The Face of the Trinity

The Trinitarian Essential for the Whole of God & Life

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Chapter 1 Introductory Terms

You shall have no other gods before me.
You shall not make for yourself an idol.
You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God.[1]
Exodus 20:3,4,7

Do all Christians worship the same God? This may seem like a trick question but I assure you of its need and importance. Read on carefully.

In the world today, people live in a global context that is shrinking our separation from each other and yet amplifying our differences, making it problematic to converge as a global community. Sociocultural, political and economic differences keep us not only apart but in conflict; and religion has emerged as a major determinant in recent global dynamics. It is within this global context and process that Christianity has to define its identity and Christians must determine its God. This unavoidable surrounding condition critically challenges the theology and practice of all Christian churches and those claiming a Christian God.

Historical Terms

For Christians, Scripture defines that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and all life. Such terms as creation and Creator have certainly been contested, yet when not denied they remain identified without ambiguity. The identity of God, however, is a different issue that remains problematic—even among Christians and within churches, including the related academy.

In the history of humanity, God has been perceived and identified in different ways, thereby making evident the lack of commonality with the human lens. The diversity of humankind composes the diversity by which God has been identified, shaped or constructed. Throughout human history, defining the identity of God has been a pervasive problem. From the beginning, created persons have been speaking for their Creator (or in place of a creator) rather than listening and letting God speak in order to know and understand the true and whole identity of God. Of course, if God does not speak or remains silent, there is an urgency to fill the void; but this effort is in contrast to human speculation about "Did God say *that*?" and the challenging of the God who did speak (Gen 3:1).

The history of religions has reflected the human shaping and construction of the identity of God. In these various terms used for God, perhaps a common thread could be found in some of these religions that can be traced back to the human person created in the beginning. Human evolution, at least, would theorize such common roots and suggest that those religions best adapting to surrounding circumstances through time have

[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.

survived. Yet, any possible agreement identifying God in those religions would, at best, be only of secondary significance and thus should not be considered what is primary in defining God and for determining God's identity in the global world today. Even when the terms used for God are transcendent (as in deism), existing all around us (as in Hindu pantheism), or more engaged as Creator (as in the Native American God), how defining those terms for God are for determining the true identity of God cannot be measured on the primary basis of human terms.

Along with the historical terms that have identified, shaped and constructed God, there also has been an ongoing problem in the history of God's people (Israel and the Christian church) of shaping the identity of their God in human terms. In comparative terms, how compatible and/or congruent is our shape of God's identity depends on the terms God revealed. In spite of God's terms (notably those opening this chapter) clearly communicated, which are distinguished from and in conflict with human terms shaping their God, human shaping continues from past to present to be the key issue determining the identity of both the God of Israel and the Christian God. God's terms noted above are usually perceived in the limits of common reasoning, and such human limits then narrow down God's terms to an outer-in quantitative focus that lacks the deeper significance distinguishing God's terms and thus the whole identity of God. The human terms used for their God may appear to be similar in terminology, if not the same, as God's terms above, but their significance in theology and practice points to a different God—that is, whose name does not distinguish the same identity (though using that name) and who essentially has been reduced to an image (idol) of this God.

The primary issues underlying this key issue of our human shaping seem to have become increasingly epistemological (both in modern and postmodern terms) and decreasingly ontological (notably in philosophical terms), yet the primary issues involve both equally in our theology and practice. More importantly, the most critical of the underlying issues is *relational*, the significance of which challenges our epistemology (and the limits of our epistemic field) and our ontology (namely defined by our theological anthropology).[2] These primary issues integrally both expose the limited, contrary or conflicting focus of human terms, and also make evident the irreplaceable disclosure of God's terms.

Making this distinction of terms has historical urgency because the tension between God's terms and human terms is ongoing; and we need to learn from this history. Again, if God did not speak and remains silent, human terms get precedent and human shaping is a non-issue. Yet, for example, even when the Creator speaks indirectly through creation, this only points to God and is insufficient to define the full identity of God—leaving the door open for human reason to identify God in human terms, as evidenced in natural theology. Did God speak beyond the limits of creation to define God's identity in unequivocal terms that both take precedent over human terms and render human reason to epistemic humility? For those who say yes, then the critical issue becomes that God not only speaks but integrally communicates by God's relational language—not an esoteric spiritual language but a language understandable in the context

[2] This is discussed further for the church and academy in my following studies: *"Did God Really Say That?" Theology in the Age of Reductionism* (Theology Study, 2013), and *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014). Both online at http://www.4X12.org.

of relationship, with a qualitative significance unable to be distinguished merely by referential language (composing the terms of human reason). God's relational terms, however, cannot be limited by human reason, or else they undergo human shaping: that is, they are relationally disconnected from God's relational context and reduced from their qualitative significance by being transposed to the narrowed-down quantitative limits of referential language and thereby composed in fragmentary referential terms. In other words, human shaping reduces God (including the communication of God's language and terms) down to our size.

Throughout history, of course, language has always been as issue in human communication. Speaking the same language (even nonverbally) is indispensable to make connection, much less to be understood. In recent years, not only are the obvious limits of language recognized but also a distinct constraint our language imposes on us that limits our perception and reasoning. It has become increasingly apparent to modern scientific research that the language we speak shapes the way we see the world and even the way we think (not necessarily producing thought).[3] This points to the function of language not merely as a means of expression but also as a template imposing a constraint limiting what we see and the way we think. In his study of neuroscience, Iain McGilchrist states about language:

> It does not itself bring the landscape of the world in which we live into being. What it does, rather, is shape that landscape by fixing the 'counties' into which we divide it, defining *which* categories or types of entities we see there—how we carve it up.
>
> In the process, language helps some things stand forward but by the same token makes others recede…. What language contributes is to firm up certain particular ways of seeing the world and give fixity to them. This has its good side, and its bad. It aids consistency of reference over time and space. But it can also exert a restrictive force on what and how we think. It represents a more *fixed version* of the world: it shapes, rather than grounds, our thinking.[4]

Therefore, the use of referential language in terms of God is consequential for constraining how we can think of God and limiting what we can see of God. What then does that do to our interpretation of God's revelation and our perception of God's identity?

Interpretation, of course, is an ongoing hermeneutic issue for all languages and communication. How God communicates with us and what God revealed to us are distinguished in the First (Old) and Second (New) Testaments of Scripture.[5] Nevertheless, God's terms have not always been distinguished in the heritage and tradition of God's people, leaving the identity of God ambiguous or raising the question of a different God. This has existed even when the referential terms composing our doctrine appear to be the same as God's relational terms. Interpreting the truth of God's

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[3] Reported by Sharon Begley in "What's in a Word?" *Newsweek*, July 20, 2009, 31.

[4] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary*, 110.

[5] These are alternative designations for the biblical text of God's revelation, which have commonly rendered the OT subordinate to the NT and thus less important than and even irrelevant for the NT. See the experience of designating the Testaments by John Goldingay in *Old Testament Theology, Vol. Two: Israel's Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 13-14.

identity, however, in narrowed-down or fragmentary referential terms creates a theological fog that makes God's presence and involvement elusive, and thus which composes our faith without the relational significance both for us and to God—the depth of significance that can only be constituted by God's relational terms. Even the first disciples labored under the epistemological illusion that shrouded the relational reality of their not truly knowing Jesus (Jn 14:9). What this makes evident for our illumination is simply stated: Knowing *how* God communicates is indispensable for understanding *what* God communicates; and we need to maintain this integral connection in order to distinguish the full identity of *who* God is.

At the same time, who, what and how God is is always subjected to (not subject to) our interpretative lens (cf. Peter, Mt 16:21-23). Anthony Thiselton reminds us that the Scriptures always include the context (horizon) of the writer-author (or speaker); to interpret the biblical text also involves the context (horizon) of the reader (or listener), and that these two horizons must be accounted for to receive fully what is communicated.[6] Yet, this must also include accounting for the language used by each horizon to have compatibility with God's communication.

Contrary to the transmission of merely information (the purpose of referential language and terms), communication expresses the identity of oneself to another and thereby requires the unrestricted reception of that communication in order to understand the identity expressed. We all certainly can use clarification and even correction to interpret the language and terms used in the communication—notably when that language is not common to ours. Since relational language is not the common or prevailing language for human contexts, we need to recognize how pervasive and prevailing that referential language is in human contexts and its influence on limiting and constraining human communication. This will warrant not only clarification but correction, yet not primarily by referential terms. In terms of the biblical text, for example, a historical-critical method (e.g. form, textual or literary criticism) has been used to clarify any misinformation; this limited framework, however, should not be assumed to correct misunderstanding of God's relational terms because such a historical-critical lens does not account for God's context (horizon). That is to say, in order to receive God's communication the listener-reader must have connection with the context from which God communicates. God's context constitutes the necessary third contextual dimension to Thiselton's two horizons to integrally complete the whole horizon (3-D, as it were) of God's communication. The most important critical issue in this hermeneutic process is to have connection with God's context; otherwise our interpretive lens only can have a flat 2-D view, at best, without the depth of 3-D. Since God's relational terms compose God's communication from God's relational context, our interpretation process requires distinct relational connection to receive how God communicates and thus what God communicates to know and understand who God is.

This is the contextualization that must become primary in the global church—over other notions of contextualization of the gospel and missions—if Christians are to worship integrally the whole of God and thus the same God. Many have started to consider the diversity in the global church as a necessary asset to rise above the limits and constraints of Western Christianity; but we must examine the terms that compose any

[6] Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 42-46.

diversity in our theology and practice. Merely having a view of God identified as Christian is insufficient to claim having the same God. Whether the terms are composed from the global North or South, unless our identity of God is both compatible with God's theological trajectory as revealed to us in God's Word, and also congruent with God's relational path embodied with us by the Word, we have no significant basis to claim the same God and even less to know the full identity of God. Western Christians especially need to be chastened by this reality.

While all human contexts influence Christians' interpretation of God's revelation, diverse conclusions about God should not be uncritically considered an asset in the global church to shape the identity of God beyond provincialism and parochial terms. This assumption, for example, is evident in various postcolonial Christian proposals.[7] Nor should we confuse diversity in theology and practice as defining and determining the summary whole of God but rather the likely fragmentation of God, perhaps even the diversity of Gods. In the midst of human diversity the primary and ongoing process illuminated for Christians is the relational process of God's communication, into whose relational context we all must enter reciprocally with God in order to receive God's self-disclosure. The relational outcome of engaging God's relational context in its primacy is to know and understand the whole identity of God, based on the significance of God's relational terms distinguished over and beyond any of our limited, speculative and reduced terms imposed on God.

In the growing intensity of religious diversity in the global context, Christianity in general and all Christians in particular are challenged not to be limited to or constrained by a process of comparative religions, which only reduces the essential truth of who, what and how God is. Our faith is challenged and accountable ongoingly to distinguish the full identity of God and *to be* distinguished by the whole of God integrally in our theology and practice. To meet this challenge, we will have to shift from our narrowed-down terms to God's whole relational terms—both a paradigm and relational shift that require converting from the primary influence of our human contexts and making them secondary in order to return to the primacy of God's relational context—so that we will no longer repeat the history of terms shaping God with anything less and any substitutes. And the historical reality is unavoidable: Without making these paradigm and relational shifts our view of God cannot be 3-D but, at best, can only be a 2-D view that is flat, distorted, misleading or simply false, and thereby not knowing the full identity of God and therefore not understanding the whole of who, what and how God is.

The Stereotyping and Idolizing of God's Identity

Perhaps you have wondered at some point in our discussion whether the distinction between God's terms and human terms is an unwarranted categorization to be applied to Christians. "After all, don't we Christians really all worship the same God? And, by the way, God's identity is not threatened by the diversity of Christian views and is not at risk of becoming a different God among those of the faith." While I can

[7] For example, see Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha and L. Daniel Hawk, eds., *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

understand these sentiments, such thinking only serves to promote epistemological illusion and to reinforce ontological simulation among God's people—just like the reality of the first disciples not knowing the full identity of Jesus, even after three intensive years of being exposed to Jesus' vulnerable relational involvement with them and all he shared of himself "with you all this time" (Jn 14:9). "Don't you know me?" indeed is a question that all Christians are accountable for and need to answer.

The identity of God cannot be determined by human terms even though human persons are created in the image of the Creator—the Creator whose name is identified simply as God but whose identity is beyond human reason (cf. Ecc 3:11; Job 42:3-5). A 2-D view of God is the most human persons can compose; and for Christians, this 2-D lens is the default view that prevails until transformed by the 3-D view from God's relational context and terms. A 2-D hermeneutic is problematic, for example, when the 2-D view prevailing even in the monotheism of Judaism and Islam may be overlooked by Christians to provide a basis for Christians to conflate (read dilute, cf. Paul in 2 Cor 4:2) their theology in order to maintain an ecumenical harmony or evolve into religious pluralism of God's identity. Even with good intentions the 2-D view from any hybrid theology renders the identity of God to an incomplete or fragmentary monotheism. Likewise, many other Christians also wander in their faith with an incomplete or fragmentary monotheism that has rendered God's identity to a theological fog and myopic practice. How so?

Our *wholeness*—without fragmentation or reduction as persons both individually and collectively—is dependent on the *whole* of God. God's identity, therefore, must by its nature be whole for us to be whole in likeness, as those created in the image of God's whole monotheism. Consider the following about anyone's personal identity and its formulation.

Surely you have wondered about your own identity and what composes that identity. Our identity is composed of many factors (both external and internal, explicit and implicit), and its formation doesn't occur in a singular moment/period in our life. Given its multi-faceted and complex nature, what do you pay attention to or ignore about your identity? On the other hand, how do others perceive your identity and on what basis do you think they have composed your identity? Do they have a fair perception of your identity, how complete is their perception, and how much do you think that they really know you? Then reverse the process and ask yourself the same questions about the identity of others, including your family and friends.

Personal identity can be a sensitive and even fragile matter. To maintain or protect one's identity as the significance of 'self'—in contrast to being conformed to others, controlled by them, or just losing one's identity—one has to establish boundaries. Boundaries for 'self' can be either for protecting one's self by keeping safe distance from others and not being vulnerable; this is the prevailing mode of human interaction. Or boundaries can be the means to highlight one's identity rather than obscure it, whereby what distinguishes (boundary markers, not barriers) the integrity of one's self is asserted in relations with others, such that one's self is not overlooked, distorted, reduced or otherwise shaped by others but able to be truly known and understood by them. So, what boundaries do you use for your identity? Most important, what boundaries do you think God uses—keeping distance or distinguishing the whole of God?

The relational reality is that God's identity functions in the latter boundaries. Some, however, have disputed this by historical measure (using referential terms), while many others by default (using a 2-D lens) have simply not paid attention or ignored the improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path of the integral identity of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement. Others claim that God's identity is preserved by the former boundaries, and thus that only a negative theology (what God is not) can be composed by the limits of an apophatic view of God. At this point in our discussion, which of these do you think has a fair perception of God's identity, how complete is their perception, and how much do you think that they really know God?

When we have a limited basis for defining another's identity, any conclusions we make about that person can only be introductory or provisional. Until we find out more about the other, we cannot claim to know the person. If we make set conclusions before finding out, then we have an incomplete, distorted or even false view of the other(s). That's how stereotypes are constructed, which can be either negative (e.g. of minority persons) or "positive" (i.e. idealized or idolized). Negative stereotypes are hurtful views, yet positive stereotypes (while flattering) are harmful views because they are not complete, real or true identities. Both embracing such stereotypes and imposing them on persons make claim to a different identity of the subject, whether it's of others or even for oneself. As a minority person of color who was successful athletically and intellectually, I experienced both stereotypes—with the frustration and sadness of others (including my mom) not really knowing *me*, my full identity. Of course, part of this consequence was my responsibility because I didn't always assert the boundary markers of my whole person. Yet, most of the others based their perception of my identity on a limited basis or composed it mainly by their terms. Does this happen to God? Specifically, what would you guess to be the prevailing identity that Christians have of God?

For some reason I keep hearing the echo of Jesus' voice speaking to his disciples: "Don't you know me, even after all our time together?" It is important to realize that he wasn't talking to new and young Christians, to casual church members, even to those just starting out in theological education or ministry. These were the core of his disciples who were embarking on the strategic leadership of the church. If they didn't really know Jesus at that point, then who was the God they worshiped? Whether you want to say that it was a different God or not, it would be incorrect to say they had a fair and complete perception of God's identity. That leaves them with a stereotype of the LORD God and making an idol of the Messiah, both of which have no relational significance to God (and thus to Jesus) because they are not based on God's terms. In reality, their stereotype and idol were in conflict with God's relational terms, which is evident on the following basis:

> Instead of "not having other gods before me," they didn't pay attention and receive the whole of God embodied by Jesus, thus constructing God's identity on their terms whereby they (perhaps unintentionally) "misrepresented the name of the LORD your God"; rather than "not making for yourself an idol," they idealized Jesus by using only certain parts (notably miracles) of Jesus, which reduced God essentially into an idol whose identity they thus idolized.

Labelling their shape of God as an idol is not a misnomer. An idol (*'eliyl*, *eidolon*)[8] in Scripture signifies to be weak, deficient, which the psalmist made definitive "all the gods of the peoples are idols" (Ps 96:5). Any view of the LORD (Yahweh) and the embodied God that are composed without the primacy of God's whole terms can only be described as deficient, weak, that is, an idol different from the whole identity of God. In other words, the idolization of the Christian God is the unavoidable implication and consequence of shaping God's identity using some stereotype composed by our terms, even idealized terms with good intentions. How could this happen to this formative base and formidable core of Christians? This is a question the global church (and its related academy) must answer for itself today.

Yahweh, the LORD, declared to the people of God to stop highlighting our human resources and celebrating our efforts—that is, boasting (*hālal*) in their primacy—"but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, *my whole identity*" (Jer 9:23-24). Much of this can be directed to the theological academy and church leadership yet it rightfully encompasses all of the faith. What is the reality of our personal knowledge and understanding of God; and who is the truth essential of the God we claim, worship and serve?

To know the full identity of God, Christians must understand the whole of *who* God is. This is the relational significance of Paul's experience—one whose prior view of God was an incomplete monotheism—on the Damascus road pursuing the identity of God, "Who are you, Lord?" (Acts 9:5) Yet, anyone cannot understand who the whole of God is apart from *what* God is. And to understand what God is emerges only from the relational experience of *how* God is—not just some spiritual experience but the ongoing experience of God in relationship. This distinct relational outcome was Paul's ongoing relational experience that unfolded from the Damascus road, which transformed his view of God to *whole* monotheism (e.g. 2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:15-19). The whole of who, what and how God is is inseparable; and in any attempt to separate or compartmentalize the integral identity of God, God becomes fragmented and thereby reduced to a stereotype or an idol and essentially a different God with the same name (even as monotheistic)—a name that Jesus himself does not recognize (Mt 7:21-23). Prior to the Damascus road, fragmenting God was Paul's epistemological, hermeneutic and relational problems. Many Christians, who don't understand the whole of Paul and thus the whole distinguishing his

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

theology and practice, repeat his problems and duplicate fragmenting God (cf. 1 Cor 1:12-13; 3:18-22).[9]

Most Christians, including from the first disciples through church tradition to today, think they understand God only by knowing about how God is, apart from what and who God is. Other Christians think they know God by knowing about what God is without experiencing how God is and understanding who God is. Some Christians think they understand who God is without knowing what God is, even though they may think about how God is. All these Christians have come up with terms for God that they have shaped and constructed in one variation or another. Historically, through all this Christian diversity of theology and practice, the results have been terms used for God that correctly can be called myths (e.g. that God is impassible), half-truths (e.g. that God only saves us from sin), and falsehoods (e.g. that the Son is not equal to the Father, that the Spirit of God is only some force, that monotheism and the Trinity are incompatible). From these results have emerged distinctly relational consequences that continue to unfold pervasively and reverberate throughout the global church with the stereotyping and idolizing of God's identity. This condition, an undeniable relational condition in theology and practice, should not be surprising because such theology and practice are our default mode—operating beyond the common notions of sin. That is, our default mode goes into operation when we are not ongoingly connected to the primacy of God's relational context (primary over our secondary human contexts, though not excluding them) according to God's whole relational terms (not by our fragmentary terms), and thereby relationally involved directly and reciprocally with the whole of God.

Our default mode in theology and practice exposes the following:

1. **Our epistemological problem** constrained to the limits of our narrow epistemic field (the source of our information and subsequent knowledge) since we do not further engage the epistemological process more deeply beyond in the relational epistemic process to include the comprehensive epistemic field of God's relational context disclosed to us.
2. **Our hermeneutic problem** that either attempts such engagement under the assumptions from the biased lens of our epistemological limits (e.g. using only our reason), or unilaterally gives primacy to the hermeneutic lens of our terms without epistemic humility in order to define and determine our conclusions about God (e.g. by a modernist narrowed-down methodology or a postmodern interpretive inclusiveness).
3. **Our relational problem** of maintaining (intentionally or unintentionally) relational distance and not becoming vulnerably receptive to God's relational presence and involvement revealing God's whole identity—thus evidencing an involvement, or lack of relational involvement, parallel to gathering information about a subject on the Internet and by social media—whereby we directly or indirectly speak for God with stereotypes about God's identity rather than letting God's full identity be disclosed in face-to-face relationship.

[9] For an expanded discussion of Paul, see my study *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study, 2010). Online at http://www.4X12.org.

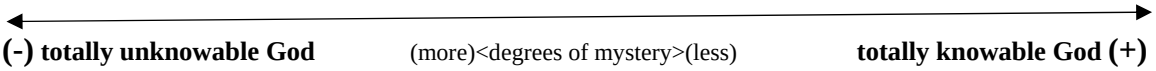
Once again, we are confronted epistemologically, hermeneutically and relationally with the persistent question: Do all Christians worship the same God? Christians could identify the same God in referential terms, and many do, but the actual identity of that God may not be the same. In other words, we can identify our God as the Christian God but that cannot be assumed to be the whole of God's identity (as discussed earlier about personal identity). God's full identity is only defined in relational terms and not referential, and the disclosure of that identity of God emerges only from God's relational context involving God's relational epistemic process. What often prevails for the identity of the Christian God is incomplete, fragmentary and simply reduced to our human shaping, and therefore misrepresentative of being the identity of the whole of God. This has far-reaching implications that need our immediate attention. Any existing reality that all Christians don't worship the same God makes evident that the truth of God is in fact effectively *dead* (lost or without vital significance) in those representations—images of stereotypes and idols, even if idealized. The theology and practice of what essentially amounts to "God is dead" despite debatable signs of life is a reality (notably within Western contexts and generations) that we must confront, with urgency so that the living whole of God is distinguished.

In all Christian theology and practice there are two critical conditions that we need to recognize. First, when our theology is deficient, our practice does not and cannot make up for that deficiency but rather merely reflects the deficiency and witnesses of that less-than-whole God accordingly. Second, when our practice is deficient, our theology must unambiguously account for that deficiency and distinctly provide the means for its significance to be restored by the whole identity of God with God's whole relational terms, and thereby newly created in the very image and likeness of only the whole of God.

Defining Terms Distinguishing God's Whole Identity

So, what does our discussion to this point have to do with the Trinity? In a 2-D reality wanting (if not longing) to be 3-D (i.e. real and whole 3-D, not virtual and fragmentary), these introductory terms are crucial to whether or not the whole identity of God (1) emerges as God's true identity, (2) is clearly distinguished as essential truth beyond comparative human terms, and (3) has uncompromising primacy for unambiguously determining integrally both our theology and practice. If God's identity cannot have definitive terms, then Christians can only have a diverse faith—with the object of such diversity composed by a fragmented God of questionable, if not contradictory, identity.

When terms used for God are discussed, they can generally be located along some point on a continuum. This continuum will range from knowing God at one of its ends to not knowing God at the other end; and the range includes degrees of mystery about God, which can be described below:



(-) totally unknowable God (more)<degrees of mystery>(less) **totally knowable God (+)**

On this continuum, mystery about God stops short of totally knowing God, since totally knowing God assumes that everything there is to know about God is known, or at least knowable. On the other hand, the unknowable God can be a total mystery, if God exists at all, and signifies the apophatic terms known as negative theology (notably from philosophical theology).

When we want to account for terms used for God that are defining, then we need to examine three vital signs for the condition of those terms to be significant of and integral to God:

1. The source of those terms, illuminated by the epistemic field of the source that constitutes the source's epistemological integrity, thus that can be counted on to be definitive. This significance constitutes **the epistemological condition**.
2. The connection with this source in the source's epistemic field, the connection of which can only be made according to the source's terms, and therefore which can only be engaged by relational involvement in order to receive the defining terms disclosed by the source. This significance constitutes **the relational condition**.
3. Upon relational connection with the source and reception of the terms disclosed by the source, those terms must be interpreted by the nature of the source's relational context that only uses relational language with whole relational terms. Conclusions about those terms for God disclosed by the source, therefore, cannot be narrowed down to referential language using fragmentary referential terms, or they will no longer be defining. This significance constitutes **the hermeneutical condition**.

Examining these vital signs and ongoingly paying attention to them will either ensure our epistemological, relational and hermeneutical conditions, or expose any epistemological, relational and hermeneutical problems. The whole identity of the whole of God is at stake here, and the implications of any fragmentation (notably by referentialization) have far-reaching consequences, namely for the ontology and function of both God and those created in God's image and likeness.

If we want to account for defining terms for God, then those terms cannot be narrowed down and fragmentary but by necessity must be complete and whole. Defining complete terms for God does not mean to totally know God on the above continuum. Since the Christian God is the transcendent holy God, there are inherent limits for all human persons that prevent us from knowing the totality of God. Nevertheless, the whole of God has been revealed in order to be known and understood. It is crucial that 'complete and whole' be distinguished from 'totality'. The whole of God is accessible to humans because of God's self-disclosure, but the totality of God is beyond what God revealed as well as beyond our human limits to understand. That does not mean, however, what Christians don't understand about God is due to mystery. Mystery about God has been invoked too easily in Christian tradition, thus readily composing incomplete terms for God. While complete terms do not define the totality of God, they distinguish terms that are defining for the whole of God, God's whole identity—just as Paul defined with *pleroma* (fullness, complete, thus whole) to distinguish the whole monotheism of God (Col 1:19; 2:9). Only complete and whole terms distinguish the true full identity of God from all other terms that can just narrow down and fragment God.

To account for the whole of God has always been the most critical theological task. Yet, this task has had the most divergent engagement, emerging from the beginning in the primordial garden with the underlying assumption that legitimizes human efforts to take hermeneutic autonomy to reinterpret God's relational communication: "Did God say *that*?"—implying that if God did say that, "you are to determine what God meant by that" (Gen 3:1,5). Such efforts to speak for God have made God's wholeness elusive or irretrievable. When the wholeness of God and God's identity is to be accounted for—and this wholeness and whole has lacked being addressed with significance in Christian theology and practice—wholeness cannot be considered an abstract concept or perceived as a conceptual model. Wholeness constitutes the ontological condition of God, *who* only functions congruently in wholeness. This essential reality of whole ontology and function distinguishes *what* and *how* God is, and who, what and how God created the ontology and function of human persons in whole likeness. The issue prevailing in the theological task, however, has been a limited epistemology constrained by a narrow epistemic field that is disconnected from God's relational context, therefore having relational distance from the whole of who, what and how God is. The consequence of these epistemological and relational problems is necessarily having to depend primarily on a hermeneutic lens biased by human terms—notably giving primacy to fragmentary referential terms, as evident in Christian scholarship. Even conceptually, wholeness and fragmentation are incompatible, yet the latter are routinely conflated to represent the former. The process of referentialization fragments terms (i.e. reduces them) in order to either grasp them with more certainty (as in science) or to render them to our controlling efforts (such as for self-determination), and likely both. This is, has been and will always be problematic for accounting for wholeness.

The whole ontology and function of God and of human persons in likeness cannot be determined by their parts—for example, the attributes and resources they have and/or the amount of things they can do and achieve. Nor can their wholeness be determined even by the sum of their parts. The truth is that the sum of those parts never equals the whole; and the fact of synergism is that the whole is always greater than the sum of those parts. In the theological task, therefore, the primary focus must not be on the parts of God because the extent of those parts will be misleading to define of the whole of God and thus will not help us understand the whole ontology and function of God. Any focus on the parts of God must always be secondary to the primacy of the whole, the whole of God, God's whole ontology and function; and the significance of any parts of God (even God's love) is only distinguished when integral to this definitive whole. While we may claim to know God by parts (especially love), we cannot boast to understand the whole of God by who, what and how God's love is distinguished with complete relational significance. For the parts of God to remain primary and not rendered to the whole of God is to fragment God in our theology and practice; and thereby we will compose our theological anthropology with a fragmentary ontology and function lacking wholeness. Moreover, we should neither assume nor expect that divergent terms used for God are even compatible with the identity of the whole of God, much less integral for God's whole ontology and function and can be conflated to determine God's wholeness.

As we discussed above about knowing the extent of someone's identity, just knowing parts of someone never equals knowing that whole person—no matter how many parts are known and even if those parts are added together. This then necessarily prompts a variation of our opening question: Do all Christians worship the whole of God? If their God is anything less or any substitute, then what is this God, who is this God, and how does this God function? And within the diversity of influence surrounding the global church, how compatible is their diverse theology and practice of worshipping the identity of their God with the way prescribed by God's nonnegotiable relational terms: "You shall not worship the LORD your God in such ways"—that is, as the majority of others do (Dt 12:4).[10]

These epistemological, hermeneutic and relational problems were evident in Job when he engaged in an intense debate with his friends over fragmented views of God. What happened next is a pivotal lesson for all Christians to learn from—an integral methodology that distinguishes the defining identity of the whole of God. The LORD (i.e. Yahweh) intruded relationally on Job: "Who is this that darkens [obscures, *hashak*] my *terms* [*'esah*] with words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2) Job's terms created a theological fog over God's whole ontology and function, whereby he fragmented the whole identity of his God without knowing and understanding (*da'at*) God. This was the self-determined theological task that emerged from a man described as "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). Like Jesus' first disciples, Job's epistemological, hermeneutic and relational problems kept him from knowing and understanding the whole ontology and function of Yahweh. Therefore, the LORD intervened on Job's narrow epistemic field to distinguish God's whole identity to him by the relational terms of God's relational context; the relational outcome was that Job's biased hermeneutic lens was refocused to perceive the presence and involvement of the whole of God—just as Paul experienced on the Damascus road. The outcome of Job's relational experience was the essential truth of knowing and understanding the whole of his God. Job summarized this defining relational outcome:

> "You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my *terms* without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things *about God* I did not *truly* understand, things too distinguished [*pala*] for me to know. You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak'…. *Up to now* my ears had heard of you but now my eyes have *perceived* you *with understanding* [*ra'ah*]" (Job 42:3-5).

What Job had heard before was fragmentary referential terms about the God of Israel. But his hermeneutical clarification corrected his epistemological illusion to open the relational connection face to face with the whole presence and involvement of his God (as experienced by Moses, Num 12:6-8).

The integral methodology for distinguishing the defining identity of our God, which we need to learn from Job, is not about procedure. Rather it involves our relational practice that engages the theological task—a task participated in by any and all Christians

[10] For a study distinguishing worship in the human context, see Kary A. Kambara *Worshiping in Likeness of God: Not Determined "in their way"* (Worship, 2016). Online at http://www.4X12.org.

who seek to sort out their beliefs, gain their meaning or put them into practice—with this integral involvement: distinctly with epistemic humility (perhaps by even epistemological humiliation), the ongoing relational practice of which gives hermeneutic priority to the primacy of God's whole relational terms (and language) over distinctly secondary limited human terms, while clarifying narrowed-down referential terms (and language) and correcting their fragmentation. This relational practice connects with God's relational context and is involved in God's relational epistemic process to receive the essential truth revealed by God; and only the relational outcome from this relational involvement constitutes the reciprocal relational response of those worshipping the whole of God whom they know and understand.

This integral methodology is implied in a relational imperative that condenses this relational practice as follows: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10). In modern times, notably in this electronic age, to "be still" in our active, (pre)occupying, even consuming human contexts is a pervasive issue; but to "be still" in our human condition (from inner out) is the prevailing issue addressed in this imperative. To be still (*raphah*) means to cease, desist, that is, to cease from human effort and to desist from depending on human resources in the theological task. The relational imperative for our theological task is 'cease and desist' from our unilateral engagement, or at least giving primacy to our efforts, and thus from our explicit or implicit efforts of self-determination, which signifies the human condition. The relational practice of *raphah* is imperative relationally so that God's communication in whole relational terms is distinguished as the primary source revealing and therefore defining the whole of who, what and how God is. *Raphah* in relational terms not only gives God the opportunity to speak in the theological task; but reciprocally integral to this relational epistemic process is for us to listen vulnerably in epistemic humility and hermeneutic receptivity in order to "know and understand the I AM, YHWH, the whole of God."

Even though the human person is created in the image and likeness of the whole of God, despite the reality that God "has also set eternity in the hearts of humans, yet they cannot fathom *the whole of who, what and how God is*" (Eccl 3:11, NIV). In other words, human persons cannot know the whole of God by undertaking the theological task in self-autonomy, by self-determination, or on the primary basis of their own terms composing their epistemological, hermeneutical and relational problems. By relational connection, however, and the ongoing practice of relational involvement with God's eternal relational context, "this is *the significance of* eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God" (Jn 17:3)—intimately know the essential truth of the whole of God, the whole of who, what and how Jesus embodied for his defining prayer to constitute the whole ontology and function of his church family in likeness (Jn 17).

Anything less and any substitutes in our theology and practice are not the true and whole identity of God. Therefore, cease and desist, and let the whole of God communicate by God's defining relational terms instead of speaking by our speculative terms, in order that we can know and understand the triune God, the Trinity in wholeness.

The Counter-Relational Reality

'Be still' is an uncomplicated relational practice, yet involvement in this practice is problematic—with a complexity of relational issues that counter this relational practice. The breadth of these relational issues are rarely addressed in the theological task, and usually not paid attention to or simply not understood. Thus, the counter-relational reality composing the underlying depth of these relational issues does not get accounted for in our theology and practice. The consequences emerging from this counter-relational reality are explicit and implicit relational consequences, which include fragmenting our epistemology and hermeneutics but most importantly reducing our ontology. The defining issue for determining the theological task is our theological anthropology. A theological anthropology defining human identity composed by reduced ontology and function thereby also will define God's identity with reduced ontology and function; and the ultimate relational consequence is that both humanity and God are fragmented, along with their relationships between them and within each of them. This critical condition can render the trinitarian theological task to be on life support, unless urgent intervention can transform this critical consequence.

What is this counter-relational reality? It emerged from the beginning with the subtle challenge "Did God really say that?" This set into motion a pervading dynamic composing these challenges:

1. **The relational challenge** to exercise self-autonomy for pursuing self-determination—"God knows that when you *do this* your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing…" (Gen 3:5).
2. **The epistemological challenge** to narrow down your epistemic field, so that you will have a better grasp of what to know and achieve more certainty in that knowledge—"that the *source* was good for *this knowledge*, and…to make one wise *with expertise*" (*sakal*, 3:6), all conducted under the sweeping assumption that "you will not *be reduced*" (3:4).
3. **The hermeneutical challenge** that uses a biased lens based on the subtle influence of this assumption, which then warrants hermeneutic autonomy to reinterpret God's terms and to skew your focus for self-determination (even in the name of scholarship or to be a better Christian)—"So when the persons saw that *the source in its narrow epistemic context* was *consonant with their view* and to be desired for *their purpose*, they *acted in self-determination*" (3:6).

These often subtle and implicit challenges are designed to reconstruct the theological task, and fully addressing them will likely require initial deconstruction to restore it back to its primary focus and engagement.

Creator God communicated terms in the beginning for those persons to follow, just as Yahweh communicated terms (as noted to open this chapter) for the people of God to follow in the primacy of covenant relationship together (not as a code for conformity). The relational, epistemological and hermeneutical challenges raise issues with God's terms in order to counter God and God's creation and people in likeness. These issues need to be illuminated in order for this persistent counter-relational reality to be exposed, so that its pervasive influence will be accounted for and neutralized in our theology and

practice. The terms that God commanded also need to be further clarified, given the diminished focus from counter-relational influence. As noted earlier, God's terms are only relational terms for us to follow, the language of which is specific to God's relational language and not to be generalized to human language and terms. In other words, God's relational language and terms are nonnegotiable and thus are irreplaceable in theology and practice. Furthermore, God's relational terms must not undergo referentialization, because referential language and terms are not relationally specific and in reality are used to be counter-relational.

Relational terms only serve a relational purpose for a relational outcome, which is always primary in who, what and how God is. As Creator and sovereign LORD, for example, God's terms can easily be misperceived apart from relational understanding, and thus all too often resisted (e.g. as too demanding) or countered (e.g. as too controlling), both knowingly and unintentionally—as emerged from the primordial garden (cf. also Num 16). The relationship-specific nature of God's terms, however, does not constitute unilateral relationship but reciprocal relationship. This is where the issues raised above become crucial for our theology and practice and need further illumination for our clarification and correction.

God's relational terms are communicated to persons who have the free will to receive and accept them or to refuse and deny those terms. God does not impose those terms on human persons in order to control them under God's rule—the ultimate Rule of Law. Nor did God impose those terms as templates for human conformity, wherein nonconformists are punished, rejected or destroyed. If God wanted total control over and complete conformity from the human population, God would simply have made robotic objects without a will. Prevenient grace from Reformed theology, for example, may define God as irresistible but at the expense of defining God with the diminished significance of God's relationship-specific terms, which has implications for the ontology and function both for God and for human persons. The only significance of God's terms, in contrast, is for the primacy of relationship together in likeness of the whole of God's whole ontology and function. Human persons who receive and accept God's terms choose to be involved in reciprocal relationship with the whole of God (not just parts of God); but, and here is the pivotal issue, they have to choose to be vulnerably involved on the basis of their whole ontology and function in the very image (not control) and likeness (not conformity) of God's whole ontology and function. The whole of God's whole relational terms only serve this whole relational purpose for this whole relational outcome. Anything less and any substitutes are always easier choices to make—for example, fragmented engagement over integral involvement, involving only parts of the person over the whole person—and this is when the pervasive and persistent counter-relational dynamic has opportunity to challenge and influence the choices made.

From the beginning, this counter-relational reality (signifying reductionism) has shaped our theology and practice by transposing God's relational terms into subtle reductions of anything less and any substitutes. These subtle reductions in our theology are incongruent with God's whole ontology and function, and their presence in our practice makes our ontology and function incompatible to God's. Human perception has long been subject to this defining influence, which has pervaded and continues to prevail to determine how we simply see things in everyday life. For example, how have God's people perceived and practiced the laws of God (*torah*)? And what is the significant

difference between our traditional Rule of Faith and the ultimate Rule of Law (imposed by God to control us, noted earlier)? The defining issue here is how relationship specific God's terms have been perceived, codified and applied to determine our theology and practice. This has direct consequence in the theological task, which is ongoingly countered with relational, epistemological and hermeneutical challenges. Making an important distinction will help illuminate how the counter-relational dynamic can (or does) influence our theological task involving God's terms.

When we consider God's terms in the theological task, it is important to ask the following questions: Are God's terms recorded in Scripture *rules* imperative to follow as stipulated, as in the rule of law, or are they mere *standards* that provide the necessary criteria for practice (e.g. moral standards) but have latitude in their observance and application? When Christians are faced with any type of rules, especially as teen-agers, we have a tendency to wonder how we can get around them or how far we can bend the rules. Yet, we usually realize that rules are rules and that to break them has consequences. On the other hand, when standards are given to us, we seem to think that there are variable ways we can do something according to those standards, and that there are different levels of measurement in meeting those standards. Any perceived flexibility of standards allows for more autonomy and self-determination, with perception biased by such efforts; whereas rules require nonnegotiable adherence (conformity, if you wish) that minimizes autonomy and does not promote the latitude of self-determination. Given this distinction, how would you categorize God's terms? Are the terms of God's law not to construct idols and not to misrepresent God's name given to us as rules or standards? Additionally, how do you think Christians use God's terms to define the theological task and determine their conclusions for theology and practice?

In spite of not outright refusing or denying God's terms, there has been much liberty exercised with what form God's terms have in theology and practice. Historically, God's people narrowed down God's relational terms to rules for them merely to conform to (e.g. the Sabbath and temple sacrifices). Even though the stipulations of God's terms (laws) served only the relational purpose of covenant relationship together, they transposed God's relational terms to identity markers to serve their purpose of self-determination for nation-state. Consequently, their theology and practice signified a counter-relational reality that reduced both their ontology and function and God's (exposed in Isa 29:13, and again by Jesus, Mk 7:6-8)—in other words, traditions composing 'rules of faith' by fragmentary human terms (cf. Paul's critique, Col 3:20-23). The rules for their theology and practice may have identified a monotheistic God, but they did not worship the whole of God—the identity of whom cannot be distinguished in anything less than whole ontology and function. Nevertheless, the counter-relational workings of reductionism embedded them in an epistemological illusion and ontological simulation, as they wandered in a theological fog (cf. the debate in Num 16). Jesus later also exposed the subtle counter-relational nature of reducing God's terms in our theology and practice from God's relational purpose, which also exposed self-autonomy with the rules that reduced the primacy of relationship together (Mt 5:21-48, in the context of his definitive discourse for discipleship, Mt 5-7).

Jesus himself was condemned for not adhering to God's so-called rule of law (e.g. about the Sabbath, Ex 20:8-10; Lk 13:10-14; Mt 12:1-9). Since his accusers reduced God's relational terms and used those fragmentary referential terms to identify their God

in the theological task, their relational, epistemological and hermeneutic issues could not perceive and receive that "the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Mt 12:8), and therefore that he constituted the whole of God's ontology and function (cf. Paul's further critique, Col 3:16-19). What Jesus exposed was the reductionism underlying their theological task that was consequential for composing their counter-relational theology and practice. What Jesus also illuminated existing in the subtlety of a counter-relational dynamic is that rules and standards are interchanged at the convenience of those influenced by reductionism and its counter-relational workings (Lk 13:15-16; Jn 7:22-24). This subtlety provided the necessary latitude and flexibility that promoted their hermeneutic autonomy to pursue success in self-determination.

In the essential truth and reality of God's relational terms, however, what Jesus illuminated is not the either-or fragmentary character of God's terms. Rather Jesus illuminated the both-and integral nature of God's terms that signify the primacy of whole ontology and function distinguished only by the whole of God and constituted for our theology and practice. Murder, for example, is a rule imperative to follow as stipulated in God's terms (Ex 20:13). As a relational term, murder also is a standard that constitutes the primacy of God's relational purpose for relationship together in wholeness, which then extends the application of God's terms beyond 'the letter of the law' in observing the rule of law (Mt 5:21-26). In fact, such a standard of God's terms encompasses an imperative rule that not only challenges the insufficiency of conformity but encourages vulnerable involvement in the practice of the primacy of relationships together in wholeness in likeness of the whole of God's presence and involvement (Lev 19:18; Mt 5:43-44,48). Reductionism and its counter-relational workings, however, always maintain the either-or distinction between rules and standards, so that they can be interchanged at our convenience to serve our limits and constraints in reduced ontology and function.

The Shema—"The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Dt 6:4)—distinguishes the whole of God with this integral term that is both a rule and a standard for the theological task. It serves as a rule of law that constitutes the standard necessary to compose the Rule of Faith for our theology and practice. Yet, historically this has been problematic whenever its rule narrows down God's whole ontology and function or its standard does not encompass the whole of God. This is the consequence from fragmenting God's terms into either rules or standards that we can expect from the defining influence of reductionism and its counter-relational workings determining our theological conclusions about the identity of God. The development, or lack thereof, in trinitarian theology has been evident of this struggling process to emerge whole. I am praying in ongoing reciprocal relationship that this study will serve to illuminate the face of the whole of God, and thus help to integrally distinguish the trinitarian essential both for God's ontology and function as well as ours. For this relational outcome to unfold in our theological task, the surrounding reality of reductionism and its counter-relational workings needs to be paid attention to in its breadth and depth, and its relational, epistemological and hermeneutic challenges redeemed where their influences have pervaded Christian theology and practice.

Chapter 2 The Name of God

***If* they ask me, 'What is *God's* name?' what shall I say to them?**
Exodus 3:13

Is there theological continuity between the God of Israel and the Christian God? There is a prevailing assumption that the God of the First (Old) Testament continues into and throughout the Second (New) Testament. This continuity, however, depends on the name that each sector uses for God. If that name is given directly or indirectly to God by each (or at least one) of them, then there is discontinuity between their Gods—even if the name given identifies the same God, as discussed in chapter one about God's identity. The continuity of God exists only when and where the name of God is the one given directly by God and only by God. Thus, any assumption of continuity in our theology and practice should always be challenged, and this includes even in our doxology.

The psalmist declares "Sing the glory of his name" (Ps 66:1). This glory, however, is not what we ascribe to God, even in glowing and well-meaning terms. Rather this glory distinguishes only what is revealed by and in God's name; and therefore glory does not emerge without the name God gave. Otherwise our doxology may not be worshiping the same God.

God's name needs clarification and/or correction in our trinitarian theological task. For there to be continuity in the theology and practice of God's people, it must be defined and determined by the name that God gave to reveal who, what and how God is, and thereby to distinguish the whole of God beyond our comparative terms. If not, there can only be discontinuity in our theology and practice. It is imperative, then, for us to *know* the name of our God and to understand the full meaning of God's name, not only for continuity in our theology and practice but most importantly for our theology and practice to unfold with wholeness in likeness of the whole of God—therefore unequivocally our *relational* imperative.

What's in a Name?

Is more of an issue being made about God's name than warrants our concern? Unlike Abraham's experiences with the LORD's appearances clearly defined to him (Gen 12:1,7, 17:1; 18:1), Jacob's experience was more ambiguous. When Jacob wrestled with the divine figure, he inquired "Please tell me your name" (Gen 32:24-30). Jacob pursued more than information but the clarity needed to understand the significance of whom he struggled with; and that significance was vested in the person's name. Thus, Jacob experienced "face to face" the monotheistic name of his God. To fast-forward for a moment, this significance was further pursued by Paul with the same monotheistic lens, who inquired in a pivotal face-to-face encounter: "Who are you, Lord?" (Acts 9:5). Both their experiences illuminate the face-to-face significance vested in the name of God.

When we think of personal names, we generally associate a specific name with a specific person. Yet, what that name tells us about the person can be ambiguous or have clarity, may signify simply some identity marker or have deeper significance of the person. In the modern Western world, personal names have lost their significance for understanding persons beyond just an identity marker. While the Majority World may give more significance to personal names (e.g. family origin, tradition and loyalty), its significance likely may not go any deeper to provide clarity about the whole person. In other words, names are often confused with titles and titles are often mistaken for names.

In the ancient world, the name (Heb. s*hem*, Gk. o*noma*) and the person were inseparable. Name was used as a shorthand substitute or representative of the person, which could include the person's character. That means a name could also come with a reputation. When a name lacks clarity or is ambiguous about the person, most often it has been reduced to merely a title and thus does not tell us of much significance about the person—perhaps their reputation or something about their character but nothing further and deeper.

Titles are quantitative identity markers of persons from outer in, which do not provide any qualitative clarity of their persons from inner out. That is, titles are shallow indicators that may identify a person but do not provide the significance of the person composing their full identity. Consequently, titles cannot be representative of the significance of a person, nor should they be used as a shorthand substitute of the whole person. In the comparative process of personal relations, it is vital to make a clear distinction between name and titles. Jacob did not want just a title of his God, he only pursued the name. When names are confused with titles, what emerges is a counter-relational reduction in comparative personal relations. For example, in the early history of humankind a concerted effort was made for globalization in the city of Babel in order to "make a name for ourselves" (Gen 11:1-9). In spite of their attempt for human unification, the name they sought was really only a reputation in comparative relations from outer in and thus that didn't have the significance of wholeness from inner out. Accordingly, any resulting so-called unity would have been counter-relational—an illusion and simulation that God did not allow to continue. Their effort influenced by reductionism evidenced confusing name with title, which even if achieved would have lacked substantive significance, though certainly a global reputation can have far-reaching appeal and influence.

Titles are useful in comparative personal relations, even for God, which serve to identify persons in comparative terms either positively or as less. Titles associated with God (such as Almighty, Most High. Shepherd, Deliverer) correctly identify some aspect of God, which have been useful to give God a more distinct identity in the midst of diverse thinking in the human context. Highlighting such titles of God, however, has had a tendency to reduce God and counter relationship together rather than deepen it; observed traditionally, and typically today, as used in worship practice to narrow the focus on only parts of God (notably what God does) instead of the whole of God, which thereby becomes a substitute for face-to-face relationship together. Therefore, these titles of God, valid or not, should never be mistaken for the name of God and the full significance vested in the name God gave, nor should we assume that any substitutes for God's name have any significance to God and also in our theology and practice. Only the name God gave was the specific relational outcome that Jacob pursued rigorously, and in

the relational process his name was changed to *Israel* (meaning 'he struggles with God') to illuminate his own significance.

For God's name to be distinguished (*pala* beyond comprehension and comparison) from merely titles of God, the significance of that name has to be beyond the comparative process of human terms to stand alone. To be distinguished as such, however, God's name must by its nature distinguish God's ontology and function beyond anything existing—that is, an incomprehensible name (as in Judg 13:17-18).

The Significance of the Verb

Jacob validly designated the place of his divine encounter 'Peniel" (meaning 'face of God') because he experienced "God face to face" (Gen 32:30). Yet, it is unlikely that Jacob understood the full significance of both the face of God and the face-to-face experience of God. This significance would further unfold later with Moses.

When the God of Israel further appeared to Moses and called him to lead God's people, Moses responded: "If…they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (Ex 3:1-15) This was a pivotal relational moment in the history of God's people, which most importantly was defining for their theology and practice. God responded back unequivocally, though arguably with ambiguity: "'I AM WHO I AM'…This is my name forever, and this is my *name* [not title, as in NRSV] for all generations." The name of God is given unmistakably and is now fully illuminated, if not always unequivocally distinguished. YHWH (the Tetragrammaton) indeed "is my name forever," and its significance is defined succinctly by R. Kendall Soulen, who retrieves it as foundational for the Trinity: "the Tetragrammaton's significance resides in the simple fact that refers exclusively to the God of biblical attestation. Unlike appellative names and titles such as God, King, Father, which apply to many besides the one true God, the Tetragrammaton applies to God alone. It is the only personal proper name of the biblically attested God, and it refers to none but him."[1]

With this pivotal disclosure, the name of YHWH was no longer a secret, yet to know and understand YHWH remains an open question still to be answered—the name which was given for their theological task and thus must be accounted for in ours also.

Yahweh emphatically communicated in relational terms later to Moses the same name with its added relational significance: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Ex 34:5-7, NIV). The word "LORD" when spelled with capital letters stands for God's name, YHWH; and as connected earlier with the verb *hayah* ("to be" in Ex 3:15), the dynamic significance of YHWH is disclosed in unmistakable relational terms—though arguably at times in contradictory terms (as Ex 34:7 may appear). God's relational terms are critical for understanding the name Yahweh in its full significance. This issue became problematic for Israel's God when they transposed God's relational terms to their referential terms.

[1] R. Kendall Soulen, "'The Name above Every Name': The Eternal Identity of the Second Person of the Trinity and the Covenant of Grace," in Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders, eds., *Advancing Trinitarian Theology: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 117.

Traditionally, the name Yahweh was never pronounced by Jews out of reverence and respect for their God. Rather they evoked God's name indirectly by using a synonym (namely *adonay*, Lord, Sovereign) and, as the custom of Second Temple Judaism, by means of various surrogates, circumlocutions and silent allusions. Despite any good intentions, what unfolds in this theology and practice is counter-relational to the significance of YHWH distinguished only in relational terms. While Israel's God was properly identified in their theology and practice, their indirectness became engaged in a process of merely referring to God, that is, the referentialization of God in reduced fragmentary terms contrary to God's whole relational terms. The relational consequence was to have and maintain relational distance from YHWH, by design or inadvertently, and to simulate involvement with God by indirect means, the measures of which became quantitative practices from the outer in without their qualitative significance from inner out (as in Isa 29:13). This recurring pattern was demonstrated in the narrative accounts of the First Testament, which was in contrast to a clearer picture of the significance of YHWH illuminated in the Wisdom texts. Their conformity to such outer-in practice was consequential both for them and for those to come, including us today.

This loss of qualitative relational significance involving the whole person (their persons and God's) was the direct result of conjointly not understanding the name of YHWH and not receiving the significance of YHWH's name. YHWH's name and significance are integrally composed in only relational terms and can be neither understood nor received by anything less and any substitutes. Accordingly, their prevailing God-talk composed referential discourse on a different theological trajectory and relational path than YHWH's, as witnessed in the OT narratives about ongoing tension and conflict between God's people and YHWH. On this narrowed-down basis, the God of Israel was often elusive—which included confusing issues of being forsaken and abandoned by God (e.g. Dt 31:17)—either too formidable for the theological task to understand or essentially unable to be known beyond a name or title. Such discourse, and later perceptions of it, has rendered the OT as insufficient, insignificant or irrelevant for Christian theology and practice. While the First Testament is insufficient by itself, it is neither insignificant nor irrelevant for the Second Testament and the theology and practice it embodies integral to YHWH. Unfortunately, much of the referential discourse in OT theology has been the continuity found too often in NT theology, when in the essential truth of the Second Testament there should only be discontinuity with such discourse. Discontinuity or continuity with YHWH has major implications for trinitarian theology and what is considered essential for our theology and practice.

In contrast and conflict with many in Israel (e.g. Num 16:1-40), Moses experienced the relational significance of YHWH's presence and involvement, which are intrinsic to the name God gave. Jacob had an introductory experience of YHWH's presence to help him be aware that "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it," so he renamed the place Bethel (house of God, Gen 28:10-19). This experience was further clarified for Jacob when he alluded to the significance of YHWH's involvement during his encounter at Peniel (Gen 32:30). Yet, YHWH's presence and involvement appeared just limited to a place for Jacob, which did not encompass the relational significance of God's face. This relational significance emerged in Moses' ongoing experience with YHWH.

Initially, as tradition and custom stipulated, 'Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (Ex 3:4-6). In his theological task, however, his relational distance was dissolved as he made himself vulnerable to YHWH's presence and thereby received YHWH's relational involvement (as emerged in Ex 3:7-4:17). What Moses experienced unfolded in the relational outcome that distinguishes the whole significance of YHWH's integral presence and involvement: the face of God in face-to-face relationship together (Ex 33:11; Dt 5:4; Num 12:6-8; Dt 34:10). This relational outcome certainly distinguished Moses' *uncommon* (read holy) theology and practice from the *common* (read human shaped) theology and practice prevailing in Israel. Most important, it distinguished who, what and how YHWH is—the whole and uncommon significance of the name of God (cf. 1 Chr 16:10) that converges in the face of God (cf. 1 Chr 16:11, NIV).

YHWH's relational significance in the face of God is integrally distinguished in God's definitive blessing upon those in covenant relationship together, the blessing that only has qualitative inner-out meaning in God's whole relational terms (Num 6:24-26). YHWH would bless them, however, contingent on the significance of the name used by them, which could be composed just in relational terms to distinguish God's face in reciprocal response for the only purpose of relationship together (6:27). The psalmist invokes the blessing of God's face in order "that your ways may be known upon earth" for the relational purpose and outcome of "your salvation among all nations" (Ps 67:1-2, NIV). The face of God is not a portrait or static caricature to be honored and remembered, but rather signifies dynamically the very front facial presence (*paneh*) of the whole of who, what and how God is. The face of God is lost in conceptual terms and obscured in a 2-D referential view, in contrast to the full relational profile of God's face that shines and illuminates the unmistakable dynamic presence and active involvement of YHWH (as noted in Pss 4:6; 31:16; 44:3; 80:3; 89:15; 119:135).

Some will argue that God really doesn't have a face, and that giving God a face is to impose an anthropomorphism. Others will argue that we can't gain any significance from God's face since no one can see God's face and live to tell about it (Ex 33:20,23). My response is yes, indeed, if humans give God a face, but no if God discloses the face; to the others, I say that depends on what is meant by face. What did Jacob mean when he said "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" to live to tell about it and call the place Peniel (Gen 32:30)? The significance of God's face for Jacob was pointed out earlier from the experience of his dream at Bethel: "Surely the LORD's *presence* is *here*" (Gen 28:16). Again, it was unlikely that Jacob understood the full significance of both the face of God and the face-to-face experience of God, but there was no question that he experienced God's dynamic presence (*paneh*) and active involvement. The *paneh* of YHWH unfolded in full relational significance with Moses: "The LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Ex 33:11); "The LORD replied, 'My presence [*paneh*] will go with you'…Then Moses said to him, 'If your presence does not go with us…what else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?' And the LORD said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with *your involvement* and I know you by name *in relational terms*" (Ex 33:14-17, NIV).

What was the significance of the *paneh* that God revealed to Moses in the above account that Moses experienced in face-to-face reciprocal relationship together (even

deeper than as common friends), and that distinguished Moses' theology and practice? YHWH clarified for Moses that the totality of the holy God was beyond human limits to "see me and live." The totality of God was one way to define God's face, which then "you cannot see my face." Of course, some may think that this is the face they perceive, not realizing their false assumptions (e.g. "you will not be *reduced*," Gen 3:4) or misguided illusions (e.g. "you will be like God," 3:5). However, the primary way God's face can and must be perceived emerges from whatever presence and involvement are disclosed directly by God. That does not mean for God's presence to be indirectly identified by referential terms; such a face should not be confused with the dynamic presence and active involvement of YHWH that clearly distinguishes the face of God in the significance of only relational terms. What are the relational terms that constitute the name of YHWH and that distinguish the face of God in their significance, in order for us to know and understand the whole of God without assuming the totality of God?

What unfolds in the First Testament has been a debatable issue in OT theology and biblical studies, the discussion of which I will not include in what follows other than an arguable note here and there. As discussed initially above, what God disclosed emerges from an epistemic field that cannot be narrowed down to just the limits and constraints of the prevailing epistemic field used by humans. This further and deeper epistemic field is what Moses engaged in his theological task when he asked YHWH directly: On the relational basis of knowing Moses "by name…[Moses requests] show me your ways, so that I may know you" (Ex 33:13), and then he requested audaciously "Show me your glory" (v.18). If God's self-disclosures are to emerge distinguished beyond human terms and shaping, they emerge from God's epistemic field and unfold as communication in relational language and terms to the human context for us to engage in God's distinct relational epistemic process. Moses' interaction with YHWH makes unmistakable these relational terms necessary to receive the depth of God's self-disclosures; and when these terms are referentialized, their limits and constraints prevent both receiving the epistemological integrity of God's communication and having the hermeneutical clarity of its significance. In other words, the fragmentation and reduction due to referentialization prevent the whole of who, what and how YHWH is from emerging, much less unfolding. This is the expected consequence in our theological task when we don't venture beyond our epistemological limits and exercise hermeneutic openness—which neither means nor should be confused with premodern fideism or postmodern subjectivism.

The First Testament testifies to the essential reality and truth of who and what emerged and how this unfolded, which testify to its importance and necessity for the Second Testament in general and trinitarian theology in particular. What is immediately distinguished in God's terms is that the name of YHWH is not static. While YHWH (the Tetragrammaton) is the basic name of God identified in transcendence, YHWH does not remain apart but engages the theological trajectory that improbably intrudes on the human context, which is the original context created by YHWH. What emerged with the name of YHWH ("I AM WHO I AM") has been associated with the verb 'to be' (*hayah*) to signify God's being and existence. Yet, God's ontology is an incomplete picture to distinguish YHWH, a view which philosophical theology has embraced to render God more conceptual and static. What YHWH distinguishes is the primacy of God's function that is integral to and inseparable from God's ontology. The being and nature of God

don't just exist but function in such a way that distinguishes who, what and how God is. Moreover, the function of God doesn't just describe the ontology of God beyond any other gods, but it distinguishes the vulnerable presence and nature of God's involvement in the human context. That is, the significance of the name YHWH as a verb constitutes God's whole ontology and function disclosed to us, which otherwise as a nominal do not emerge in their wholeness. Further and deeper, as a verb YHWH's name does not merely signify God's activity in the human context—a common notion in OT theology—but constitutes God's relational-specific action and involvement integral to the whole of God's presence.

Therefore, just as Moses demonstrated, when we want to know and understand the whole of God, we have to be involved in congruent reciprocal response to the following:

> What distinguishes the face-presence of YHWH is whole-ly constituted by relational-specific action for relational-specific involvement in the primacy of relationship together; accordingly, God's ontology and function cannot merely be observed by disengaged referential terms but can only be relationally experienced (not just spiritually or unilaterally) by the involving relational terms that vulnerably disclose God's whole ontology and function in the name and with the face-presence of YHWH.

When the same relational terms involve us in our reciprocal relational response—composed by the relational significance of a verb and not a nominal—the relational outcome will be to come face to face with God's whole ontology and function, just as Moses experienced in the theological task to make whole his monotheism (the clear manifestation [*temunah*] of YHWH, Num 12:8, and of God's glory, Ex 33:19, cf. Mt 17:2-3).

Whatever else you want to attribute to YHWH and the significance of this defining name for God, nothing emerges from YHWH or unfolds in the significance of YHWH's name without the following: the constituting relational-specific action of YHWH integrally determining the vulnerable relational-specific involvement of YHWH's distinguished face-presence. At the heart of God's self-disclosure in relational terms is this integral relational action and involvement that, on the one hand, constitutes the primacy of relationship *within* the whole of God's ontology and function (the immanent God), and, on the other hand, composes the primacy of relationship by which God's whole ontology and function is present and involved with us in the human context (the economy of God). Yet, the ontology and function in the economy of God cannot be separated from the ontology and function of the immanent God, because it is the same ontology and function in relational terms. This is not to say, however, that the immanent God can be conflated with and thus reduced to the economy of God, since the identity of God extends beyond God's action in the world. In referential terms God's ontology and function in transcendence is kept separate to preserve the totality of God. But it is important to keep in sharp focus that YHWH doesn't disclose God's *total* ontology and function, as he told Moses; YHWH discloses only God's *whole* ontology and function, which is the same ontology and function that distinguishes God in relational terms whether in God's context or the human context. This whole disclosure distinguished

beyond comparative human terms the relational outcome of Moses' vital relational experience with YHWH (notably Ex 33:15-16), as well as determined the pivotal lesson learned by Job in his theological task (Job 42:3-5).

Furthermore, using the term relationality to describe God's ontology and function (perhaps as implied by Jacob earlier Gen 28:21-22) may or may not be a valid relational term. Relationality may be descriptive but by itself (notably as a noun) it is insufficient or even misleading to define the relational action and involvement basic within the whole of God, and to determine the primary relational significance of God's ontology and function in the human context. The name of YHWH is an unmistakable relational term that functions ongoingly as a relational verb. On the dynamic basis of this relational term, the significance of YHWH's name is never nominal but relational action always relationally-specific (1) for distinguishing the face-presence of God's whole ontology and function, and (2) for only the relational purpose of face-to-face relationship together in wholeness (the *shalôm* in God's definitive blessing, Num 6:24-26). This is the relational basis that composes the whole relational terms of covenant relationship (*tāmiym*, as given to Abraham, Gen 17:1-2).

It was only in the relational process of covenant relationship based on the relational term of YHWH that Moses made his appeal: "If your *face*-presence does not go with us…how will anyone know…you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people *in the human context*?" (Ex 33:15-16). Essentially then, Moses held YHWH, in the full significance of the name, accountable to *be* and *function* in reciprocal relationship together with the whole of who, what and how YHWH is. YHWH responded accordingly, not just to Moses' appeal but by the irreducible nature of God's whole ontology and function—the only integral way God is, lives and acts. Therefore, as the defining relational verb, YHWH disclosed and distinguished nothing less and no substitutes; and just as Moses pursued nothing less and no substitutes of God in his theological task, we need to also in the trinitarian theological task.

The Glory of God's Name

The name of YHWH must not be reduced to a mere title or else it transposes the relational verb to a noun, whereby the relational-specific action of the Subject in relational response to us is rendered obscure, ambiguous or elusive—even when God's general activity and/or relationality are conceived. This has obvious relational consequences, which is evident in the history of God's people to the present; but most consequential is that God is misrepresented, and that God's relational response to us is not received in its full significance and thus not relationally responded to by us reciprocally in likeness.

The psalmists declare "ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name" (Ps 29:2; 96:8), and "Blessed be his glorious name forever" (Ps 72:19), and "sing the glory of his name" (Ps 66:2). Then the proclaiming responses, "Let your glory be over all the earth" (Ps 57:5,11; 108:5). This glory of YHWH's name—whether due his name, praised, sung or proclaimed—is not about whatever glory we give to God but constitutes only the glory YHWH reveals to us. That is, the glory (*kabod*) due YHWH's name involves some substantive aspect of God's ontology and function that was revealed by YHWH, the glory

of which signifies to be substantively heavy and impressive (*kabed*, the root of *kabod*). What did YHWH reveal of God's ontology and function that was truly substantive to qualify for *kabod*?

Our familiarity with the word 'glory' in biblical vocabulary should not mislead us in common usage (e.g. in worship) such that it loses its significance. 'The glory of God' constitutes the revelation of God's being, nature and presence to us, whose significance is composed only in relational terms to distinguish the who (being), the what (nature) and the how (presence) of God. If God's glory is merely perceived in referential terms as the abstract attribute of the transcendent God, we may claim to have some theological knowledge about God but without the relational significance to take us further and deeper in relationship to truly know and understand God. That referential knowledge about God would not be substantive to qualify for *kabod*. In the First Testament, *kabod* is used poetically to identify the whole person (Ps 16:9; 57:8; 108:1); and only YHWH revealing the whole of God's ontology and function to distinguish the being, nature and presence of God warrants "the glory due God's name." Who, what and how YHWH is, therefore, is critical to the substantive understanding of God's whole ontology and function.

When Moses asked YHWH to "show me your glory," it's not clear if he requested YHWH's whole person—but he likely received more than he requested. Later, YHWH called out intensely (*qara*) to Moses the further significance of YHWH's name as the substantive relational verb: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands…" (Ex 34:5-7, NIV). What YHWH revealed is the depth of God's relational action specific to us, and this relational action integrally defines God's substantive presence and determines God's substantive involvement in covenant relationship with us. It is this depth that has not always been received by God's people, which then results in not knowing and/or understanding the substantive quality constituting God's glory—that is, God's whole ontology and function composing the whole of who, what and how God is specifically in our context face to face.

Commonly in our theology and practice, love is the key identifier of our God and is ascribed to God as God's most significant attribute. What YHWH revealed is certainly the most significant key to God, yet it is misleading to identify love as an attribute of God. This needs to be clarified and corrected even though many have been comforted or assured and have even gained hope from thinking 'God is love'. As an attribute, God's love is transposed to a referential term that refers to who God is based on what God *does*, thereby narrowing down the ontology and function of God to just the parts of God's activity instead of the whole of God's relational-specific action. This is a subtle, often inadvertent, paradigm shift that has relational consequence both for YHWH's revelation and what we receive from YHWH for our theology and practice, which will have a major impact on the trinitarian theological task.

The psalmist guides us in the right direction, while his whole person thirsted and longed for his God (Ps 63:1), when he declared "your steadfast love is better than life" (v.3). How could this be so? First of all, when you hear "steadfast" don't be misled to think of God's love as an ontological constant. Steadfast can serve as a narrow qualifier for *hesed* (love, and *agape*) that loses the full significance the psalmist points to. Having said that, did the psalmist simply overstate an idealism commonly perceived about God's love? Yes and no. Yes, if the psalmist engaged in the following: When God's love is

narrowed down to a referential term that idealizes the name of God to a nominal status, this renders YHWH without the relational reality that distinguishes the whole real identity of YHWH and its significance as the substantive relational verb; the lack of experiencing God's love in relational terms is substituted for by the idealizing of God's love—perhaps like spiritualizing his thirst for God or sublimating his unfulfilled thirst. No, on the other hand, because the psalmist didn't conceive of YHWH as a noun, but he directly experienced and thus understood (*ra'ah*) the relational reality of YHWH's glory (63:2), and this declaration was the relational outcome.

In human thinking, love has been an elusive quality that many have tried to quantify, making it even more elusive to experience. Quantitative measures have narrowed the focus on love to various deeds—most notably of sacrifice as commonly perceived of *agape*—thereby reducing the primary significance of love to a subordinate position under the quantity of deeds defined as 'love for others'. Love for others, however, is not the same action as the love *of* others. The love of others involves relational-specific action that is not focused primarily on what is done by the one loving, or even on how what is done benefits others; and this narrow focus reflects when God is misperceived, how God is misunderstood, and why God is misrepresented. That is, the primary significance of love is not about 'what I am to do' but rather constitutes 'how I am to be involved with others'. What to do in love, even for others, neither signifies nor requires being involved with those others. In contrast, the basis of love's involvement is only defined by relational terms that by its nature must be determined by relational-specific action. The love of others is always how to be involved with them in relationship, and not just to be relational but to be vulnerably involved in the primacy of relationship *with* them over any secondary deeds *for* them. Therefore, what we give primacy to in love—'what I am to do' or 'how I am to be involved'—reveals my person to others: who and what my person is (in reduced ontology or whole ontology?), and how my person is (in reduced function or whole function?). Likewise, the love that YHWH gives to us (or its narrow perception) reveals who, what and how YHWH is in whole ontology and function (or a reduced God).

As YHWH revealed and the psalmist experienced, the relational-specific action of God's love constitutes the significance of God's relational involvement directly in the human context, which then distinguishes the substantive whole of God's being (" I AM"), nature ("WHO I AM") and presence ("face")—that is, which distinguishes the glory of YHWH's name. The whole of God's ontology and function emerge with the substantive relational verb of God's being, nature and presence. It is critical to understand in our theology and practice (perhaps in our thirst and longing for God also) that God's wholeness only unfolds from the relational-specific action (not merely activity or mere relationality) of the verb, and that God becomes reduced and fragmented by nominal terms—all of which is neither to suggest nor be confused with process theology. And it is vital to understand that the breadth and depth of God's relational action converge integrally in the relational-specific involvement of love *from* God. Without the relational-specific involvement of God's love, the glory of God is neither distinguished in the human context nor experienced by us. Thus, what of God's being, nature and presence emerge to distinguish for us the significance that the who, what and how of God's love is better than life?

As the source of all life, it is God's relational involvement with us that gives life its full significance, and therefore gives all our lives their integral meaning (not partial, situational or temporal) in the primacy of this relational-specific involvement in relationship together. Life by itself is incomplete and has no significance or meaning without the relational involvement of love; not even love as an ideal or as mere deeds provides this significance and meaning. This essential reality has usually not been recognized throughout human history. Even less acknowledged, at times even by God's people, is the essential truth that life cannot be whole without the relational-specific involvement of God's love, who is the source of that life. Here again, the real needs to be distinguished from the ideal to understand the essential truth and reality of God's relational involvement of love and its significance both for our life and God's. God's life cannot be separated from or understood apart from the relational dynamic of God's love, and this includes the very life within the whole of God. Beyond the quantitative deeds and referential activity composing the economy of God, God's love enacts God's ontology and function to distinguish the presence of God's being and nature (i.e. the glory of God). When the economy of God is composed by the ongoing relational involvement of God's love, it distinguishes the same whole (not total) ontology and function as the immanent God.

Thus, the relational-specific involvement of God's being, nature and presence revealed the whole of who, what and how God is for us to receive in relationship, and thereby know and understand the essential truth and reality of God's whole life—the whole ontology and function of God's being, nature and presence that constitute our life to be in likeness, with the relational-specific outcome of experiencing God's relational involvement of love being better than life existing without this integral significance and meaning. Knowing who, what and how God is as the substantive relational verb, therefore, is indispensable for understanding both God's whole ontology and function and ours in order to compose our theology and practice in like wholeness.

When Moses held YHWH accountable in the theological task to show him YHWH's glory, YHWH distinguished God's presence more deeply to Moses; and this relational process ongoingly unfolded to signify the depth of their face-to-face relational involvement (Ex 33:11; Num 12:6-8; Dt 34:10). What YHWH disclosed of God's glory, and this must not be overlooked, was not a static view of God's presence (as depicted by a noun for referential information) but the dynamic presence of God enacted by the relational verb of YHWH. Even though the totality of God was not revealed, the dynamic presence of God disclosed to Moses required YHWH to be more vulnerable with God's whole ontology and function. That is, the significance of God's dynamic presence is always God's relational-specific involvement, which now discloses God's **vulnerable presence**. This is frequently overlooked because the substantive significance of God's vulnerable presence is only composed in relational terms and constituted by God's relational involvement (not God's deeds); and this is why God's presence is overlooked, misinterpreted or simply elusive. Nevertheless, God's vulnerable presence unfolds to distinguish the glory of YHWH's name as the substantive relational verb.

Since God's vulnerable presence enacts God's ontology and function in relational terms for the relational-specific purpose of the primacy of relationship together, underlying the covenant established with Abraham was the primacy of relationship together in *wholeness*—the terms of which were summarized in "walk before me and be

blameless" (i.e. be whole, *tāmiym*, Gen 17:1). What emerged with Abraham and unfolded with Moses is covenant relationship together on the basis of the relational-specific involvement of the whole ontology and function of both God and God's people. The primacy of relationship together in whole ontology and function first emerged even prior to covenant relationship, when God created human persons in this relational primacy on the basis of God's likeness (Gen 1:26; 2:18). What is vital for our theology and practice is the integral truth and reality essential of God's whole ontology and function that are revealed in relational terms by the relational involvement of God's vulnerable presence: the very nature of God integrally constituting God's whole ontology and function—God's **relational nature**.

God's relational nature distinguishes God's vulnerable presence not with mere relationality; God's relational nature is neither a noun nor an adjective. The relational nature of God is the substantive basis for the whole of who, what and how God is, and all that God enacts in self-disclosure and integrally engages in for relational-specific response to and involvement with us. And God's vulnerable presence has significance for us because the relational nature of God's whole ontology and function has emerged, unfolded and been ongoingly involved with us for relationship together, nothing less and no substitutes. YHWH revealed to Moses that the nature of his relational involvement of love is integrally enacted with his faithfulness (Ex 34:6), which the psalmists poetically define as "love and faithfulness meet together" (Ps 85:10, NIV) and "love and faithfulness go before you" (Ps 89:14, NIV). Faithfulness is inseparable from the relational involvement of God's relational nature and unfolds also as the relational verb to consistently and ongoingly enact God's involvement of love, so that the whole ontology and function of God can be counted on to be vulnerably present and relationally involved with us in the primacy of relationship together. God's relational nature indeed is the substantive basis for YHWH's name as the relational verb, whereby the relational-specific involvement of God's love is distinguished, and thus for the glory of God to be an essential truth and relational reality in our theology and practice.

Relationship is primary for God, yet this primacy is constituted only by whole ontology and function—just as God communicated to Abraham for covenant relationship, "walk *with* me *in reciprocal relationship* and be *whole* [*tāmiym*] *in your involvement*" (Gen 17:1). This wholeness of ontology and function (not about merely "blameless" practice), which also defines the significance of *shalôm*, was an ongoing issue in the practice of covenant relationship, if not in its theology. The terms for covenant relationship summarized to Abraham and given in the Torah to Moses were always whole relational terms for how to be involved in reciprocal relationship together. Yet, God's whole relational terms were frequently transposed by the Israelites to referential terms of what to do (such as "blameless" practice), as a code for conformity and identity formation, and thereby for self-determination. This refocused their practice as well as their theological anthropology on the outer aspects while subordinating or ignoring deeper involvement, all of which signified a reduced ontology and function. For example, by revising God's terms for relationship, they re-formed the covenant from the covenant of love (Dt 7:7-9) to a quid pro quo contract; and thus they essentially revised the book of Deuteronomy from the essential truth and reality of God's love story—which it is indeed in its relational depth (Dt 4:37; 7:7-9; 10:15; 23:5; 33:3)—to a template of conformity without relational significance. In this fragmentary process, God was also reduced mainly

to a figurehead or referential point for their theology and practice (cf. 1 Sam 15:22-23; Ps 147:10-11; Jer 7:21-26). This pattern in their theology and practice certainly was consequential and needs to be understood to locate such patterns in our own theology and practice.

The relational consequence was that the Israelites redacted the name of YHWH to a noun and conflated the glory of God's name with insignificant titles and other secondary matter. Thereby they reshaped the covenant relationship of love with God to a covenant increasingly detached from the primacy of relationship and distant from God, so that the covenant became engaged in secondary matter merely in referential terms (e.g. Isa 29:13; 58:1-6, cf. Mt 15:7-9). Does this have any similarity to contemporary theology and practice, notably being preoccupied with the secondary from outer in? The critiques from YHWH become even more relational-specific with Jesus, and encompass both religious and sociocultural traditions and their underlying reduced ontology and function from the influence of reductionism and its counter-relational workings.

God's vulnerable presence and relational nature obviously were affected by such theology and practice, and YHWH responded accordingly (as disclosed in Ex 34:7). What is also revealed in the God of Israel's relational response of love is the further enactment of God's whole ontology and function that now distinguishes the vulnerable presence of God's being, along with God's relational nature. The essential reality of God's relational nature vulnerably presented and relationally involved is further distinguished in its depth when YHWH revealed the defining basis for establishing covenant relationship. When God's people were chosen by YHWH "out of all the peoples on the earth," God did not focus his love, affection, heart (*hashaq*) on them "because you were more numerous than any other people"; in fact, "you were the fewest of all peoples" (Dt 7:6-7). This is not to say that 'small is beautiful' and 'less is better/more' for God, and to idealize God as the benefactor of the minority in the world. YHWH revealed that the relational nature of God's presence and involvement with them was further determined by the heart of God's ontology and function: **the qualitative being** of God, which distinguishes God's glory by integral qualitative terms as well as relational terms to constitute God's whole ontology and function for the necessary involvement in covenant relationship.

The heart of God's ontology is not defined in quantitative terms, nor is the heart of God's function determined by the quantitative. Such quantitative measures have traditionally reduced the immanent God to human shaping and rendered the economy of God to an ontology and function in human terms. Therefore, what is primary for God's ontology and function is always the qualitative over the quantitative (not to exclude it), which signifies the primacy of ontology and function from inner out that fully integrates the outer into the primacy of the inner. Outer-in ontology and function is a substitute from reductionism that is both in contrast and conflict with God's whole ontology and function, as well as with persons in God's qualitative image and relational likeness. At the depth of God's ontology and function is the qualitative heart of God's being from inner out that constitutes God's relational nature in all God's relational involvement with nothing less and no substitutes for God's whole ontology and function. Congruent to the whole of who, what and how God is in full glory, the heart of God's qualitative being centers the vulnerable involvement of God's relational nature on the heart of our

ontology and function, not on our quantitative matter. Samuel had to learn this critical distinction, which was pivotal for him to find God's successor to Saul (1 Sam 16:6-7).

God pursues the heart of our ontology and function because that constitutes the whole person from inner out (1 Chr 28:9). This is the ontology and function necessary for compatible involvement with the heart of God's ontology and function in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together. Anything less and any substitutes for the heart of our person have no significance to God's heart, and therefore are insufficient involvement by our ontology and function because it is incompatible with the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the qualitative heart of God's whole ontology and function (Isa 29:13). When the name of YHWH as the substantive relational verb enacted God's whole ontology and function, the glory of God was disclosed in relational-specific terms to integrally distinguish the essential truth and reality to compose our theology and practice: the qualitative being of God's vulnerable presence and the relational nature of God's relational involvement.

If the glory of God revealed is not received as distinguished by the name of YHWH, there is no substantive basis to "ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name" (Ps 29:2; 96:8), to "bless his glorious name" (Ps 72:19), and to "sing the glory of his name" (Ps 66:2). And there is an insurmountable gap in our theology and practice between the essential truth and essential reality of God's glory—which should not be confused with the gap in Lessing's 'ugly ditch' between faith (as fideism) and reason. This gap is most notable in the doxology (from *doxa*, glory) of our theology and practice, a doxology which does not get to the heart of God's ontology and function when not distinguished by God's whole glory. If this is the extent of our doxology, then our theology and practice have assumed a different theological trajectory and relational path from God's self-revelation. The existing reality, then, becomes that God's so-called glory signifies reduced ontology and function—even when the referential truth of God's glory appears doctrinally correct.

YHWH enacted the heart of God's whole (again, not total) ontology and function to disclose the substantive glory of God's qualitative being, relational nature and vulnerable presence for just this relational-specific outcome: so that the vulnerable qualitative relational involvement of God's love in face-to-face reciprocal relationship together constitutes and distinguishes all in the significance beyond life itself—just as the psalmist declared. The dynamic relational verb of the name YHWH acted in only whole relational terms to unfold the essential truth of God's glory, so that the essential reality of the whole of God's qualitative relational presence would be known relationally and fully understood in this relational outcome for our theology and practice. This is the glory of God's name that is irreplaceable for our theology and practice, including trinitarian theology and practice.

The essential truth, which we have the relational opportunity to receive, understand and be involved with, is that God's whole ontology and function is irreducible, and therefore can ongoingly be counted on ("faithfulness") to be vulnerably present and relationally involved with nothing less and no substitutes for the whole of God. Yet, the reality essential also of God's whole relational terms is that relationship with the whole of God is not unilateral but reciprocal. This has opened the door for human will to act in self-autonomy to redefine the terms for relationship together, notably becoming preoccupied with the secondary for self-determination. Thus, as emerged from

the beginning, our ontology and function has been subject to negotiation and often rendered to reduced ontology and function—which then renegotiates the glory of God's name down to reduced ontology and function. This reduction is evident in many of our theological anthropologies and has been influential in the trinitarian theological task, all of which should not be surprising whenever there is a gap between the essential truth of God's whole glory revealed and the essential reality of the whole of God's ontology and function composing our theology and practice.

This gap reflects epistemological and hermeneutical problems (discussed in chap. 1) yet most importantly involves a relational problem, because this is the unavoidable relational gap of not making relational connection with the relational-specific action of YHWH's presence and involvement. Even when YHWH's presence and involvement are affirmed referentially in our theology and practice, this relational gap still exists without the relational significance of YHWH's name. Accordingly, and most important, doxology always maintains a wide gap in our theology and practice when not defined and determined by God's full glory. When the theological task falls short in doxology, the relational consequence renders us to virtual worship of a reductionist ideal or stereotype of God. In contrast and conflict with what is virtual, the relationship-specific outcome of engaging God in the relational context and terms distinguished by YHWH alone is the relational experience of vulnerable face-to-face connection of our whole person directly experiencing the whole of God. We need to understand how crucial this issue is and address the matter with urgency in the theological task, since no less than God's wholeness and thus the whole of God are at stake—that is, the substantive basis for what is essential for all life and that is requisite to integrally compose our trinitarian theology and practice.

The Unity or Whole of YHWH?

We cannot behold the glory of God in anything less than God's whole ontology and function enacted by the vulnerable qualitative relational involvement of the LORD's love. God is neither distinguished nor experienced without the truth and reality of the substantive relational verb of YHWH's name. Since the truth of YHWH's name gets redacted and the reality of YHWH's presence gets conflated with secondary matter without qualitative relational significance, their coherence is not often clear whether it is just the unity or the whole of YHWH composed in our theology and practice. Is there in fact a difference between unity and whole, and is it necessary to make a distinction between them? The clarification and/or correction involved in discussing these matters will further challenge our interpretive lens of the First Testament.

In the coherence of the OT narrative, the identity of God's name as monotheistic was not a contested theological truth, though the reality of God's presence and involvement was frequently doubted in practice. The Shema prevailed to establish the God of Israel in monotheism, which extended into Second Temple Judaism to have no question about the identity of "one God" (Mal 2:10). Even though the name of YHWH encompassed various titles (such as Creator, Almighty, Savior), these did not signify a theological plurality but only sub-titles to the one God. The ontology of God maintained its singular integrity while God's function took on various forms. This 'singularity with

diversity' becomes problematic when God's ontology and function are seen separately, and yet still poses a problem when seen together if that ontology and function are not understood integrally.

One title-function used in the First Testament of God in particular raises this issue: **Father**. Moses distinctly recited the words in a song for all of Israel to hear, "Is not *the name of YHWH* your father?" (Dt 32:6) The psalmist recorded David's cry to the LORD that extended Moses' song: "You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation" (Ps 89:26, cf. 2:7). In the dark days of Israel, Jeremiah illuminated their contradictory practice of addressing the name of YHWH as "Father" (Jer 3:4,19); and in anticipation of new days, the third installment of Isaiah clearly affirmed YHWH as "you are our father…from of old is your name" (Isa 63:16). After the temple was rebuilt, the practice of God's people in their covenant observance was further critiqued with this focus: "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?" (Mal 2:10). What is unmistakable in the First Testament identity of God with father is that its significance only emerges in relational terms; referential terms create theological ambiguity—for example, what of God is referred to?—that can mislead or distort our perception of God's identity, particularly in the trinitarian task.

In relational terms, the above accounts identify 'father' as God's function in *how* God is present and involved with his covenant family, who bear the identity as the children of God (Dt 14:1, cf. Ex 4:22; Jer 31:9). It is problematic at this stage in the theological task to also identify Father as *who* and *what* God is, that is, God's ontology; that would be unwarranted theologically and thus premature. Yet, having said that, it is critical to the integrity of the one God that God's function (with plurality of forms) never be separated from God's ontology (in singularity), or God becomes divided and fragmented (perhaps into multiple Gods), and thereby reduced in ontology and function and no longer whole from inner out. In other words, how God is in relational terms is always who and what God is, and who and what God is is always how God is—though this truth and reality essential to the whole of God are not distinguished in referential terms.

This points us to the issue of the unity or whole of God. Referential terms narrow God down to the parts of who, what and how God is—such as the traditional view of God's ontology in terms of God's existence and God's functions in terms of essence—and then reference these parts (titles, attributes, functions) with each other, or as their sum together, in order to compose a unity of God (likely a static unity). This unity has no relational significance for the truth and reality essential *of* God other than for referential doctrine *about* God. It is crucial to understand for the composition of our theology and practice: The whole of God is not the sum of God's parts, however inclusive, but involves the integral relations between who, what and how God is—that is, the ongoing integral relations *within* God that constitute God's irreducible whole ontology and function. Another way then to differentiate between God's unity and God's whole is to understand this existing condition: God's unity refers to a realm of thought and ideas, whereas God's whole involves the real world of relational action and experience. This distinction between a unity of God and the whole of God is vital for the integrity of the dynamic name of YHWH and to distinguish (*pala*) the glory of God beyond the comparative terms of human thought and ideas.

In our theology and practice, for there to be continuity of the name of God and for God to be distinguished beyond the shaping of our human context, our theology cannot be a human variable that is subject to negotiation. Unlike politics, for example, which is determined primarily by pragmatism in an unavoidable process of negotiation and compromise, theology by God's whole relational terms is nonnegotiable and integrates the irreducible "idealism" of God with the realism of human life not by pragmatic compromise but integrally to redeem it and make it whole. Traditionally, what goes into composing the unity of God has been an explicit or implicit process of negotiation and/or compromise, which in reality becomes fragmentary and a reduction of God contrary to being the whole ontology and function of God—despite whatever so-called certainty the doctrine of unity is based on.

While the significance of the name of YHWH as father cannot be used to make definitive the person of the Father in the triune God, that father's title-function distinguishes the glory of YHWH as the substantive relational verb, who enacted the whole of God's ontology and function in the relational-specific involvement of nothing less than *family love*. This involves the relational-specific love of God's covenant family that composed the covenant of love (Dt 7:7-9). The qualitative being of YHWH's vulnerable relational involvement "meet together" in family love (as the psalmist said, Ps 85:10), the relational-specific process of which integrally constitutes the *fatherhood* of God's salvific action for our essential reality. YHWH's relational-specific process of family love would continue to illuminate God's face (as in Num 6:24-27) to unfold the whole of God's relational-specific context of family not only for Israel but for all nations (cf. Gen 17:4; Ps 67:1-4; 98:2). And the whole of God's relational context of family and relational process of family love signify more than the unity of God composed simply in referential terms, because what unfolds is only the relational-specific action of God's whole ontology and function—that is, nothing less than and no substitutes for the whole of who, what and how God is. And God's function as father is at the center of God's whole relational context of family and whole relational process of family love.

The singular integrity of God's ontology also took on two other vital forms of God's function along with father, whose singularity with diversity will further help us distinguish the whole of God from just the unity of God. The singularity of this diversity expressed in the First Testament will challenge any limited perceptions of God and open up the new horizon that makes definitive the whole of God's ontology and function in the Second Testament.

The next/second vital form was central to God's function in the unfolding narrative of the First Testament that revealed God's integral presence and involvement—integral because God's presence is never without God's involvement, relational-specific involvement in family love. Yet, as will be distinguished, this central function of God is in contrast to and conflict with other common perceptions of God. On the one hand, God's presence and involvement are in contrast to the detached God in transcendence of deism. The theism of OT theology, on the other hand, is also in contrast with a referential immanence of merely God's general presence and activity within the world. Furthermore it is in conflict with the hybrid view of God's transcendence and immanence in an even more generalized identification of God's presence and agency permeating the world order, a view called panentheism, and also in conflict with pantheism that identifies God as composed within all of reality—without any distinguished presence in transcendence

and with having no relational significance in the world. In further contrast and conflict, the integral presence and involvement of God unfolding with coherence in the First Testament is **'the Spirit of God'**.

The presence and involvement of God's function emerged in the beginning at creation: "the Spirit [*ruah*, spirit, wind, breadth] of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen 1:2, NIV). Perhaps this stage of God's creative action was post-Big Bang, yet planet earth (*'eres*) formed with the function of God's presence and involvement. Even if *ruah* is translated as "a wind," it was "from God" (NRSV) signifying God's presence and involvement. Also, even if a Big Bang and evolutionary biology provide sub-plots for the universe and human life, God's presence and involvement are neither precluded nor eliminated—modern assumptions that can only be made from a limited epistemic field. And the *ruah* of God emerged beyond pantheism and panentheism and unfolded deeper than immanence to become palpable to increasingly distinguish God's unmistakable presence and involvement. This Spirit will also clarify and correct perceptions of God that limit or constrain God—for example, later from the time of patristic theology that has conceived of God as reason and will, or as mind, and thus the basis for creating human life in such likeness, the prevailing view of the human person to this modern time.

After God's involvement in creative action, God's continued involvement with humanity in general was tenuous—"My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are *reduced*" (Gen 6:3)—though God's presence was never withdrawn, as evident with Noah (Gen 6:6-8). Within the context of covenant relationship, the spirit of the LORD God's presence and involvement would undergo ups and downs, ins and outs (e.g. Num 11:25; Judg 6:34; 1 Sam 10:10; 16:14; 2 Sam 23:2; Ps 51:11; Neh 9:20,30), and then would unfold in the transformed days of new covenant relationship together (Joel 2:28-29, cf. Isa 61:1).

The who and what of the spirit of God's presence and involvement are not distinguished in this OT discourse, other than to identify the spirit as holy and as affective (Ps 51:11; Isa 63:10). Holy (*qodesh*) signifies to be uncommon and separated from the ordinary usage in the human context, thus the how of God's function as spirit is clearly distinguished beyond what is common to us and cannot be always explained in human terms. Accordingly, YHWH made it imperative for our theology and practice "to distinguish between the holy [uncommon] and the common" (Lev 10:10)—the uncommon from the subtle unholy that could encompass the status quo in our theology and practice (as in Isa 55:8). Further, the involvement of God's function as an affective spirit ("grieved," Isa 63:10; cf. Gen 6:6) helps us understand the apparent ins and outs of God's involvement in covenant relationship together, which again is a reciprocal relationship that can have relational consequences. The affective spirit of God is not understood in quantitative referential terms, nor can it be known as just a spiritual nature. This spirit can only be illuminated and palpable in qualitative relational terms, which is the composition of God's self-disclosure. Thus, the significance of the *affective* spirit also reveals to us that God's function should not be separated from God's ontology; and this integral spirit will be crucial to distinguish the identity of the whole and uncommon God in the trinitarian theological task. Moreover, the spirit's presence and involvement signifying the diversity of God's function is insufficiently accounted for by merely compiling it in the unity of God.

What the fatherhood and affective spirit of God's function make unmistakable for us is to distinguish nothing less than the whole and uncommon God's presence and involvement, enacted by the substantive relational verb with no substitutes for YHWH's whole ontology and function. This whole relational-specific context and process of God converge in the third form of God's function that emerges in the First Testament. What is testified centers on God's communicative action and this is why the First Testament is a more significant inscription to use than 'Old' since communication from God is never old, past and irrelevant. The psalmist summarizes God's communication for us with this defining statement: "The unfolding of your words gives light" (Ps 119:130)—the illuminating function of **the Word**.

Unlike the words commonly composing human speech, the words God speaks do not revolve around God. That is to say, the words of God are not self-promoting, nor do they serve for the self-glorification of the one God. While God may be central to God's words (notably in the Torah), they are not self-centered to even suggest the self-pride of God's name. When God speaks, the words emerge from God's relational context by God's relational process for the primary relational purpose of communication in the primacy of relationship. This relationship-specific action cannot be received and understood in the limits of referential terms since it is only composed by these relational-specific terms. In other words, God's relational-specific words, what unfolds from God's words is the light necessary to integrally (1) know and understand the whole of God's face (as Job experienced, Job 42:4-5, cf. the boast in Jer 9:24), in order to (2) constitute the primacy of face-to-face reciprocal relationship together in the covenant of love (as unfolds in Dt to compose God's love story, not God's self-serving terms, cf. Dt 7:8-9; 8:3; 11:19).

God's relational context and process were illuminated at creation when God's words called forth all of life that exists, whether known or not to humankind (Gen 1; Ps 33:6-9). With each "the LORD God said," the relational context and process of God further emerged to communicate God's presence and involvement in the human context. The word of YHWH often was communicated through human persons in the prophetic task, yet the source of their speech was unequivocally "the LORD says" because "the word of YHWH came to *them*" (e.g. 2 Sam 7:4-5,17,19,21,29); therefore, this word was neither transposed to human terms nor redacted to serve a human purpose. Whether directly or indirectly communicated, it is crucial to understand that the word of YHWH functions only in the primary significance of YHWH the relational verb.

What unfolds from God's words is not merely communication as an end in itself or to inform us about God (the function of referential language and terms). Rather God's words openly communicate God's relational response of grace to the human condition, problem and need. Initiated in and from the beginning, "the LORD said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone'" (Gen 2:18), that is, *apart* from the whole constituted by the primacy of relationship in God's likeness. Accordingly, God's communicative (and creative) action responded in the relational-specific purpose for the relationship-specific outcome that always unfolds in this primacy of relationship together in wholeness both with God and with each other (cf. Gen 2:25). The words of God's communicative response continued to unfold God's creative action and then disciplinary action to God's salvific action (e.g. as witnessed in the Historical Books).

How God's words function in the narrative history of God's people illuminates the relational-specific context and process of God's whole presence and involvement, which is communicated by the relational-specific action of God's whole ontology and function—the whole of who, what and how God is in the relational response of grace to the human condition, problem and need. Just as the psalmist declared the "The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple" (Ps 119:130), Joshua experienced the relational significance of "all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us" (Josh 24:27). This essential truth and reality of the words of God's function and this relational outcome of God's words converge in the singularity of God's Word—that is, to constitute the whole Word and not to compose or compile the unity of the Word. This convergence involves the relational purpose to distinguish the whole function of the integral Word of and from God—as in "The Lord announced the word [*'omer*], and great was the company of those who proclaimed it" (Ps 68:11, NIV). The unfolding of the Word illuminates the following for our understanding: "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the *relational purpose* for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11). Thus, all God's people are told: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you" (Isa 60:1), for the Word is distinguished by the name "Wonderful" (*pala*) and even "Father" (Isa 9:6), and "the *whole Word* will be your everlasting light" (Isa 60:19).

It is now this Word that will be the epistemological, hermeneutical, relational and ontological keys to the whole and uncommon God, and who will be integral for God as father and as spirit to be known and understood together as the triune God. Together their diversity of function does not compose in referential terms the tri-unity of God; even if perceived as personal, this tri-unity is insufficient composition of the triune God. The Word is integral for the whole and holy God because it does not merely put together the sum of these parts for the unity of God. God's words unfold with the Word in the relational process of synergism, which distinguishes (*pala*) the whole and uncommon God as greater than the sum of narrowed-down parts and therefore beyond any common triunity. In relational terms, contrary to the mere sum of referential parts, together they (each of them beyond just function) constitute the inseparable and integral ontology and function of the whole of God, subsequently to bear the uncommon name of the Trinity, nothing less and no substitutes.

The Name of the Whole and Uncommon God in Transition

Shifting from YHWH of Israel to the Christian triune God is a difficult transition for the traditions of both sides of monotheism. Some may think that a paradigm shift is required to make such a move, or even that fideism is needed to cross this perceived gap. Yet, the name of YHWH as the substantive relational verb never becomes static as a mere noun for theological reference; Subject God (not as Object) continued in the relational involvement of love enacted by YHWH's whole ontology and function in order to further disclose the glory of the whole and uncommon God. It should not be surprising then, though it may exceed human understanding, that the God whose presence and

involvement continue to unfold also continues to go deeper than the essential truth of God accessible and the essential reality of God existing at that time.

As the substantive relational verb, the name of YHWH enacting the whole and uncommon God now unfolds in transition integrally on the improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path previously neither witnessed nor experienced. This theological trajectory and relational path are the most improbable and intrusive encounters of God experienced in the human context. They have, on the one hand, unequivocally constituted the whole and uncommon God's vulnerable presence and intimate relational involvement, and, on the other hand, have caused questions, speculations, confusion, doubt and conflict. In other common words, the improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path of the Word will shake up both the universe and the status quo, with the relational outcome that our theology and practice will never be the same: that is, not constrained to the epistemological limits of a narrow epistemic field, to the hermeneutical limits of an interpretive lens shaped only by human terms (notably of referential thought and ideas), and constrained by the relational and ontological limits from reductionism embedded (if not enslaved) in the secondary—all of which prevail because of reduced ontology and function. Even the psalmist likely could not have anticipated the Light that "the unfolding of your Word gives," nor would have realized that it "imparts *whole and uncommon* understanding to the simple."

As this transition is made and the Word unfolds—who has already emerged 'in the beginning'—the hope of *new* covenant relationship together as the whole of God's uncommon family is raised up; and the fulfillment for the primacy of this relationship together in wholeness is provided and thereby constituted whole. Indeed, as promised by the name of YHWH, "My face shines on you and relationally responds in grace to you; my face turns to you and brings change to establish new relationship together in wholeness"—the essential relational outcome of *siym* and *shalôm* from the whole and uncommon God's definitive blessing on us (Num 6:24-27).

Chapter 3 The Face of God Embodied in the Word

In the beginning was the Word…was with God…was God.
John 1:1

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.
John 1:10, NIV

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory.
John 1:14

In the Second Testament the identity of God is unmistakable, yet there are many issues about the breadth and depth of God's identity. For the Christian God to have continuity with the God of Israel, this one God must be on the same theological trajectory and relational path as YHWH, "my name forever…for all generations" (Ex 3:15). The pivotal issue underlying the discontinuity of God's identity involves converting YHWH's name from the substantive relational verb to a noun, thereby imposing a static title constrained to human terms and limits. Converting YHWH's name also could include substituting the substantive relational verb with a passive verb or intransitive verb. Such conversion obviously has reduced YHWH and restricted who, what and how YHWH could be and continue to unfold. Issues of reduction and restriction also emerge in NT theology and practice that are critical to the breadth and depth of God's identity unfolding in the Second Testament, which need clarification and correction in the trinitarian theological task.

YHWH Unfolds Embodied in Wholeness

Our initial understanding of YHWH, the God of Israel, is not about knowledge of a triune God or even about maintaining monotheism through the Shema. God's self-revelation is distinguished beyond such referential knowledge about God and vulnerably exposes YHWH in the human context for knowing and therefore understanding the whole of God. YHWH is not fragmentary, something *less* and thus incomplete but unfolds only whole; accordingly, this is not about the quantitative sense of mono-theism but the qualitative reality of whole-theism. This reality of YHWH emerges whole only from God's relational context and process, which compose the third horizon of the necessary hermeneutic for the 3-D view of God. This 3-D lens is indispensable in order to whole-ly understand (*syniemi*, Mk 8:17-18) the Word of YHWH unfolding—the irreplaceable lens for the whole understanding (*synesis*) to specifically know (*epignosis*) the whole of God (as Paul provided for the church, Col 2:2). Otherwise, at best, we only have a flat 2-D view (the horizons of biblical writers and readers) of God composed by thought and ideas—a myopic view even when focused on Scripture—which lacks depth and therefore the full, complete and whole significance of God. A 2-D view is not only problematic hermeneutically but presents an insurmountable issue epistemologically.

Just as the human person has been increasingly reduced to a simple object, notably by the observations of science, we need to discern if the God in our theology and practice is merely a simple Object or a complex Subject. A simple Object is defined in measureable terms, namely by a quantity of parts (i.e. what the Object has and does) observed in the Object, which yield some degree of explanatory certainty about God—as science concludes about the human person and often assumes about the nonexistence of God. The reality of the complex Subject, however, emerges from beyond a limited, narrowed-down epistemic field of human observation, and is contingent on only the transcendent God's self-revelation. The embodied self-disclosure of this complex Subject was a major point of contention for those dependent on the measureable terms of "human standards" (Jn 8:12-15, cf. Jn 7:24). Yet, the subtle influence of human terms on the epistemic field and interpretation of the incarnation continue to shape much of our theology and practice.

The reality of the whole of God dwelling in transcendence beyond our human knowledge and understanding signifies a complexity that we cannot reduce to our human terms—even with the simplicity of philosophical theology—and expect the complex integrity of God to remain whole without fragmentation. The complex integrity of God is the issue facing us as YHWH emerged from transcendence on the theological trajectory to be present and the relational path to be involved in the human context, and then unfolds embodied in wholeness of the Word—a relational-specific process that again should not be confused with process theology. Thus, we need to answer this question for the Word in our trinitarian theological task: Is the focus on a simple Object or a complex Subject?

As we shift our main focus from the First Testament to the Second Testament, the unmistakable name of YHWH unfolds on the most improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path in human history to embody God's whole identity. However, while the essential truth of the incarnation embodies the whole of God, what Jesus embodied has often become a virtual reality in our theology and practice rather than the essential reality of this truth essential of God. Virtual reality is more pervasive today since the advent of modern technology, yet it has existed from the beginning of human engagement. The virtual reality of Jesus is evident upon realizing that there is a tendency in our theology and practice to fall into a default Christology. That is, we use either an overly christocentric Christology or an incomplete Christology, both of which are fragmentary reductions that don't signify the whole Word and/or distinguish the whole of God's Word—who was "in the beginning" (Jn 1:1-2; Col 1:17), emerged from the beginning (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16), and unfolded relationally embodying the whole of God (Jn 1:14; Col 1:19; 2:9). A Christology focused primarily on Christ or lacking the full significance of Jesus' whole person, such a Christology is a virtual reality of Jesus the Christ that is disconnected from his essential truth. To be connected to the essential truth of Jesus' whole person involves engaging the relational-specific process both congruent with his theological trajectory and compatible to his relational path, which has the relational outcome of embracing the essential reality (not virtual) of the Word's essential truth.

Just as the name of YHWH as a substantive relational verb is essential for God's whole identity, the Word of YHWH without redaction is essential for the whole of God. A default Christology has consequences for the trinitarian theological task, and its most

consequential impact is the fragmentary reduction of the Trinity that doesn't distinguish beyond mere thought and idea the truth and reality essential to the whole of God. This diminishes the heart of God's vulnerable qualitative presence and intimate relational-specific involvement and thus renders God to a simple Object, who is likely embodied in doctrinal norms with speculative certainty. God's complex integrity embodied in the Word has emerged for our relational-specific knowing and converges in the complex Subject's ontology and function for our whole understanding of the Trinity. Christians should expect the Trinity to be complex, on the one hand, but accessible to understand and experience on the other hand. And Christology (full, complete, whole) is the epistemological, hermeneutical, relational and ontological keys to this relational-specific outcome in our trinitarian theology and practice.

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

An incomplete Christology by the early disciples (as in Mk 6:51-52; 8:17-21) rendered their intense years following Jesus to a virtual reality, which didn't have the relational significance to truly know Jesus' whole person. In spite of the quantity of referential information about Jesus they could convey, they lacked the essential reality of the truth essential of Jesus embodying the whole of God—much to Jesus' chagrin after being "with you all this time" (Jn 14:9). This epistemological gap in their theology and practice certainly reflected a problem in the disciples' hermeneutic lens, which prevented whole-ly understanding Jesus and putting together the pieces (*syniemi*) revealed to them. Yet, the most critical issue in their theological task was the relational distance they kept from Jesus; for example, they consistently kept their thoughts and wonderings about Jesus to themselves (Mk 4:41; 8:16; 9:32-34; 10:26; 14:4). This relational pattern—which Mark's Gospel highlights in critical review of the disciples—demonstrated their practice that reflected their lack of relational involvement to make their persons vulnerable to the vulnerable presence and intimate relational involvement of Jesus' whole person. This certainly created a barrier to fully receive all of Jesus' self-disclosures. The subtle consequence was not really knowing and fully understanding Jesus in their theology and practice (Jn 14:9-10).

This irreplaceable relational-specific process was clearly illuminated when Jesus' whole person vulnerably converged with Peter's person at his footwashing, only to be refused and kept at a comfortable relational distance with the relational consequence "you have no share with me" (Jn 13:6-8). Later, Peter's incomplete Christology had to be corrected for the essential truth of Jesus to be proclaimed for the essential reality of all persons (Acts 11:9, as previously illuminated by Jesus, Mt 15:15-20).

The relational consequence of not engaging the theological task in relational terms is to be disconnected from the Word embodied in wholeness, whereby redactions of the Word result in overly christocentric or incomplete Christologies from fragmentary reductions of Jesus' whole person. As with the early disciples, this composes theology and practice with a virtual reality of Jesus—a default condition that likely longs for the essential reality of his essential truth (the embodied Truth), which Moses pursued from YHWH in his theological task. Such reductionism of the Word also unavoidably fragments the whole gospel and truncates the salvation enacted in relational-specific terms by the whole of God, and therefore has immeasurable repercussions on trinitarian theology and practice.

The Whole Gospel Unfolds Embodying the Face of God

The gospel initially emerged with the covenant established with Abraham of reciprocal relationship together in wholeness—"walk before me and be *whole*" (*tāmiym*, Gen 17:1). This covenant relationship was constituted by the qualitative face-presence of YHWH's relational-specific involvement of love (Dt 7:7-9). Now this good news further unfolds in a strategic shift to embody the whole face of God, which involves deeper tactical and functional shifts to distinguish the whole of God in irreducible and nonnegotiable relational-specific terms—that is, distinguishing the whole of God beyond mere thought and ideas (even ideals). This deeper profile of God's face challenges our epistemic process and whether our hermeneutic lens is open to be able to distinguish God's whole face unmistakably and thus deeper than commonly viewed.

This warrants **a short pause in our discussion** to address a related theological issue just touched on earlier about the face of YHWH.

Philosophical theology would dispute that God has a face, much less an unmistakable face. Its proponents' basis for this theistic view is important to understand as we consider what God has or has not self-disclosed. Their epistemic field is critical for the basis of their view. One skillful method to narrow the epistemic field is to expand the concept of uniqueness. This is accomplished by creating distinctions in categories such that some particular distinction stands alone (a unique or new category) and cannot be compared to others in that original or common category. For example, modern science made a distinction in the category of what exists by creating the category of the improbable, whose uniqueness then could no longer be compared to what else exists. This made it easier to take the approach that the improbable no longer needed to be accounted for because it could not be known; and therefore the conclusion follows that it didn't exist—presumably based on probability, but it was a conclusion shaped more by a perceptual-interpretive framework from human contextualization since mathematics in itself imposes limits making it insufficient for conclusions beyond those limits.[1] Nassim Taleb further discusses the severe limitation to our learning from observations or

[1] For a helpful discussion on the limits of mathematics, see Marcelo Gleiser, *The Island of Knowledge: The Limits of Science and the Search for Meaning*.

experience, and the fragility of our knowledge based on probability, thereby creating a barrier to learning more from the improbable.[2]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

God *cannot be*. It does not ascribe any attribute or property to God since it explicitly denies that God has any attributes or properties.

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

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

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

assumed depth without breadth is anthropomorphic—with both resulting from human shaping and construction.

As God's presence (qualitative face) engages the most improbable theological trajectory and God's involvement enacts the most intrusive relational path, it would seem highly likely that the embodying of God's face would be easily recognized, if not readily received. After all, distinguished (*pala*) implies beyond comparison to anything else existing in the human context, making God's face seemingly unmistakable. But, "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (Jn 1:11), even after they "have seen his glory" (1:14). This always indicates that epistemological and hermeneutical issues (as discussed earlier) are in operation. For example, a face from outer in is just a re-presentation of a person (e.g. ours in the mirror), which may not be a deception but still cannot be counted on for the whole person. God's face from outer in (i.e. in referential terms) is a reduced face of an Object that cannot distinguish the whole of God, and thus does not have the deeper profile necessary to be distinct from anthropomorphism. Only God's face as revealed from inner out in relational terms distinguishes the whole of God as Subject—clearly distinguished from mere parts of God as Object. At the same time, God's face from inner out does not distinguish the totality of God, only the whole of God; *whole* is neither totality nor aggregated parts.

While keeping these issues in mind, we need to turn our attention to more urgent relational and ontological issues involving the embodied Word. One issue to mention initially is between the economy and immanence of the triune God. The immanent Trinity is who, what and how God is whether apart from the human context or within it, whereas the economic Trinity only involves God's actions within the human context. They are neither the same nor at the same time separable from the other. It is crucial in our understanding of the whole of God that, on the one hand, the glory of God's immanence is not collapsed into the glory of God's relational-specific action (not merely activity) in the human context. Yet, on the other hand, they are also inseparable from each other such that separately the economic Trinity does not integrally signify and distinguish the whole of God's immanence. When our conclusions about who and what God is are based on only our perceptions of how God's activity is in the human context, then we are most susceptible to anthropomorphism and shaping God by our human terms. The integral distinction of who, what and how God is embodying God's whole glory will be critical for composing trinitarian theology and practice. This is the relational and ontological challenge (along with epistemological and hermeneutical) that the face of the whole Word presents to us.

In contrast to those having problems recognizing God's embodied face, when Simeon—who was involved with and guided by the Holy Spirit of YHWH in relational-specific terms (Lk 2:25-28)—saw Jesus, he declared YHWH's fulfillment of the good news promising salvation for all peoples (2:29-32). Jesus embodied the encouragement (*paraklesis*) that Simeon was waiting for, yet Simeon didn't have any illusions about what was to unfold. Since seeing the glory of Jesus was not a virtual reality for Simeon, he understood the essential reality that the truth essential of Jesus the Christ (Messiah) would shake up the human context (including the religious status quo), and thus that Jesus would be the source for both joy among those redeemed and conflict among those exposed from inner out (2:34-35). In other words, Simeon fully understood (*syniemi*) already by the Spirit that this Messiah did not come to bring a virtual peace on the earth;

instead he brings the redemptive change (the old dying and the new rising) necessary for the essential reality of peace as wholeness in new relationship together (as in Lk 12:49-53; 19:41-42).

This whole reality of peace is the primacy of new relationship together in wholeness that the face of YHWH promised to "give [*siym*] you peace"—that is, the *siym* which means to "bring change and establish a new relationship together in wholeness [*shalôm*]"—in the whole of God's definitive blessing for God's family (Num 6:24-26). The whole of Jesus' glory (being, nature and presence) embodies this peace only for the relational-specific purpose of this primacy of relationship together in wholeness, which is necessary to constitute God's family (or kingdom) in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole face of God (as in Jn 17:21-23). On this relationship-specific basis, Jesus embodied the face of YHWH and pursued the religious status quo: "How often have I desired to gather your children…and you were not willing! …You will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is the *Word* who comes in the name of YHWH'" (Lk 13:34-35).

Here Jesus clearly reveals his identity with the name of YHWH, whereby his substantive relational action embodied the face of nothing less than the whole of God. The Word of YHWH unfolds, therefore, not only in function from the First Testament but now also revealed integrally in ontology, so that God's whole ontology and function are distinguished. God is not evolving into wholeness, as process theology claims, but the whole of God's ontology and function is vulnerably disclosed in this relational-specific process. On the basis of whole relational terms, then, the whole gospel unfolded to illuminate "the glory of God *embodied* in the face of Jesus Christ," as Paul later made definitive for the church's theology and practice (2 Cor 4:4,6).

The conclusions by Simeon and Paul illuminating who, what and how God is went beyond prevailing theological thought and ideas, primarily because their epistemic field and hermeneutic lens were not limited or predisposed (biased) due to their relational involvement with the Spirit in the theological task (as Paul made clear, 1 Cor 2:9-16). The relational context and process unfolding here increasingly distinguishes the whole of God as the triune God and then as the Trinity. There is no shortcut to the essential truth of the Trinity to compose the essential reality of trinitarian theology and practice, unless of course we would settle for a virtual reality of thought and ideas. That means our Christology must be complete with God's strategic, tactical and functional shifts.

The good news of the vulnerable presence of the very heart of God's qualitative being and of God's integral relational nature—composing the integral glory of God—unfolds embodied on this improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path. Each relational-specific step embodying this trajectory and path is essential for trinitarian theology and practice, without which there is no essential reality of the truth essential to the embodied whole of God—and thus without the relational-specific outcome of the whole face of God in Face-to-face relationship together in wholeness as God's irreducible and nonnegotiable family.

God's Strategic Shift

For our theological task to be of significance, at the very least it must account for God's vulnerable presence, and then progress to embrace the essential truth of God's relational involvement. Moses' experience of YHWH's direct involvement with him in

Face-to-face relationship was a precursor to the strategic shift of the gospel. The pivotal point in God's improbable theological trajectory was the strategic shift of God's thematic relational action when the Word embodied God's intrusive relational path. It is distinguished as intrusive because up to then in the human context the heart of God's presence dwelled primarily in the temple (1 Kg 9:3). When Jesus vulnerably disclosed the intimate presence of God to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:6-26), this pivotal theological engagement emerged in relational language to illuminate the theological task for her. How can we say she was involved in the theological task? In reality, when anyone (even children) seeks to sort out their beliefs, gain their meaning or put them into practice, they are engaged in the theological task. She demonstrated this involvement (4:12, 19-20,25); and she also challenged others in their theological task (4:28-30, 39-42).

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

The relational significance of God's strategic shift is magnified in this highly improbable interaction. For a Jewish rabbi to engage a Samaritan woman one-on-one in public required an act of *redemptive reconciliation*—that is, to be freed from constraints of the *old* (and what defined them), and thus opened to vulnerably engage each other in the relationship of the *new*. Jesus tore down the constraint of "double jeopardy" (double discrimination based here on ethnicity and gender, resulting in her apparent social ostracism) for her and gave her direct access to a highly improbable, though ultimately unique, opportunity: unrestricted connection and intimate relationship with the whole of God.

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

In relational language, Jesus vulnerably engaged her to reveal that the *old* (prevailing religious tradition and way to see things) was going to be changed (Jn 4:21-22), and that the *new* "is now here" (4:23-24). The strategic shift in the holy and transcendent God's presence was embodied vulnerably with her in a highly improbable encounter—improbable both in God's action and in human thinking. As Jesus disclosed the qualitative and relational significance of his whole person (the Word of YHWH) in

his pivotal "I am" relational message to her (v.26), the whole of God's ontology and function became vulnerably accessible for ongoing involvement in direct relationship Face to face. The same relational dynamic was also extended improbably to Paul on the Damascus road, which raised similar issues for Paul in his religious tradition, as for the woman in hers, but with further implications and consequences. This shift to the new relational context and process, however, necessitated (and still necessitates today) terms significant for compatibility in order to distinguish relationship together from prevailing human terms, self-definition and determination. In the strategic shift of the gospel, there is no relational progression with the whole-ly accessible God without these ongoing relational terms: "in spirit and truth" (4:23-24).

This part of their interaction can easily become virtual and thus lack significance for theology and practice. It is vital, then, to comprehend that Jesus' disclosure of "God is spirit" (v.24) cannot be distinguished in referential language. Philosophical theology could be satisfied with rendering the transcendent "God is spirit" to the self-existing spirit distinct from all his creatures, who alone has life within himself and is the life-giver. Yet, this referential explanation would neither be significant for this woman's theological task nor be significant to God and for the whole of God vulnerably disclosed here. Throughout the incarnation Jesus' whole person vulnerably disclosed the transcendent "God is spirit", that is, the whole of God's glory, therefore who, what and how God is.

The Word embodied not only physical life in quantitative terms (*bios*) but also constituted the qualitative substance of life (*zoe*, "in him was life," Jn 1:14); and "the *Zoe*" distinguished the whole of God beyond physics and metaphysics to embody "the *relational* Way and the *essential* Truth…to the Father" (Jn 14:6). Jesus' self-disclosures ("I am" statements in relational language and terms) were jointly nothing less and no substitutes of God as well as only for relationship together, the whole of which then had theological significance to the woman and to God. If the incarnation embodied anything less or any substitute, it would not have theological significance. As Jesus embodied God's intrusive relational path (the Way) with his whole person (the *Zoe*), he directly opened access for her to the transcendent "God is spirit" (the Truth) in vulnerable relational terms, not in constraining referential terms.

The incarnation makes accessible the presence of the holy and transcendent God. The glory of God in Jesus' whole person makes evident the heart of God's being, the core of the whole of the triune God, functionally for relationship (cf. Jn 1:14). In the incarnation the righteous God embodies the righteousness of God, whole-ly with certainty. That is, the vulnerable presence of the very heart of God is the truth of who and what God is, and the functional significance of nothing less and no substitutes; and the intimate involvement of the very core of the whole of the triune God is the truth of how God is, and the relational significance of nothing less and no substitutes. The incarnation embodies this 'dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes'. Accordingly, the primary composition of this whole truth of who, what and how God is consists of essential relational truth, with its secondary composition as propositional truth. In conflict with the dynamic of referential language, the heart (core) and truth of God in Jesus are not revelations (*apokalypto*) of mere information in referential language but vulnerable self-disclosures (*phaneroo*) in relational language only for the intimate involvement necessary for relationship together to be whole. Therefore, "God is spirit" is disclosed by Jesus exclusively in relational language, the terms of which are unavoidably vulnerably present

and intimately involved. For her to be compatibly engaged in the theological task also required her vulnerable presence and intimate involvement for reciprocal relationship together. This was her experience in the theological task as she responded back to Jesus with the heart and truth (honesty, Jn 4:16-18) of her own person ("in spirit and truth"). Both as a woman and a Samaritan, she made her person vulnerable culturally, religiously and most important relationally. In contrast to her vulnerable engagement in the theological task, Jesus' disciples kept their hearts at a distance (4:27,31-33); and their lack of vulnerability in their theological task resulted in not whole-ly understanding Jesus (*syniemi*, Mk 6:49-52; 8:17-21), with the unavoidable relational consequence of not knowing Jesus in his relational terms (Jn 14:9). "In spirit and truth" are the persons who make compatible relational connection with the whole of God at the depth-level of God's heart; and theology's relational significance is contingent on having this congruence (4:23-24).

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

The heart (core) of the person is the "spirit" disclosed by Jesus, which is necessary and intrinsic to "God is spirit" in order to be involved with the Father (Jn 4:23-24). By vulnerably disclosing the heart of God's being, the core of the triune God, Jesus made evident the transcendent "God is spirit" as the present and involved "God is heart" (cf. Ps 33:11, *leb*, heart). This does not redefine the ontology of God but distinguishes the strategic shift of God's thematic relational action to disclose God's whole ontology. By embodying the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, Jesus is *the hermeneutical key* that opens this ontological door to the whole of God.

Yet, accessing the whole and transcendent God, the immanent and economic Trinity, may still appear virtual and remain elusive in the theological task, if we just focus on the content of Jesus' words and not pay close attention to the Subject of the Word (as the Father made imperative, Mt 17:5). When Jesus said "I who speak to you," the term for "speak" (*laleo*) is contrasted with a synonym term *lego* ("to say," discourse involving the intellectual part of the person). *Laleo* does not emphasize the content of the speech but rather focuses on the reality of communication taking place (as opposed to no communication, cf. Heb 1:1-2). This focus on the factual act of communication makes the function of relationship primary, which is neither to discount what Jesus said nor to disregard the terms ("in spirit and truth") disclosed as necessary. The significance of this is to account for and pay attention to the relational context and process, the nature of which are necessary for these terms. In other words, "I am he, the *God is spirit* who is speaking to you" was vulnerably disclosing both the relational context "out of" (*ek*) the

holy and transcendent God for direct access, and then the relational process "back to" the whole and uncommon God for intimate relationship together—the "out of-back to" relational dynamic constituting the whole of Jesus' person, who composes this relational connection.

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

This raises two important questions. What if Jesus' person were something less or some substitute of God, or what if the person Jesus presented in his life and practice were anything less or any substitute of his whole person, even as God? The former has been an ongoing theological issue, which Jesus' first century adversaries tried to establish about him. Any revisionism of Jesus makes discourse about an accessible God insignificant, if not irrelevant. The latter question is a functional issue that essentially has been ignored. Yet, its critical importance has theological implications about the reliability of our Christology, and more importantly creates a functional problem of integrity for the relational involvement of trust. How reliable is your knowledge of someone if the person presented to you is anything less or any substitute for the who, what and how of that person? Moreover, how can you trust someone in a relationship if you can't count on that person's involvement to be beyond anything less or any substitute for the whole person? This is not about having faith in someone without having a sound basis, such as fideism; nor is it about engaging in relationship together merely on the basis of quantitative information, such as prevails today in social media relations.

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

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

In the strategic shift of the gospel, throughout the incarnation the distinguished presence of Jesus' whole person vulnerably disclosed the transcendent "God is spirit" (as

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

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

The heart of the theological task involves nothing less than the reciprocal response to the heart of God vulnerably disclosed in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Compatibility and congruence in this reciprocal relational process is constituted first by God's heart and then by our heart in likeness. By the nature of 'heart' this always involves the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, which is ongoingly challenged, reduced and substituted for by the dynamic of referential language. Therefore, the heart of the theological task demands embodying nothing less and no substitutes for heart; and integral to the theological task is the presence and function of our heart, signifying the vulnerable involvement of our whole person from inner out. Jesus, together with the Spirit, leaped with joy when vulnerable persons engaged the theological task in contrast to the scholarly engagement of "the wise and learned," because only persons with open hearts receive the depth of God's revelations (Lk 10:21). This is the hermeneutical key to theological engagement—just as Jesus vulnerably embodied with the Spirit, from the Father—without which the theological task is unable to open the ontological door to the whole of God and the relational door to the theological significance of knowing and understanding God in whole relationship together.

Tepid results in the theological task, notably in the trinitarian theological task, signify a critical condition of the heart needing an urgent response. This composes Jesus' ongoing post-ascension response to our heart to open the barrier to reciprocal involvement in theological engagement (Rev 3:20). The theological significance of our conclusions will be crucial for the who, what and how of God composing our trinitarian theology and practice.

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

God's Tactical Shift

YHWH's function as father established the relational-specific context of family and the relational-specific process of family love, and these remain basic for composing the covenant relationship together of God's kingdom-family. Covenant relationship together as family can only be composed in this relational-specific context by this relational-specific process, which the whole of God newly distinguished further and deeper than previously disclosed. This relational-specific context and process are embodied whole-ly by the ontology and function of the Word in relational progression integral to both the ontology as well as function of the Father, which then starts distinguishing the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love.

The relational progression to the Father is critical to understand in the trinitarian theological task, because it reveals both YHWH's glory further than the prevailing perception as Sovereign, and YHWH's salvation deeper than the common notion of a kingdom. And by necessity, the relational progression is indispensable to redefine, if not deconstruct, the existing status quo in theology and practice—which is what Nicodemus experienced from Jesus (Jn 3:1-15). This relational-specific progression unfolds in the relational significance of the tactical and functional shifts of the whole of God's improbable presence and intrusive involvement. Moreover, what will unfold takes us further and deeper in the trinitarian theological task than social trinitarianism.

The major significance in Simeon's theological conclusion is connecting God's glory and salvation. While Simeon alluded to what would unfold, two important matters remain about this connection. The question is, what is this salvation that reveals the glory of God? The issue is, what is God's glory that reveals not just parts but the whole of who, what and how God is? Understanding this inseparable connection is indispensable for knowing the whole of God, for understanding the Trinity, and thereby for composing

trinitarian theology and practice (Jn 1:14; 17:1-5). Yet, antecedent to this understanding is being connected to God's relational-specific context and having the involvement necessary in God's relational-specific process in order to receive God's communicative relational action in self-disclosures to know the whole of God intimately in Face-to-face-to Face relationship together—which the early disciples lacked during Jesus' time on earth with them (Jn 14:9).

The good news unfolds when the whole ontology and function of the Word (not just as function) embodied YHWH's relational context of family and relational process of family love, which in the First Testament distinguishes YHWH's function as father. As the embodied Word's ontology and function are disclosed in the Second Testament, the essential reality of this relational context of family and relational process of family love unfolds with the whole Word—not fragmentary parts of the Word, for example, just his teachings—so that the truth essential of the Father's ontology as well as function are also disclosed (Jn 1:10-14,18). The integral flow of this relational dynamic both composes the continuity between the Testaments and increasingly distinguishes the whole of God who is involved in an improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path. Therefore, as the early disciples learned the hard way, to become a full Christian involves not just to ask God to forgive our sins; and to be a whole Christian involves not just to be saved from our sins. Both of these views may have implicit functional continuity with the OT, which creates subtle illusions of God's presence and virtual realities of God's involvement. Such continuity doesn't have the significance to be in full continuity with the whole and uncommon God's theological trajectory and relational path; thus these views make evident explicit discontinuity with God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement in new covenant relationship together in wholeness as God's family. The Word embodies the relational-specific context of family and relational-specific process of family love in whole relational terms, only for the relational purpose and outcome of this primacy as family together—the primacy as family together in the very likeness of God's whole ontology and function, as Jesus prayed to the Father (Jn 17:21-23).

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

Any news about Messiah would be good news since people needed salvation, especially for those who experience discrimination and dispossession. What people *needed*, however, was often not what people *wanted*; and the desire and pursuit of the latter continues even today to shape theology and practice. This was the human condition in Judaism that confronted Jesus to his face, and that the face of God embodied in Jesus also confronted in all our human condition. It is not clear whether the Samaritan woman, and those following her, believed in Jesus merely as the expected prophet, or also responded from their innermost to Jesus as the whole of God's very self-disclosure for

relationship together (Jn 4:19,28-29, 39-42, cf. Deut 18:15-19). While the former outcome for them was expected and probable, or at least hoped for, the latter would be an improbable expectation, a paradoxical wish at best. This suggests the difficulty not only of explaining the holy (uncommon) and transcendent God's presence and involvement but also understanding the significance of God's strategic relational shift—a difficulty compounded if approached from thinking in referential terms.

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

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

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

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 further engagement in the relational progression. With this shift, only the whole ontology and function of Jesus makes evident the gospel further in the improbable, not to mention the uncommon.

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

progression as well as the functional significance of the gospel as essential truth for our essential reality (not virtual).

Jesus emerged in the midst of a religious context pervasive with messianic and covenant expectations, with the surrounding context prevailing in cultural, economic and political stratification. He also encountered the interacting effects of these contextual pressures in his public ministry, yet these effects neither defined nor determined what emerges in the tactical shift of the gospel. The presence of these and other contextual influences, pressures and related problems, however, have importance in the life of Jesus, and accordingly for his followers, and are valuable in our understanding of the gospel, for the following purpose: (1) they help define the pervasive common function from which Jesus' function was distinguished; and (2) they help identify the prevailing common function from which persons needed to be redeemed. This purpose is realized with the tactical shift. The relational-specific process 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 get our first exposure to Jesus' tactical shift when he called Levi to be redefined, transformed and made whole (Mt 9:9-13). Reviewing Levi's story, it was nothing less than the embodying of the gospel—that is, the gospel that is contingent on no substitutes for a complete Christology and a full soteriology. In calling Levi, Jesus demonstrated the new perceptual-interpretive framework distinguished from what prevailed in common function; and this new framework further needs to be distinguished from what prevails today 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, 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[4]—that is, specifically in the primacy of whole relationship together in the relational progression to God's family. This relationship would transform Levi and make him whole, the reality of which Levi would experience even further in relational progression.

Intrusively as complex Subject and vulnerably as whole person, Jesus' tactical shift enacts the relational-specific process in this relational progression for persons like Levi to go from a disciple (and servant) of Jesus to his intimate friend (Jn 15:15), and then to be whole together as family (Jn 14:23; 17:21). Our theology and practice must by

[4] 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.

this nature account for this intimate relationship together; specifically, our ecclesiology must by this tactical shift account in our church practice for this new relationship together as family—not just friends but sisters and brothers in the primacy of God's family. Certainly, this is good news for what the human condition needs, yet its depth is threatening for those who don't want to be vulnerable, which then for them amounts to bad news. Anything less and any substitutes in our theology and practice as well as ecclesiology deny the relational outcome of the intrusive Subject's tactical shift and disconnect us from the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of God's strategic shift. Thus, the question of good news or bad news keeps emerging, which complex Subject Jesus holds us accountable to answer.

This new relationship and gathering were not only improbable to observing Pharisees but unacceptable because such practice didn't conform to their purity code for being holy (Mt 9:11). Yet the holy Jesus in vulnerable presence and intimate involvement was not making evident a relational separation from the common's context but the distinction of his relational work of grace from common function, even in religious practice. The most probable candidates to follow Jesus would be those with messianic expectations; others likely would be the economically poor. As a low-level tax collector Levi wouldn't assume to be aligned to the former category, and he didn't appear to be economically poor, though certainly not rich. These candidates represent, however, what is only the expected from common function—those who warrant a response, for example, as commonly proposed in social trinitarianism. Levi represents the qualitative distinction of Jesus' relational work of grace from the common function of those who don't warrant a response. This reflected the perception from a different lens of this new perceptual-interpretive framework, which includes the theological anthropology of the whole person.

While celebrating Levi's commencement in the relational progression, Jesus disputed these religious reductionists by clarifying his vulnerable presence, purpose and function (9:12-13). In the strategic shift of God's thematic relational action, the incarnation was enacted only for direct relationship together as the whole of God's family. As God's ultimate response to the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole, Jesus vulnerably functioned to call such persons to be made whole in the likeness of the triune God improbably unfolding as the Trinity. He made this evident by definitively declaring that these persons are qualitatively distinct (but not intrinsically distinguished) from the "the healthy" (*ischyo*, to be whole) and from "the righteous" (*dikaios*, congruence in actions to one's constitutionally just, right character, which implies wholeness instead of disparity, vv.12-13). In other words, those who were not whole and who remained apart from the whole were the persons Jesus came to be vulnerably involved with in his relational work of grace in order to reconcile them back to the wholeness of God essential for all life.

"The sick"-"sinners," whom Jesus called, were not those perceived by common function—that is, those commonly perceived by a surrounding context—as sick or sinners. While Jesus certainly never ignored those defined as sick and sinners, he was involved further and deeper than merely with physical disease and moral/ethical failure. Levi was not suffering physical disease, though he likely was perceived as a sinner of moral/ethical failure, assuming the stereotype for tax collectors applied to him. Yet Jesus notably pursued Levi also for the "social illness" (distinguished from physical disease) he

was suffering that made him part of "the sick" (*kakos*, v.12).[5] The term *kakos* not only denotes to be physically ill but also to be lacking in value. This suggests social interpretation (not medical) based on a comparative process that labeled persons to be lacking in value. The consequence of having this label was exclusion from participating in valued relationships of the "whole" (as in community), thus suffering the social illness of not belonging. This expands our understanding of Levi's condition as a tax collector, which was *kakos* (to be lacking in value), not *ischyo* (to be whole) and *dikaios* (to function in wholeness). Though Levi didn't belong to the prevailing "whole" of the common context, Jesus changed Levi's condition to belong (as a function of relationship, not merely membership) in God's whole—the redemptive change constituted just by the old dying and the new rising.

This also deepens and broadens our understanding of sinners and the function of sin. In the trinitarian relational context and process vulnerably engaged by Jesus, sin is the functional opposite of being whole and sinners are in the ontological-relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole. When sin is understood beyond just moral and ethical failure displeasing to God, *sin becomes the functional reduction of the whole of God*, thus in conflict with God as well as with that which is and those who are whole. Sin as reductionism is pervasive; and such sinners, intentionally or unintentionally, reflect, promote or reinforce this counter-relational work, even in the practice of and service to church. 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 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 Mt 20:28 common in Christian practice today). Only Matthew's Gospel has Jesus quoting "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (9:13), which would not be unfamiliar to Jewish listeners and readers (quoted from Hos 6:6). The fact that Matthew has Jesus repeating this later, when his disciples were accused of unlawful practice on the Sabbath (Mt 12:7), is significant. The code of practice for Judaism was redefined by reductionism, thus these Pharisees did not understand the meaning of the quotation from Hosea. Jesus made it imperative to "Go and learn what this means."

Sacrifice (and related practice) was a defining term for Jews, and also has been defining for many Christians (e.g., by misunderstanding Lk 14:33, Mk 10:21). Yet God's strategic shift to the incarnation was not about Jesus becoming a mere sacrifice on the cross. Moreover, Jesus' tactical shift within the incarnation was not about a change from Messiah to servant. By referring back to Hosea, Jesus made two issues clear about the practice of sacrifice, not only for Jews but for all his followers: (1) sacrifice does not define the whole person, only a part of what a person may do, thus should never be used to define that person, just as what Jesus did on the cross should not define his whole person (or it becomes an incomplete Christology); and (2) the practice of sacrifice neither

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

has priority over the primacy of relationship nor has significance to God apart from relationship, thus its engagement must not reduce the priority and function of relational involvement—contrast the priorities of the disciples and Mary in their time with Jesus (Jn 12:1-8, par. Mk 14:3-9). What is disclosed about Jesus goes deeper than just his function and includes his ontology. Jesus' whole ontology and function must be paid close attention to in the theological task since it is irreplaceable for trinitarian theology and practice.

These two important issues apply equally to service, and the term sacrifice can be replaced by service in the above for the same application. This relational clarity and relational significance are crucial to understand for both of them—particularly for the gospel of Jesus the Christ and his followers' life and practice. Moreover, a reduction of this relational priority and function prevents us from composing a complete Christology, which embraces the whole ontology and function of the Subject Jesus. This whole Christology embraces the following: the whole of Jesus' person functioning in whole life and practice that is intrinsically distinguished qualitatively and relationally from common function (as prevails in culture), whereby the whole and uncommon Trinity is disclosed in essential truth for the essential reality of trinitarian theology and practice.

In his relational work of grace, Jesus made clearly evident the importance of Levi's whole person and his need to be reconciled to the primary relationships necessary to be whole, thereby functionally signifying his tactical shift for further engagement in the relational progression. For his followers to go beyond sacrifice and service "and learn [*manthano*, understand as a disciple] what this means [*eimi*, to be, used as a verb of existence, 'what this/he is']," they need to understand the heart of Jesus' person, not merely the meaning of these words in Hosea. That is, this is not the conventional process of learning as a common rabbinic student but the relational epistemic process characteristic of Jesus' disciples. This then must by nature be the understanding experienced directly in relationship with Jesus the Subject, aside from any other titles and distinctions ascribed to him, which therefore emerges only in the essential reality of the essential truth integrally embodying the whole and uncommon Trinity.

Such relational involvement is what the full quote from Hosea expands on: "I desire mercy [*hesed*, love], not sacrifice, and knowledge [*da'at*, understanding] of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hos 6:6). This is not about knowing information *about* God, which was why those Pharisees never understood the significance of Hosea's quote. God wants ("desire," *haphes*, denotes a strong positive attraction for) the relational-specific involvement of love in the intimate relationship together necessary to understand the whole of God in uncommon wholeness as the Trinity. In other words, this is God's deepest desire and priority over anything else done *for* God. Though sacrifice and service are important, they are secondary and must never supersede the primacy of 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 and uncommon Trinity, and therefore to be on a different relational path than Subject Jesus. Such reductionism needs to be redeemed for the relationship to progress—and so that the reality of trinitarian theology and practice will be essential and thus unfold in their essential truth.

The relational progression is further distinguished with Zacchaeus. What unfolds from Levi to Zacchaeus is certainly more improbable in contextual terms (Lk 19:1-10). The significance of this was the design of Jesus' tactical shift, which further illuminated his qualitative innermost relational function 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.[6] Chief tax collectors (Levi's boss) in particular became rich often by their greedy management of a system that depended on imposing unjust taxes and tolls for greater profit. Low-level tax collectors like Levi merely did their dirty work. As a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus not only bore this social stigma but clearly appeared to abuse his power to extort others by his own admission (19:8). He was a sinner in the eyes of all (not just the Pharisees, v.7), who apparently warranted no honor and respect despite his wealth—implied in not given front-row access to Jesus by the crowd, which he could have even paid for but had to climb a tree with dishonor instead (vv.3-4). The image of a short rich sinner in a tree and the Messiah coming together was a highly unlikely scenario.

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

Given Jesus' practice of observing purity as prescribed by the law, he was not ignoring covenant practice in this interaction. Yet he functioned in clear distinction from the prevailing function of covenant practices, which had become a reduction to a code of behavior for self-definition (individual and corporate) rather than the relational function necessary by the nature of the covenant with God. Prevailing function demonstrated that a system defining human ontology and identity based on what persons do inevitably engages a comparative process, which groups persons on a human totem pole or ladder of higher-better and lower-less. This explicit or implicit stratification reduces the importance of the whole person and fragments the primary relationships necessary to be whole. The consequence, even unintentional among God's people, is reinforcing the human condition "to be apart" from God's whole.

Though Zacchaeus certainly was not lacking economically, he lacked by any other measurement. Most importantly, he lacked the wholeness of belonging to the whole and uncommon Trinity. 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

[6] 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.

must (*dei*) intrusively pursue in their innermost by the nature of embodying the Trinity's relationship-specific response of grace; this is how Jesus also pursued the rich young ruler in his innermost, though 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-interpretive framework; and its absence is consequential for the trinitarian theological task.

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

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

Jesus' whole person was vulnerably present and intimately involved with Zacchaeus for the relationship necessary to be saved. Jesus didn't come merely to bring salvation into existence but to engage Zacchaeus for the distinctly specific relationship to be saved "to the degree that he is a son of Abraham." If this "degree" meant to the extent that Zacchaeus demonstrated adherence to the code of Judaism, then this was salvation coming into existence based on what Zacchaeus did in order to be identified with the lineage of Abraham. If "degree" involved the extent to which Zacchaeus engaged Jesus in the relational progression necessary to be saved, then this was salvation based on Jesus'

relational work of grace, not Zacchaeus' lineage with Abraham. Jesus needed by nature (*dei*) to dwell at Zacchaeus' house only for the latter degree.

What does it mean to be saved and what is this salvation that is not truncated? Limiting our discussion to the term "to save," *sozo* denotes to deliver, to make whole. In Jesus' relational work "to save," *sozo* includes both and thus necessarily involves a twofold process: first, to deliver from sin and its consequence of death, and secondly to make whole in the relationship necessary together with the whole and uncommon Trinity. Salvation (*soteria*) is a function of *sozo*. Soteriology is truncated when it is only a function of the process "to deliver"—that is, only what we are saved *from*. Sadly, this truncated understanding is our prevailing view of salvation, and this includes those overemphasizing ministries of deliverance. A full soteriology, however, necessarily is a function of *sozo*'s twofold process, which then must by its nature also involve "to make whole"—that is, including by necessity (without being optional) what we are saved *to*. This second function of the process is the significance of Jesus sharing directly with Zacchaeus "I must be [*dei*] relationally involved [*meno*]…" (v.5). This *dei* and *meno* "to make whole" constitutes the relational significance of the gospel of transformation to wholeness in likeness to, with and of the uncommon whole of the Trinity. This full soteriology signifies the glory of God, the whole of who, what and how the Trinity is that we are completely saved by and to in relationship together—all of which converge integrally in Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17).

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

The relational progression began with the call to "Follow me"—the call to be redefined, transformed and made whole. Relationship with Jesus as a disciple (*mathetes*) was a function of an adherent, the terms of which were determined only by Jesus.[7] This relationship went further than the common function of traditional rabbinic students as learners preparing for the role of teachers themselves eventually. Jesus' disciples served others (*diakoneo*) in various ways, yet with the integrating paradigm making relational involvement with him the primary priority, not the work of serving (Jn 12:26, cf. 21:15-22). Disciples functioned as servants, ministers, deacons (*diakonos*), which tended to be perceived as the role of servant. Disciples became servants (cf. Mt 20:26-28), though with no fixed distinction between these identities.

Servant (*diakonos* and the functional position of *doulos*, slave) did reflect movement in the relational progression, as Jesus implied (in Mt 20:26-27), but this does not define its relational completion. Unfortunately, our perceptions and practice of discipleship tend to be defined by a servant model, which may need redeeming (cf.

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

Martha's practice, Lk 10:38-42). Yet, Levi in particular did not give up his servant role to a chief tax collector merely for another form of servanthood transferred to Jesus. Table fellowship for Levi and Zacchaeus necessarily functioned to take disciples further and deeper in relationship together than as mere servants. Table fellowship demonstrated the relational progression to friendship, intimacy and belonging. Jesus clearly constituted this movement in the relational progression when he intimately communicated to his disciples: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (Jn 15:15, NIV). The relational progression to this deeper relationship should neither be confused nor conflated with common notions of relationships between friends, which are shaped by the constraints of the human relational condition. Moreover, the depth of this relationship unfolds directly from the integral relationship between the Father and Jesus, such that Jesus shares everything with his *uncommon* friends.

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.[8] 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, which simply evidenced their human relational condition needing to be transformed to wholeness in relationship together.

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

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

Yet, friends together is not what we are saved *to*. Though the function of friends is necessary in the relational progression, it is insufficient for the relationship necessary together to make us whole, that is, the relationship 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, the ideal of 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, Jesus alluded to both: what we are saved to, and thus the relationship necessary to be whole.

Their relationship together went further than the friendship of table fellowship, and their relational involvement went deeper into the relational progression. Though Zacchaeus' salvation was not "because" of ancestry with Abraham, there was essentially relational connection as "a son of Abraham," as Jesus declared (Lk 19:9)—pointing to vital connection with Abraham's wholeness in faith (as Paul's will later emerge). That is, "to the degree that" (*kathoti*) Zacchaeus' whole person from inner out—the shift Zacchaeus also made to be compatible with Jesus—was intimately involved with Jesus on the basis of the Trinity'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, this whole 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, as Jesus indicated after the resurrection (Jn 20:17, cf. Mt 12:50). This was what Zacchaeus was saved to, and this was the relationship necessary by nature to make him whole in the innermost together in God's uncommon whole—the relational progression to the uncommon wholeness of God, the Trinity irreducibly as family.

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

The trinitarian theological task is both challenged in its theology and accountable in its practice by the disclosure of who and what God is and how God unfolds in these strategic and tactical shifts. The whole of God is constituted in the life of the Trinity. Yet the wholeness of the Trinity's life is signified neither by the titles of the trinitarian persons nor by the roles they perform. While each trinitarian person has a unique function in the economy of the Trinity, that function neither defines their persons nor determines the basis for their relationship together—that is, how they relate to and are involved with each other. Their whole persons (not modes, nor tritheism) are neither ontologically apart from the others nor functionally independent, but always by the nature of God's whole

ontology and function are relationally involved in intimate relationship together as One (perhaps in perichoresis but more significant in relational synergy) by the relational-specific process of love, functional family love (Jn 10:38; 14:9-11,31; 15:26; 17:10-11, Mt 3:17; 17:5). This is the uncommon whole of God, the uncommon wholeness of the Trinity's life, that Jesus vulnerably shared for his followers to belong to and experience in likeness of the Trinity in order to be whole in ontology and function; and that he prayed as the central focus to form his family for the world to witness the essential reality (not virtual) of this essential truth (not propositional form) of the gospel (Jn 17:20-26).

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

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

God's Functional Shift

The strategic and tactical shifts illuminated the face of only Subject-God, clearly distinguished from an Object. These shifts make evident the ontology of the Subject—the whole of who, what and how God is—which is inseparable from the Subject's function. This disclosure has continuity with YHWH's functions in the First Testament, functions which were premature to distinguish the ontology of the functions as Father, Spirit and Word. As accessed in these shifts, the Subject's ontology and function are most notably distinguished in relationships, both within the whole of God and with others. The Trinity is not distinguished by each person's title or role, which would create distinctions causing stratification and relational distance between them (discussed further in later chapters). Rather the whole of God is always distinguished by the ontology and function of the trinitarian persons inseparably being relationally involved in intimate relationship together as One, the Trinity as family (Jn 10:30; 17:21-23). The truth and reality essential of their relational involvement, which Jesus embodied, has more significance defined by the integral nature of relational synergism than the concept of perichoresis traditionally used in trinitarian theology. Furthermore, 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. All of this points to the trinitarian essential for the whole of life, both God's and ours.

In God's strategic and tactical shifts, the whole and uncommon 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 as this process of family love, of which Zacchaeus and Levi were initial recipients. With the qualitative significance and relational function of family love, Jesus (only as Subject) embodied in whole the gospel's functional shift—the function necessary for the innermost involvement in the relational progression in order to bring it (and his followers) to relational consummation (not yet to full conclusion). What is this family love specific to the trinitarian relational process?

During their last table fellowship, Jesus intimately shared with his disciples-friends "I will not leave you orphaned" (Jn 14:18). While Jesus' physical presence was soon to conclude, his intimate relational involvement with them would continue—namely through his relational replacement, the Spirit (14:16-17). This ongoing intimate relational involvement is clearly the synergistic 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 relational synergism 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 YHWH made specific provisions for them in the OT (Dt 14:29, Isa 1:17,23, cf. Jas 1:27). This might suggest that Jesus was simply assuring his disciples that they would be taken care of. This would address the contextual-situational condition of orphans but not likely the most important and primary issue: their relational condition. It is critical to understand that Jesus' sole concern here is for the relational condition of all his followers, a concern that Jesus ongoingly pursued during the incarnation (e.g. Lk 10:41-42; Jn 14:9; 19:26-27), after the resurrection (e.g. Lk 24:25; Jn 21:15-22), and in post-ascension (e.g. Rev 2:4; 3:20). Moreover, to understand the qualitative and relational significance of the gospel is to have whole understanding of the gospel's relational dynamic unfolding the depth of 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. Even orphans absorbed into their extended kinship network were not assured of the relational function of belonging in its qualitative relational significance. The relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole and to not experience the relational function of belonging to the whole of God's family would be intrinsic to orphans. This relational condition, which is also innermost to the human condition, defines the relational significance of Jesus' concern for his disciples not to be *relational* orphans but to relationally belong. And the primary solution for what addresses an orphan's relational condition is the *process of adoption* essential for persons to be whole together. Without adoption, distinguished in the primacy of whole relationship

together as family, this relational condition remains unresolved. Therefore, Jesus' relational-specific work of grace by the trinitarian relational process of family love enacted the process of adoption, together with the Spirit, to consummate the Trinity'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 Trinity's relational process of family love and its relational outcome of adoption into the Trinity'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 essential, and that would depend on whether adoption is constituted by the essential 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 embodied 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 family relationship together. The qualitative relational outcome essential 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. Isa 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 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 and uncommon Trinity for the essential truth and reality of belonging in the primacy of whole relationship together as family—which the functional shift of his relational work of grace made permanent by adoption. This relational action established them conclusively in the relational progression to belong as family together, never to be "let go from the Trinity as orphans" (*aphiemi*, as Jesus said).

The essential reality of the Trinity's presence and involvement in relationship together as family has no significance if the truth essential of the Trinity cannot be distinguished in the relationship-specific process of adoption. The Trinity's family love only has meaning and purpose when the relational outcome is adoption. In its most innermost function, the trinitarian relational process of family love can be described as the following communicative and creative action by the whole and uncommon Trinity:

> The Father sent out his Son, followed by the Spirit (cf. Jn 1:14; Mk 1:10-12; Jn 17:4), to pursue those who suffered being apart from God's relational whole, reaching out to them with the relationship-specific involvement of distinguished love (cf. 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 (cf. 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, 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 (Jn 8:35; Rom 8:15-17, and 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 qualitative relational significance discloses the whole and uncommon Trinity, who penetrates with an intrusive relational path that we must account for in our theology and be accountable to in our practice. In the theological task, the truth and reality of the Trinity are distinguished only in these relational-specific terms. Therefore, they must be experienced to clearly distinguish the Trinity in our theology and practice—the relationship-specific outcome from the essential truth and reality of the Trinity's uncommon vulnerable presence and whole intimate involvement.

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

Adoption, therefore, in the trinitarian task is indispensable for making accessible the Trinity and for helping to distinguish the ontology and function of the Trinity. Moreover, adoption is irreplaceable in our theology and practice to be compatible in 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 religious status quo prevailing in our contexts. The experiential truth and reality of adoption cannot justify anything less and any substitutes in trinitarian theology and practice.

By the relational nature of the Trinity, the trinitarian relational process of family love is a function always for relationship, the relationship of God's family. These are the relationships functionally necessary to be whole in the innermost that constitutes God's family. That is, distinguished family love is always constituting and maturing God's family; therefore, family love always pursues the whole person, acts to redeem persons from their outer-in condition and to transform them from inner out, and addresses the involvement necessary in the primacy of relationships to be whole as family together in likeness of the Trinity. In only relational terms, family love functionally acts on and with the importance of the whole person to be vulnerably involved in the primacy of intimate relationships together of those belonging in the Trinity'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 the Trinity's uncommon family together. Then its members will not only occupy a position within the Trinity's family but also engage from inner out and experience the relational function necessarily involved in belonging in the innermost of the Trinity'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 uncommon whole of the Trinity's family. This integrally, as well as intrusively, involved the following relational dynamic: being redefined (and redeemed) from outer in to inner out and being transformed (and reconciled) from reductionism and its counter-relational work, in order to be made whole together in the innermost as family in likeness of the Trinity (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 essential relational outcome of being saved to the uncommon wholeness of the 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 the essential truth having qualitative-relational significance for this wholeness to be the essential reality of consummated belonging to the Trinity's family. Family love also then necessarily involves clarifying what is not a function of the Trinity's uncommon family, and correcting misguided ecclesiology and church practices, and even contending with what misrepresents the Trinity's family, which includes confronting virtual realities of the church. The integrity of God's whole is an ongoing concern of family love. This was further illuminated by Jesus when his family love exposed the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of family, along with its counter-relational work—exposed by his relational action centered on a familiar theme composed with relational words in relational language, not referential: "you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:31-47).

Jesus made unmistakable that the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole is pandemic (and enslaves us all to sin as reductionism, 8:34), thus critically endemic to those who labor in ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of God's family (8:35,39,42). What Jesus distinguished with his relational words in relational language was both in contrast to and conflict with what prevailed in human

contexts (8:43)—the influence of which permeates even gatherings of God's people. To be distinguished necessitates meeting the contingencies of Jesus' familiar words above. His familiar words are an integral relational message first contingent on his inseparable relational words connected to them: "If you continue in my *relational* word, you are truly my disciples." In spite of this context, these familiar words are usually separated from their contingency on this integral structure of Jesus' relational message. The relationship-specific contingency of discipleship, however, is not met by merely following his disembodied words or teachings, which also are de-relationalized. It can only be fulfilled by following Jesus' whole person, which Jesus made paradigmatic for discipleship (Jn 12:26) and the Father made relationally imperative (Mt 17:5). To "know the truth" is not a referential fragmentary truth (likely in propositional form) but the whole of the embodied Truth as Subject in the primacy of relationship. Therefore, "make you free" further involves a contextual contingency communicated in Jesus' complete relational message. In other words, there is no relational progression to belong in the Trinity's family without redemption, and there is no redemption to be reconciled together as family without receiving and relationally responding to Jesus' family love in his functional shift (Jn 8:35-36). To be relationally involved with the whole Word and to relationally know the embodied Truth are indispensable for the complete Christology necessary that constitutes the full soteriology of what we are saved to.

The relational progression does not and cannot stop at just being a disciple, or end with liberation as it did for many in Israel. The prevailing influences from the surrounding contexts—most notably present in the human relational condition shaping relationships together, yet existing even in gatherings of God's people—either prevent further movement in the relational progression or diminish deeper involvement in its primacy of relationship. God's salvific act of liberation is never an end in itself but an integral part of God's creative action for new relationship together in wholeness—the distinguished Face's relational work of *siym* and *shalom*. This is where church practice overemphasizing deliverance and other liberation theologies are often lacking, and thus promote, reinforce or sustain a truncated soteriology. When the people of Israel frequently sought deliverance, they usually neither pursued it nor pursued YHWH for the purpose of deeper involvement in the primacy of relationship together in wholeness. The embodied Truth in the trinitarian relational process of family love is the fulfillment of the whole of God's thematic relational response, nothing less than the strategic shift of God's relational work of grace. And the face of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement distinguished within the Truth as Subject are solely for the primacy of this essential relational outcome. 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 but freed to be involved in the relational progression together.

Moreover, redemption is conclusively relationship-specific to the uncommon whole of the Trinity's family together on just the Trinity's relational terms, which are the relational context and process the Truth embodied. Jesus' relational words must be understood in the whole context of God's thematic relational action as well as in their immediate context. By the strategic, tactical and functional shifts of God's relational work of grace, Jesus the Subject fulfilled God's relational response to the human

condition, thereby also defining the contextual contingency of the familiar words of his relational message. Jesus' relational language is unequivocal: the embodied Truth is the only relational means available for his followers to be liberated from their enslavements to reductionism (or freed from a counter-relational condition, Jn 8:33-34), for the innermost 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, 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 to disclose this likeness for family together (Jn 14:6; 17:26).

Additionally in contrast, the immediate context of Jesus' relational words further defines a reduced servant (*doulos*) as one who is not free to experience God as Father and participate (*meno*, dwell) in his family as his own child (as Paul clarified theologically and functionally, Rom 8:15-16; Gal 4:6-7). Any mere servant, or mere disciple stalled in the relational progression, are relational orphans and thus must be redeemed first, then must be adopted to belong in its innermost relational significance. This integrated context makes clear the contextual contingency in Jesus' relational message declaring adoption as irreplaceable. Anything less and any substitutes for God's people are reduced in function to ontological simulations and epistemological illusions. Whatever forms these simulations and illusions from reductionism may have in church practice today (including as an orphanage), these persons have no position of significance nor belong in the innermost with relational function in the Trinity's family as long as the adoption process is not complete. Without the relational reality of adoption, a church functions in a reductionist substitute, at most, and engages in counter-relational work, at least (the implications of Jn 8:43-44 among God's people). And without experiencing redemptive reconciliation in the primacy of intimate relationship with the embodied Truth who "will make you free" (8:32) with the relational work of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17-18), there is no other relational means for the outcome of adoption. If we find ourselves (as person and church) in this critical condition, then what relational position does this put us in with the whole and uncommon Trinity (and the trinitarian persons), and what is the extent of the good news that we assume to claim?

The Challenge of Subject Face

The face of God in its deepest profile disclosed in the human context is the central concern for our trinitarian theological task. The deepest profile of any face must be composed by the *subject* of that face; an *object* is insufficient to provide a profile of depth. The nature of being a subject is to be who, what and how that person is. To be a whole subject is to be the whole of who, what and how the person is both from inner out and in relationships with others. The challenge to the trinitarian task is to distinguish this Subject who illuminates the whole face of God. If we don't meet this challenge, we will rely on what amounts to stereotypes—the prominent notions such as when Jesus inquired "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Mt 16:13-14).

The challenge of God's face being present and involved has been fulfilled by the unmistakable face of Jesus in his deepest profile of whole ontology and function—the

irreducible Subject of the Word now more distinguished than YHWH's function as Word. In the functional shift of Subject Jesus' relational work of grace initiated by the Father and completed with the Spirit, his trinitarian family love whole-ly constitutes his followers in their innermost—by the relational progression to the whole and uncommon God—in the relationships necessary to be whole together as the triune God's very own family. This is the only relational outcome jointly that is congruent with God's thematic relational response to the human relational condition, and that Jesus' whole person vulnerably fulfilled with his strategic, tactical and functional shifts in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love.

God's whole face was embodied and thereby disclosed in these strategic, tactical and functional shifts to distinguish the Trinity's ontology and function:

1. The strategic shift distinguishes the heart of who and what God is—the ontology of trinitarian persons.
2. The tactical shift distinguishes the depth of how God is—the function of the Trinity—inseparable from the heart of who and what God is—the Trinity's ontology and function.
3. The functional shift distinguishes the whole of who, what and how God is for the relational outcome that composes the integral understanding (*syniemi*, Mk 8:17, *synesis*, Col 2:2) of the Trinity's whole ontology and function.

The face of Jesus' whole person is the epistemological, hermeneutical, relational and ontological keys to the whole of God in uncommon wholeness, the whole and uncommon (whole-ly) Trinity. In continuity with the First Testament, the functions of YHWH as Father, Spirit and Word further unfold in the embodied Word to disclose in substantive relational terms the whole ontology of YHWH as Father, Son and Spirit. The qualitative relational significance of God's self-disclosure distinguishes the face of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement, without which God's whole face is distorted, obscured or simply lost in the surrounding human context. Therefore, anything less and any substitutes for Jesus' whole ontology and function as Subject render him in an incomplete Christology, no longer distinguishing the whole of who, what and how Jesus is from inner out and in relationships with other persons (both trinitarian and human). This is the only qualitative and relational significance that the whole gospel of Jesus the Subject composes—nothing less and no substitutes. Accordingly, without this qualitative relational significance, the gospel is reduced to a truncated soteriology about only what we are saved *from* and to a fragmented soteriology without the whole (God's relational whole) that holds us together in our innermost both as the person in God's qualitative image and as persons together in the Trinity's relational likeness.

As the Subject of the Word unfolds irreducibly, the whole Subject of the Trinity intrudes in our lives, persons and relationships to compose the heart of our theology and practice. That is, assuming that we fulfill the challenge for our face ("in spirit and truth"), the intimate challenge which can only be disclosed by the unmistakable Face fulfilling the challenge of God's whole face. Without the Subject whole-ly establishing the essential truth of the Trinity's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement, there is no relational connection, no ongoing relationship and no reciprocal involvement in essential reality together. Therefore, this whole gospel and its whole outcome are contingent on the

irreducible Subject's complete Christology, for which we must give account in our theology and be accountable in our practice—that is, for us (both as person and church) to be transformed in his relational progression to wholeness, in the likeness of nothing less than the Trinity. For the gospel we claim and proclaim to be of substantive relational significance, it must be the irreducible essential truth of the Trinity's relational-specific context and process of transformation to new relationship together in wholeness. And just the whole Subject of God's face constitutes the irreplaceable essential reality of this nonnegotiable relational outcome.

The full relationship-specific significance of the incarnation and the whole relationship-specific outcome of the gospel shake up the status quo in all theology and practice—as Nicodemus experienced with the embodied Word. The name of YHWH as the *substantive relational* verb has unfolded beyond the probability of human terms and prevailing religious expectations to reveal the uncommon truth and reality of the substantive relational ontology of the triune God's face. Inescapably then, the whole ontology and function of the Father, Son and Spirit together—not merely in the unity of God but integrally as the whole of God—is vulnerably present and intimately involved ongoingly to distinguish the improbable and unexpected Trinity for our essential truth and reality in the theological task. Nothing less and no substitutes can define and determine the deepest profile of the whole and uncommon God's face, and therefore our theology and practice must by its substantive relational nature reflect the Face and illuminate its whole Subject.

Chapter 4 What the Substantive Face of God Distinguishes

But who do you say that I am?

Matthew 16:15

And you still do not know me?

John 14:9

As long as there is continuity with the God of Israel, anonymity of the Christian God is certainly not an issue. Yet, what distinguishes the full identity of God has commonly lacked to be whole-ly defined, leaving questions open that are integral for the theological task even for Christians. What God we are faced with in the Scriptures is the primary issue in the theological task, and how we define God's presence and determine God's involvement continue to be critical in the Second Testament. Are we talking about a monotheistic God, a triune God or the Trinity? Yes indeed, all of them, and yet what underlies the three is the irreducible whole of God, whose integrity has not been given primacy or paid attention to, or simply not understood. Nothing less, however, can distinguish (*pala*) God in the theological task and can compose trinitarian theology and practice—that is, distinguish beyond the common to disclose the whole and uncommon God.

On the one hand, this identity deficiency should be surprising given the incarnation. On the other hand, it should not surprise us but likely be expected, on the other hand, when we consider what has happened to the significance of the incarnation and has become its prevailing notion. In common thinking the incarnation was quantified in history as the event that brought God to the earth. In quantified terms the embodiment of God signifying the incarnation has become limited to *bios* and referentialized to the quantitative biography informing us of God's presence in the world. In other words, embodiment is a quantified descriptive profile of God that lacks the qualitative relational significance of God the Subject. Thus, the lens of embodiment in the theological task is insufficient to distinguish the *Zoe* (as in Jn 14:6) embodying the heart of God's whole presence and relational involvement. The full identity and whole profile of God's face will continue to lack definition until the qualitative relational significance of *Zoe* and Truth integrally embodying the Way to the Father are known and understood in their substantive relational terms.

As we pursue the Subject's deepest profile of God's presence and involvement, this is a good time to review the issues discussed in chapter one in order not to implement them in this trinitarian theological task. One further matter should also be clear in our listening to the Word. Daniel Hardy points also to the primacy of the Scripture for a 'density of meaning' in which the texts open a new depth of meaning beyond other focuses in biblical interpretation. This density of meaning for Hardy conveys more than simply a quantitative 'extensity of meanings' found in the Scripture but suggests a qualitative 'intensity of meaning' in which

> "both God and humanity are joined, both heaven and history, not simply by way of assertions about them, but as dynamically interwoven and mutually operative….

> [The Scriptures] are not simply a tissue of assertions about God and humanity, respectively, like a textbook recital of facts; they are more like accumulated expressions of passions. Why? In them, God, God's purposes and all the forces of life in the world *actually appear together as associated: the inner movement of God is intrinsic to the dynamics of human life*."[1]

For the intensity of meaning, Hardy recognizes the need for the academy to be freed from the constraints of a merely quantitative interpretive framework, as well as from the reductionism of both the text and in practices/projects which distract from the text. Yet, at the same time, Hardy must also recognize that for the intensity of meaning to have substantive significance, it must be composed integrally by relational terms along with those qualitative terms. Only the integrated relational qualitative significance of the whole Word constitutes the substantive meaning necessary to distinguish YHWH's presence and involvement further than the First Testament, and therefore more deeply disclosed than previously. Distinguishing the intensity of meaning disclosed by the Word from just the extensity of meanings rendered by the density of narrative information describing the incarnation, this will be vital for knowing and understanding the whole-ly defined identity of God distinguished by the substantive Face above the words of human thought and beyond the scope of human ideas.

The Pseudonimity of God

It is the wholeness of YHWH that distinguishes the God of Israel beyond comparison to all other gods. Anything less than the whole of God becomes essentially an idol, which serves as a pseudonym shaping God in human terms. Israel's history evidences the shaping of God in human terms to compose a pseudonymous God, even though the anonymity of God was no longer an issue for them since YHWH's name was disclosed. This same process of shaping God's identity extended into NT times and the church that emerged (e.g. 1 Cor 1:12-13; Rev 2:4; 3:2), and has evolved even to modern times. Historically, trinitarian theology and practice is an example of the human shaping of God that has been incomplete of the whole of God, while it has sought to resolve monotheism as a triune God without a whole-ly defined identity.

As discussed previously, the key functions of YHWH as Father, Spirit and Word further unfolded to embody the whole of God's glory in the integral ontology and function of the Father, Spirit and Word. The whole of who (being), what (nature) and how (presence) God is, therefore, cannot be reduced to modalism to preserve monotheism, nor fragmented to signify tritheism. This is when the intensity of meaning for the embodied Truth constitutes the whole *Zoe* of God in the qualitative relational significance of the Way, which integrally discloses the Trinity's presence and involvement. The embodied Word as Subject person was revealed beyond referential information to compose the essential truth of God's integral ontology and function in the depth of whole relational terms; the whole Word thereby disclosed each trinitarian person distinctly yet inseparably from each other to distinguish the whole and triune God. The

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

distinction of Subject persons unfolds in the irreducible reality essential of God's presence and involvement, which is necessary and irreplaceable to compose the essential truth of the Trinity in trinitarian theology and practice—in contrast to a virtual reality of trinitarian persons composing a propositional-doctrinal truth.

The perception of God's whole glory embodied by the Word can become ambiguous or misleading and thus obscure the substantive Face distinguishing the Trinity in the theological task. This was the apparent theological task that the first disciples engaged. After being exposed to the Word's glory revealed to them in Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana, "his disciples believed in him" (Jn 2:11). Their response to his glory and not merely to his miraculous act was justified, since miracles (*semeion*) are signs that signify some important aspect of the person performing the miracle (cf. Mt 12:38-40). Yet, later when the disciples encountered a furious storm crossing a lake, their belief in Jesus was challenged such that Jesus responded "you of little faith." After Jesus completely calmed the storm, "they were amazed, saying, 'What sort of man is this?'" (Mt 8:25-27). Sometime later, at a key point Jesus asked them "who do you say that I am?"—an issue that wasn't well defined in their theological task. As the glory of God appeared to be fading in their perception, Peter responded to Jesus' inquiry: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God," which Jesus clarified as a theological conclusion not by human shaping and terms from human thought and ideas, but revealed to Peter only by "my Father in heaven" (Mt 16:15-17). In spite of this relational process of disclosure in relational terms, the substantive Face distinguishing the Son and the Father is easily obscured when the Word of God is referentialized as information in the theological task, and thereby susceptible to pseudonimity. Just moments later, as Jesus vulnerably disclosed what was to happen to the Messiah and Son of God, Peter confronted Jesus "and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you'" (16:21-22). Regardless of the Father's revelation to Peter, he used a fictitious-false name (i.e. a stereotype) for his Messiah in the theological task that wasn't compatible with the Messiah disclosed by the Son of God—so to Peter Jesus obviously was wrong and had to be corrected by Peter. It wasn't surprising then that the idolization of Peter's pseudonymous Lord and Teacher would "never wash my feet (Jn 13:8). Accordingly, and most important in the theological task, the disciples lacked face-to-Face relational connection in their theological task, so that they "still do not know me" and were unable to perceive the glory of the Father whole-ly distinguished in the Son (Jn 14:9). Certainly then, this has direct consequence for the trinitarian theological task and on the significance of the who and what composing trinitarian theology and practice.

What the disciples demonstrated in their theological task unfortunately is neither uncommon nor a past condition, given the advanced (if not enhanced) knowledge of the Scriptures available today. From the beginning of theological engagement, the long-existing reality has been evident as follows: If the theological task does not account for the essential truth of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement, then it has to both compose this truth in different terms and thereby shape God according to terms different than God's self-revelation. The referentialization of the Word is the prevailing alternative in the theological task that transposes God's whole relational terms to fragmentary referential terms; this epistemological and hermeneutic dynamic inverts the communication process of 'God speaking *to* us' to 'we speak *for* God', resulting in the pseudonimity of God.

For example, if the Bible is read through someone's idea of what the perfect being outside the universe *must* be like, as in classical theism, whose words become primary for theology, ours or God's? The philosophical influence on theology, which still exists today, has shaped or constructed a different picture of God than the God of thematic relational action and response in Scripture, definitively embodied by the Word in substantive relational terms. The classic doctrine of God, existing in systematic and biblical theologies, does not fit the image of God embodied by the face of Christ, as the monotheist Paul "discovered" and understood the whole profile of his God's face (2 Cor 4:4-6). This reshaping emerged when concepts from Greek philosophy were used as the framework, which was later refined by the epistemological program of foundationalism to establish a basis for certainty. The quest for certainty emerges again with the consequence of narrowing the words of Scripture. Most importantly, the reshaping of God forms and develops when interpreters of Scripture end up listening to themselves talk about God rather than listening to God speak for himself. Nicholas Wolterstorff defines this as 'dogmatic' interpretation: dogma governs our interpretation of Scripture for our divine discourse, not God's communication of God. Interpreting Scripture in light of itself involves the reciprocating hermeneutic process: interpreting the parts/words in the light of the whole and the whole in the light of the parts/words.[2] This communication process was illuminated by the ancient poet: "The unfolding of your words gives light" and understanding of the whole (Ps 119:130)—that is, to those who listen carefully and do not speak prematurely "of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know," just as Job learned (Job 42:3).

It is important for our theological task to understand the workings of referentialization, so that we don't compose a pseudonymous God in our theology and practice. The subtle workings of reductionism underlies all that unfolds here, thus we should not be quick to assume that it doesn't apply to our engagement in the theological task.

The pursuit of theological significance has defined theological engagement since back in the primordial garden (Gen 3:1-6). We need to understand what unfolded there in its larger context. Since the lens of those persons "saw" that some parts of the surrounding context were a "good" means for this pursuit "to make one wise," they incorporated it into their theological task. Basic to what emerged from this beginning to shape theological engagement was their lens: the interpretive lens refocused from the inner out to the outer in by a quantitative interpretive framework that reduces the epistemic field from God's whole relational terms to fragmentary referential terms. This shift focuses on an extensity of meanings instead of the intensity of meaning in God's Word. Even if God did really say 'that' (to not eat from the tree), 'what did God really mean by that' became the issue. The shift to the latter refocused the theological task to pursue theological significance with a reduced lens. This lens from this quantitative interpretive framework emerged along with the construction of a new language in fragmentary referential terms (i.e. referential language), which substitutes for God's relational language communicated only in whole relational terms. This replacement language—signified by "you will not die for God knows that when you…" (Gen 3:5-6)—

[2] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Promise of Speech-act Theory for Biblical Interpretation" in Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, Karl Moller, eds., *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 73-90.

(re)defines 'what God really means by that' and thereby determines what God says. In other words, referential language speaks for God, subtly replacing God speaking for God. How does this dynamic from referential language work?

It has become increasingly apparent to modern scientific research that the language we speak shapes the way we see the world and even the way we think (not necessarily producing thought).[3] This points to the function of language as not merely a means of expression but also as a template imposing a constraint limiting what we see and the way we think. In his study of neuroscience, Iain McGilchrist states about language:

> It does not itself bring the landscape of the world in which we live into being. What it does, rather, is shape that landscape by fixing the 'counties' into which we divide it, defining *which* categories or types of entities we see there—how we carve it up.
>
> In the process, language helps some things stand forward but by the same token makes others recede…. What language contributes is to firm up certain particular ways of seeing the world and give fixity to them. This has its good side, and its bad. It aids consistency of reference over time and space. But it can also exert a restrictive force on what and how we think. It represents a more *fixed version* of the world: it shapes, rather than grounds, our thinking.[4]

This modern awareness provides us with some understanding of the dynamic of referential language—how it works and what effect it has—that was set in motion from the primordial garden. The origination of referential language unfolded as God's relational language was narrowed down and God's command (*sawah*, Gen 2:16) was redefined from communication in God's relational terms to the transmission of information in referential terms. Detaching the command from Subject-God (thereby *de*-relationalizing it) removed God's words from their primary purpose only for relationship together. The command was clearly God's communication for the wholeness of their relationship together, not the mere transmission of information (the purpose of referential language) for humans to know merely what to do (the focus of referential terms). This inaugural referentialization of God's words (command) was extended later by the people of Israel whenever they transposed the commandments (the terms for covenant relationship) from God's relational language to referential language, and consequently shaped the covenant in narrow referential terms—essentially *de*-relationalizing the covenant from ongoing relationship with Subject-God.

The shift to referential language opened the door to shape, redefine or reconstruct the so-called information transmitted by God in order to narrow down the interpretation—notably what God really meant by not eating from the tree, as in "your eyes will be opened"—that is, to reduced referential terms that implies speaking for God on our own terms (signified in "to make one wise"). When referential language is the prevailing interpretive framework for our perceptual-interpretive lens, then this shapes the way we see God's revelation and the way we think about God's words—as modern science is rediscovering about language. Conjointly and inseparably, referential language also puts a constraint on our lens, thereby restricting what we see of God's revelation and

[3] Reported by Sharon Begley in "What's in a Word?" *Newsweek*, July 20, 2009, 31.
[4] Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary*, 110.

limiting how we think about God's words (signified in "you will not…"). This dynamic from referential language obviously redefines the subject matter in the theological task, and certainly continues to constrain its theological engagement. Any explanations and conclusions that emerge from the theological task in referential terms merely reflect the theological reflections of human thought and ideas composed by referential language. Any such theological statements have no theological significance; they only attempt to speak for God—most prominently with the illusion or simulations from reductionism ("you will be like God").

This pursuit of theological significance that was put into motion in the primordial garden needs to be accounted for. In referential language, theology's subject matter is narrowed down to terms that are disembodied and de-relationalized, thus fragmentary or elusive, without the necessary significance for distinguishing the whole Subject. This limitation or constraint is the designed purpose of referential language, and its use in the theological task has unavoidable consequences epistemologically, hermeneutically, ontologically and relationally.

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

1. A common assumption made in the theological task extends the sweeping assumption from the primordial garden of not being reduced in our function and thus in our engagement of the theological task; this implies having an existing understanding of sin in our theology that amounts to a weak view of sin, which limits and constrains, distorts and biases the theological task; this then requires the strength of view of sin necessary to address sin as reductionism and to account for any sin of reductionism—which must include addressing and accounting for reductionism's counter-relational workings—and, therefore, having a lens of sin irreducible to human contextualization and nonnegotiable to human terms.
2. Basic to the theological task is our theology. Ironically, as demonstrated in the primordial garden, the critical key to significance in the theological task, and to the nature of our theological engagement, is our theological anthropology defining the person from inner out (with the functional significance of the heart) based on *who* the person is in the qualitative image of God—that is, the God present and involved—and *what* persons are in the primacy of whole relationships together in the relational likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity; therefore, underlying our basic involvement in the theological task, and what we see of God and the way we think about God, is not reducing the person to outer in defined by what one does and has, and on that basis limiting engagement in relationships to secondary function, noticeably with relational distance in the epistemic process.

In the midst of what was put into motion in the primordial garden was God's voice in relational language pursuing those persons for the sake of theological significance: "Where are you?" (Gen 3:9) God's voice continues to resound today,

pursuing us for theological significance. Our response must not follow the relational distance found in the primordial garden, with its weak view of sin without reductionism and fragmented view of the person from outer in, all of which operated under the sweeping assumption that "you will not *be reduced*" (Gen 3:4). Those who do not vulnerably account for *where* we are in the theological task—*where* in relational terms, not the referential terms of what we do, our knowledge and methodology—will continue in the contrary flow set in motion from the primordial garden, on a different theological trajectory and relational path from the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole and uncommon God.

Given God's presence and involvement, in addition to the question of 'Where are you?' God's voice in relational language further pursues us, perhaps in our theological fog: "What are you doing here?" (just as he pursued Elijah in his theological fog, 1 Kg 19:9,13). We need to account not only for *where* we are in our theological engagement but also be accountable for *what* we are doing in the theological task and *why* we are doing that. What are we doing here indeed!

The existing gap between the convention of theological discourse in referential language and theological engagement in relational language is insurmountable. That is, the whole and uncommon God from beyond the universe is not distinguished by the limitation of terms within the universe. We need to examine our epistemology and the epistemic field we use in our theological task, including our hermeneutic framework and lens. Having the continuity of God's presence and involvement is contingent both on a compatible epistemology that includes God's epistemic field beyond the universe and on a congruent hermeneutic that translates (not transposes) God's relational language. Without this compatibility and congruence, the continuity of God's self-disclosures is disrupted since the communication from the relational context of God's presence and the relational process of God's involvement is not received in the relational terms disclosed.

Since the emergence of referential language, the dynamic of its influence and workings has permeated even human development (including the brain) along with its primary purpose to construct substitute developments in theology. Shaping and constraining what we see and the way we think have had major consequences in human relations, and the most consequential repercussion is in relation to God—magnified in church history and amplified in the global church today and in its post-Christian surrounding context. As discussed, referential language is fragmentary and disembodies-derelationalizes the Word into parts (e.g. teachings, doctrine), which it attempts to aggregate into some unity or virtual whole (e.g. in a systematic or biblical theology). This fragmentation, disembodying and derelationalizing are further evident in textual criticism (historical, form, literary), which embeds us in the secondary without understanding the primary (as defined by God). For George Steiner, this secondary critical reflection is the interpretive crisis that results in the loss of God's presence—a condition he identifies as 'a Secondary City'.[5] More critically, the use of referential language in the quest for certainty (e.g. in foundationalism and philosophical theology), which presumably would more accurately describe and represent the Word (e.g. in propositionalism and criticism), cannot be more than self-referencing, inconsistent and incomplete. That is, this is the consequence once it disembodies and derelationalizes the Word as Subject and hence disengages from the Word's relational context and process vulnerably disclosing the

[5] George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

whole and uncommon God. This signifies the detachment of God's theological trajectory from God's relational path in the human context, which results in disconnecting from God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement. Who then speaks for God, and what can they reveal about God that would be of significance for theology and practice?

Different terms such as referential terms always reduce the essential truth of the whole of God disclosed in substantive relational terms, with the relational consequence of lacking the qualitative relational significance in theology and practice of the essential reality of the whole and uncommon Trinity. Such terms at best only provide the possible (as in virtual) truth and reality of God to claim in the gospel. This divergent shape and fragmented profile of God's face may not compose God's identity in the theological task with anonymity but it essentially does with pseudonimity. The whole of who, what and how God is becomes identified as something less, and the reality of God's presence and involvement becomes determined by some substitute. Even composed with so-called correct propositional-doctrinal truth, the theological task is constructing a pseudonymous God that has no substantive and sustainable significance for our theology and practice. Inadvertently then, if we can't account for the truth and reality essential of God's presence and involvement, we in essence are left with a deistic God—perhaps in function that has evolved without distinction into panentheism or simply pantheism.

Whenever the essential truth of God's whole presence and relationship-specific involvement is an elusive essential reality in our theology and practice, we have to speculate in the theological task with what amounts to pseudonimity about God. This pseudonymous God can subtly exist without detection in our midst, because its epistemological illusion from reductionism can compose the identity of God in referential terms using what appears as of similar terminology for God's substantive relational terms. This subtle process is what the disciples engaged in their theological task with the embodied Word, who neither let them reduce his whole ontology nor derelationalize his whole function.

The Ontological Footprints and Functional Steps of God

When the psalmist recounted Israel's redemption by YHWH through the Red Sea, he noted that the footprints of God's theological trajectory and relational path were not seen (Ps 77:19). This perception, knowledge and understanding of God's footprints would change and deepen as the substantive Face embodied the steps of the improbable trajectory and intrusive path of the whole and uncommon Trinity. This required the strategic shift of the theological trajectory of God's ontological footprints and involved the tactical and functional shifts (the three shifts discussed in chap. 3) of the relational path of God's functional steps. Unlike the disciples' limited engagement early in their theological task, our perception, knowledge and understanding will change and deepen as we receive the intensity of meaning communicated by the whole Word that reveals the ontological footprints and functional steps of the Trinity's presence and involvement.

Biblical criticism notwithstanding, how reliably can we depend on the Word to distinguish the uncommon God and to have validity for the whole of God beyond human thought and ideas? The psalmist declared that "Righteousness will go before him and will make a path for his steps" (Ps 85:13). Righteousness (*sedeq*) denotes a relational term

signifying who, what and how the person is, thus who and what can be counted on to be reliable in how the person is in relationships, which implies having validity in one's communication. The righteousness of "the Word of *Zoe*" composed the reliable basis for John to witness to the validity of this *Zoe*, who was revealed not merely as an object to observe (*apokalypto*) but disclosed in relational terms (*phaneroo*) for the essential truth and reality necessary to constitute the *koinonia* of relationship together with the Trinity (1 Jn 1:1-4). And this message conveyed by John defines the validity of the good news based on "Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn 1:5; 2:1), whose intensity of meaning is notably presented with substantive significance in John's Gospel.

In the Gospel of John, the evangelist doesn't focus on the narrative of Jesus' earthly life as the Synoptic Gospels do. Perhaps this was intentional by John but more likely by divine design for the primary significance needed to complete the story of the other Gospels; the outcome was that John centers on the theological significance of Jesus' whole person from "In the beginning." He illuminated the Word's integral relational context and process that further distinguishes both YHWH's function as Father, Spirit and Word, and also their depth in ontology. The theological significance of what John's Gospel distinguishes emerges from the intensity of meaning in John's qualitative focus on the whole Word in substantive relational terms. Rather than merely transmitting information about the embodied Word, John echoes the relational communication of the whole Word in its qualitative relational depth of significance, and thus its intensity of meaning, whereby the whole ontology and function of the whole and uncommon God is disclosed (*phaneroo*, not just *apokalypto*). The Word's disclosure is made for only the relational-specific purpose and outcome of having this essential truth and reality of the Trinity in our theology and practice.

The whole Word communicates the relational terms disclosing the ontological footprints and functional steps of the Trinity's presence and involvement, which the disciples failed to perceive and thus receive in their narrow christological focus on the Son (Jn 14:9-10). Given what unfolded with the Word contrary to what even the disciples understood, it is critical for us to understand and keep in mind in the theological task that the substantive Face embodied the irreplaceable steps of the improbable trajectory and intrusive path of the whole and uncommon Trinity. In whatever manner we approach the Trinity, we need to accept that the Trinity is both whole and uncommon (holy if you wish), and thus irreducible and unable to be whole-ly distinguished (*syniemi*) in common terms; and anything less and any substitutes will no longer be the essential truth and reality of the Trinity. God's presence and involvement are simply nonnegotiable to the best forms of human thought and ideas.

So, when John declares having relational-specific experience of the Word's "glory, the glory as of *the* father's only son [*monogenes*]" (Jn 1:14), this *monogenes* ("one and only") distinguishes the ontology of the Son beyond what is common within the limits of a quantitative epistemic field and of related human thought and ideas—the limits and constraints of the common. Further and even deeper, if not comprehendible by the common, this *monogenes*—who is beyond comparison as just being unique or one of a kind—also vulnerably brings out into fullness (*exegeomai*) the ontology of the unseen God (Jn 1:18), whose ontological footprints and functional steps go beyond the common practice of biblical exegesis. In other substantive words, the ontology and function of the Word makes known from the innermost the heart of the Father's ontology and function,

just as he revealed the strategic shift to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:21-26) and later definitively prayed to the Father the substance of their family (Jn 17:4,6,26). What John's Gospel highlights communicates to us the deepest profile of YHWH's face that previously was not seen, and that has been reliably disclosed to distinguish the validity of God's whole identity.

The essential truth and reality of the whole and uncommon Trinity's presence and involvement are who and what we need to account for with congruence in our theology, and how in likeness we have to be accountable for with compatibility in our practice. The whole of who, what and how the Trinity is cannot be reduced epistemologically with a narrow hermeneutic lens in the theological task, or it has consequences in our trinitarian theology and practice both ontologically and relationally. Our hermeneutic lens will define the limits of our epistemic field (and conversely), which then will determine the Trinity's depth level of ontology and function that we will perceive and receive from the Word's disclosure to us—just as the disciples demonstrated in their theological task.

Ancient or modern, our methodology is critical for the epistemic means used for our knowledge and understanding of reality and life together. To go further and deeper in the epistemic process by necessity involves turning our focus to revelations from outside the universe—neither assuming beforehand a reality exists beyond the universe nor assuming such reality cannot exist. Along with eschewing these two assumptions, the assumed superiority of the scientific method that privileges sight over other means of perception is chastened. Thus this epistemic process involves paying attention to disclosures that are "heard" more than seen—in a similar sense of purpose, perhaps analogous, to scientific monitoring of outer space to listen for any signs of alien life. That is, these disclosures are communicative action from the Reality beyond the universe, the access to which cannot be gained by any effort from within the universe, however sophisticated, dedicated or convicted the effort. Therefore, we have to assume that any disclosure is a self-disclosure initiated from a personal Being, whose "discovery" can only be known in the relational epistemic process constituted by the relational context and process of this personal Being's self-disclosure from the beginning. Anything less and any substitute of this relational context and process reduce the relational epistemic process to, at best, conventional observation, which becomes self-referencing and thus is consequential for the relational outcome for which these self-disclosures have been communicated to us. This reduction applies equally to scientific, philosophical and theological observations, including those by biblical exegetes.

The declaration that 'the Trinity is both whole and uncommon' involves the complete significance (*phronēma*, as Paul defined, Col 1:19; 2:9) of God's full identity, which is both cataphatic (what God is) and apophatic (what God is not). This declaration of God's incomparable*ness* needs to illuminate trinitarian theology of its source and to distinguish it of its substantive significance. We cannot know who God is without embracing what God is not in fragmentary human terms and context, which compose the common. We cannot understand what God is not without receiving who, what and how God is in God's whole relational terms, context and process, which compose the uncommon. Receiving the latter distinguishes the whole of God and embracing the former distinguishes the uncommon God, the whole and uncommon Trinity.

If we fail to distinguish the whole and uncommon Trinity in the theological task, then the name of God is rendered to commonization and thereby misrepresented and misused (*shaw'*, Ex 20:7) in our theology and practice. This is how virtual images of God and the idealization of Jesus become idolized substitutes for the Trinity's presence and involvement. While Peter correctly identified Jesus as "you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:69), he perceived the Word mainly in referential terms (cf. Mt 16:16), thus without the substantive significance of the whole and uncommon Word clearly distinguished from Peter's common stereotype of Messiah, Lord and Teacher (as discussed earlier). The commonization of who, what and how God is prevails in the theological task—even if unintentional or unknowing—because it is unavoidable whenever the whole and uncommon Trinity is not distinguished.

In the philosophy of religion, such an omnipotent, omniscient, perfect God took creative action in the beginning to form the universe and all in it, after which this Being either left it on its own (deism) or continued to be involved with it—the extent of which varies with each specific view of theism. Both deism and theism depend on a particular interpretive framework, which determines the epistemic process it engages. Perhaps deists need to return to monitoring the universe to listen to the signs of life coming from outside the universe. Yet, the classical theistic picture of God—as self-contained and all sufficient, impassible, etc.—is also not the God of thematic relational action found in the self-disclosures of the Word in and from the beginning that notably distinguished the face of God. The interpretive framework from human shaping and construction has dominated philosophy's voice in this conversation. In part, this speaks to the Copernican shift in astronomy (the earth revolves around the sun) and its influence on philosophy: theocentricity was replaced by anthropocentricity. The direction of influence was no longer from certainty of God to certainty of the self but now from self-certainty to certainty of God. Hans Küng identifies this *methodical beginning* emerging from the human being, the subject, one's reason and freedom, as a paradigm shift that culminates in a radical critique of the proofs of God.[6] Moreover, if we account for reductionism, it would be evident that human contextualization had previously been well established as the primary determinant; this formalization is just a later consequence of further narrowing the epistemic field to what we know and can rationalize. In spite of this history, philosophical theology will hear a clearer voice to respond to for engaging this conversation. This is demonstrated, for example, by current scholarly efforts to clarify how many voices from outside the universe there are.[7] That work addresses the issue of the "threeness-oneness problem" and involves the theological and hermeneutic issues of the Trinity; however, this trinitarian theological task must also address the primary relational issue underlying these issues in order not to continue composing a pseudonymous God. Without addressing this primacy, our results in the theological task will be no further developed than what the disciples knew of God—much to Jesus' sadness and frustration (Jn 14:9). Like the disciples after intense years engaged in following Jesus, we can find ourselves following the footprints of a different path than Jesus' steps.

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[6] Hans Küng, *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 43-53.
[7] A descriptive overview of this work, in interaction with systematic theology, is found in Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism?: Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

When John declared that "no one has ever seen God" (Jn 1:18), on the one hand he affirms YHWH's communication to Moses "you cannot see my face" (Ex 33:20). On the other hand, however, John highlights the substantive face of the Word, who illuminates the whole of God's face-presence (*paneh*) not seen before only because it was never self-disclosed (Jn 5:37-38; 6:45-46). Since YHWH only precluded the *paneh* of the totality of God for Moses' theological task, the whole of God was always accessible. In the full depth of the substantive Face's profile, the irreducible and irreplaceable Word discloses both the whole of what the Trinity is and the uncommon of what the Trinity is not—in other words, nothing less than and no substitutes for the whole and uncommon Trinity. This complete Christology in John's Gospel is pivotal for the trinitarian theological task, and therefore integral for trinitarian theology and practice. Perhaps this Gospel also serves as a theological triage for the urgent care necessary to restore reduced ontology and function to whole ontology and function in the hermeneutic perception of the Word and the theological anthropology of his followers.

The ontological footprints and functional steps of God's glory—that is, the heart of God's being, the triune God's relational nature, and the vulnerable presence of the Trinity—are disclosed by the Word (Jn 1:14,18; 11:4,40), so that the identity of YHWH's name is further defined in the glory of the Face's name (Jn 12:28; 17:4,6,11) and the Son's (Jn 1:12,34; 5:23,43; 8:54; 10:25,36; 11:4; 17:12). What's in the name of the Father and the Son is not just their functional significance but also the substantive significance of their integral ontology as persons. The glory of the whole ontology and function of the trinitarian persons is certainly uncommon to human thought and ideas that historically have raised questions and shaped conclusions in the theological task. These issues continue to influence trinitarian theology and practice today, which will be discussed below. Therefore, it is important for us to integrate (put together for *syniemi*, as in Mk 8:17-18) the qualitative relational significance (intensity of meaning) of the revelations in the incarnation of God's presence and involvement, in order to receive the whole understanding (*synesis*, as in Col 2:2-3) of the Trinity.

The ontological footprints of God can appear vague, most notably if they are not observable; and simply appealing to mystery does not necessarily resolve the matter. Nevertheless, the footprints of God's ontology are palpable. The breadth of observation is contingent on the extent of our epistemic field, and the depth of observation depends on our hermeneutical framework and lens. This is true even for the footprints of the universe, which science has been finding more and more expansive than concluded earlier. The breadth and depth of what can be known and understood ongoingly challenge the limits and constraints of the human context and the thoughts and ideas it composes. Moreover, the bias of the human context creates a virtual fog that distorts what is perceived or even prevents perception altogether. For example, the expansion of artificial light generated by urban development has brightened (i.e. polluted) the night skies, such that the great majority of earth dwellers can no longer view the stars in space—with the Milky Way the most notably obscured from the naked eye. The bias of the human context also creates theological fog that critically affects what can be perceived.

The whole and uncommon Trinity cannot be known and understood apart from the historical reality of the incarnation composed objectively in the human context, not by the human context, which challenges the breadth and depth of our perception. At the same time, the Trinity is integrally constituted in substantive qualitative and relational

terms, the breadth of which can only be received in the depth of essential reality—that is, beyond the limits of mere quantitative observation and the constraints biasing human perception. The full incarnation of Jesus' whole person—not selective fragments from whatever perspective—challenged the process of human rationalization and confronted its quantitative lens and method to expand the breadth of its limited epistemic field, and thus to also include the depth of the qualitative and relational in order for the epistemic process to be whole (again not fragmentary or incomplete). The good news of the incarnation, however, is ongoingly subjected to reductionism. This is critical to understand and maintain awareness of in the theological task—notably about our view of sin and our theological anthropology—especially if we want to emerge from any fog in trinitarian theology and practice.

One subtle influence of reductionism is the narrowing of our interpretive lens—limiting what we can see and constraining how we see and think—for the cause of certainty and, of course, for the sake of self-determination. This common influence always prevents any knowledge and understanding of the whole, since it restricts the whole from emerging by focusing on fragmentary parts and perhaps the sum of those parts. This whole is not some idea of a whole from inside the universe itself (the sum of those parts) but the whole interposing from outside the universe (the whole greater than the sum of parts). Fragmentation prevails in the human context to compose the human condition, the function of which limits, constrains and prevents wholeness from unfolding. Unfortunately, this restriction does not prevent the virtual perception of the whole since creating any epistemological illusion and ontological simulation of the whole (i.e. with some form of unity) are the genius of reductionism. When we are seeking to develop the whole in trinitarian theology and practice, we must by its nature be able to distinguish the whole from illusion of it in our theology and simulation of it in our practice.

Science, for example, in theory seeks an integrating development in the epistemic process in order to be whole, that is, more complete in its knowledge and understanding of what exists. Yet, its epistemological assumptions and hermeneutic bias restrict the process to the whole, even though there are various tentative claims and expectations of wholeness. The full incarnation (not reduced or fragmented), with its ontological footprints and functional steps, leads the approaches of science, rationalization and modernity, including postmodernity, on this heuristic path to wholeness. Rather than refute or be in conflict with them, God's self-revelation in the incarnation clarifies and corrects them to be whole (cf. Rom 1:19-20). And the historical-critical approach in biblical criticism needs to converge with this heuristic process to wholeness. Of course, the convergences of any approach will require both epistemic and ontological humility.

This relational epistemic process and the issue of epistemic-ontological humility urgently apply to theology. The bias of the human context that obscures the view both within and beyond the universe needs to be addressed. If theology is indeed directed by revelation from outside the universe, its formulations should be other than self-referencing; and its understanding needs to be more complete by the nature of the knowledge available from outside the universe. Yet, theology has long labored under a counteracting dynamic: between what God reveals and what we attribute to God; between what God says for and of himself and what we say for God and impose on him; between God's whole terms and reduced terms of human shaping and construction. Some may

locate this dynamic in the hermeneutic circle, thinking that both are necessary without considering their compatibility. But the former is whole and the latter is not just some part that can be interpreted into the whole of God; the latter is fragmentary and from reductionism, which is always incompatible with the whole. Furthermore, comfort should not be taken in the latter's place in tradition, prominence in the academy, and acceptance in the church.

When the breadth of our epistemic field and the depth of our hermeneutic are neither limited nor constrained, the Trinity's presence and involvement can be distinguished according to the terms of their self-disclosure. Human self-referencing cannot substitute for God's self-disclosure. In the trinitarian theological task, three essential and irreplaceable dimensions are required for the integral understanding of the Trinity as distinguished by God's full identity—composing the following 3-D perspective essential to God:

1. *Pala*-distinguished (as Job learned in his theological task, Job 42:3): God is distinguished beyond all else that exists and thus is incomparable to anything or anyone else; yet the *pala* of God is not the same as the uniqueness rendering God unknowable in Greek philosophy and negative theology, because God has self-disclosed the improbable, if not the impossible (Jn 1:18; 6:45-46).
2. Uncommon-holy: God is also holy, that is, separate from and uncommon to all else, therefore irreversibly distinguished from the common signified by all else and thereby simply unable to be defined and determined by the limits and constraints of the common's human contextualization and lens; the common can only speculate about the Uncommon or just remain silent—that is to say, unless it turns around with epistemic humility and hermeneutic vulnerability to receive the Uncommon's self-disclosure *in* the common's context but only *by* God's relational-specific context and epistemic process.
3. Whole-complete: God's self-disclosures are vulnerably enacted only in substantive relational terms, and therefore the who, what and how of God disclosed is always whole, never fragmentary or incomplete—whole-ly given by and for the primacy of relationship together in wholeness and not subject to reduction or negotiation in our theology and practice, notably by incomplete referential language and fragmentary referential terms.

For the trinitarian theological task to be substantive and have qualitative relational significance, only *pala* and *uncommon* define and determine the who, what and how essential for the full identity of the *whole* of God. And the ontological footprints and functional steps distinguishing this whole and uncommon God constitute integrally without negotiation the *person*-al Trinity and the inter-*person*-al Trinity (discussed in the next two chapters).

If we cannot distinguish the essential truth of God's presence and the essential reality of God's involvement with us, how can a distinction exposing a pseudonymous God and its virtual reality be made in our theology and practice?

The Essential Relational Outcome

The church and its related academy, not just its leaders and teachers, are accountable for God's revelation distinguished in substantive relational terms with nothing less than the whole and no substitutes for the uncommon. Nothing less and no substitutes also hold us accountable to receive and respond to the whole and uncommon God's self-disclosures by reciprocal relational involvement in the Trinity's relational-specific context and process. Anything less and any substitutes take us out of the Trinity's uncommon context and disconnect us from the Trinity's whole epistemic process, whereby we are left to shape the Trinity in reduced fragmentary terms that render the Trinity incomplete and common—a Trinity no longer distinguished whole and uncommon, nor essentially distinct from a pseudonymous Trinity of virtual reality. The relational outcome of nothing less and no substitutes and the relational consequence from anything less and any substitutes will be determinative for knowing and understanding the Trinity, or for lacking such, just as Jesus made definitive about carefully paying attention to the whole Word (Mk 4:24).

The Word communicates in substantive relational terms in order for the relational-specific purpose and outcome to disclose the who, what and how essential for the Trinity and all of life integrally beyond the human context and in the human context. To say this is essential is not to labor in the philosophical concept of the essence of something: the basic or primary substance in the being of a thing and that thing's nature, without which it could not be what it is; and thus, per essentialism, what is essential cannot be lost without ceasing to exist. This conversation is certainly shaped by human thought and ideas, whose limits and constraints compose a narrowed-down framework that is fragmentary and incomplete at best. Notably when applied to God it is unable to get to the innermost that distinguishes the whole of God, and thus that distinguishes the who, what and how essential for God's whole ontology and function. Perhaps the analogy currently applicable from modern science would be the Higgs boson just discovered with the Large Hadron Converter, which is the most essential particle that determines the existence of matter. The significance is that without the Higgs boson our physical bodies would not have material existence. As essential as this particle is to our physical well-being, it still doesn't get to the innermost of the human person; nor does it define and determine the whole of who, what and how the person is in ontology and function—it is just one part (albeit the smallest particle) of the whole person. This is the extent of God that is composed by the essence and essentialism of philosophical theology, which clearly lacks substantive depth in the theological task to be of qualitative relational significance for trinitarian theology and practice.

Having said this, Anselm Kyongsuk Min looks to Thomas Aquinas (leading developer of scholastic philosophy) for a legacy of challenges and questions that any trinitarian reconstruction must address.

> Substantively, there are three questions. The first concerns the ontological constitution of the Trinity: how do we conceptualize the process in which three divine persons emerge or originate in such a way as to distinguish each as a distinct person without denying their common divine nature, while also guaranteeing their equality, co-eternity, and mutual coinherence? The second concerns the relation

> between the essential and the personal in God: do we have a conception of the divine "person" adequate enough to avoid tritheism and modalism by including in itself both the divine essence as God and the distinguishing traits proper to each person? By what criteria do we assign certain attributes to the common essence and certain others to the personal distinctions? The third concerns the relation of the immanent and economic Trinity: what is there in the immanent Trinity that moves God to create, redeem, and govern the world? How does the life and structure of the immanent Trinity serve as the ontological *ratio* of the economic Trinity?
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> There are also two methodological questions which Aquinas did ask and which remain pertinent today. The first concerns the method and criteria of predicating divine names: do we have a developed theory that will justify the use of the only language we know in talking about God, our human language derived from the material world, yet also does justice to the ontological difference between God and creatures and protects our language from the idolatry of anthropomorphism and the abusiveness of ideology? The second concerns the model we use for talking about the Trinity: is the model adequate to indicate something of the infinity of God, the immanence of divine life, and sufficient freedom from our created world while also suggesting an eternal love for creation? Are the models supple enough to accommodate coherently the many aspects of trinitarian theology such as processions, relations, persons, the difference between the relational and the essential, the immanent and the economic, and capable of promoting the coherent, theological appropriation of biblical names (e.g. Father, Son, Word, Gift, etc.)?[8]

These questions certainly have relevance for our trinitarian theological task, and hopefully some have been addressed already with more to follow below. But to reemphasize, such a perceptual-interpretive framework and lens constrains God substantively to its limits—in spite of its conceptual expansiveness attributed to God—and thereby is incomplete to have the qualitative relational significance necessary for the essential relational outcome in trinitarian theology and practice.

The full identity of God has to be essential or else we are merely identifying less than the whole of God. Once again, the whole of God (not the totality) is not conceptual but constitutes the vulnerable presence and direct involvement of the whole and uncommon Trinity in substantive relational terms. The Trinity's essence in referential terms has insufficient qualitative relational significance to distinguish the truth and reality essential of the Trinity's presence and involvement. When God is whole, and integrally uncommon beyond common human fragmentary thought and ideas, the full identity of YHWH is triune and thus the substantive face-presence of YHWH is trinitarian integrally in ontology and function. This is not a leap over Lessing's ugly ditch from reason to fideism. That is to say in substantive relational terms, trinitarian ontology and function is essential to the whole of who, what and how God is; and without the whole ontology and function of the Trinity, the essential relational outcome of God's ongoing presence and involvement can no longer be accounted for in the innermost of essential truth and reality

[8] Anselm Kyongsuk Min, "God as the mystery of sharing and shared love: Thomas Aquinas on the Trinity" in Peter C. Phan, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 105.

(analogous to the limits of the Higgs boson). Therefore, the who, what and how of the Trinity is essentially not distinguished any further than propositional-doctrinal truth and any deeper than virtual reality, thereby rendering God's identity to some substitute ideal or stereotype.

The gospel of the embodied Word from the triune YHWH, in order to be good news indeed, has to be trinitarian to be congruent with the ontological footprints and functional steps unfolding in the incarnation—the improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path further enacted by YHWH as Father, Spirit and Word. Without the trinitarian presence and involvement, our theology and practice are composed by only a partial gospel, which becomes an overly christocentric focus from an incomplete Christology. This results in salvation becoming truncated to what sin we are saved *from* without the qualitative relational significance of what we are saved *to*: the primacy of relationship together in wholeness as persons with the whole of God in God's new creation family, constituted in the relational likeness of the ontology of the Trinity—thus what sin we are saved from does not included sin as reductionism.

The full outcome of salvation from the essential relational outcome of complete Christology is the new creation transforming the human condition from the original creation, which Paul distinguished from the common messianic expectations to make integrally definitive for the church (2 Cor 5:16-17; Rom 6:4; Gal 6:15, cf. Isa 65:17). The new creation was not only constituted by the death and resurrection of the Christ, but in complete Christology emerged from the trinitarian relational context of family and unfolded by the trinitarian relational process of family love, and was thereby distinguished whole and uncommon in likeness of the Trinity (as Jesus illuminated, Jn 17:20-26, and Paul clarified, Eph 4:24; 2 Cor 3:18). The new creation, then, is the reconstituted, recreated whole of the original creation in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the triune God (Col 3:10). The substantive significance of the original creation is integral to the First Testament and the qualitative relational significance of the new creation is integral to the Second Testament—as Jesus distinguished for Nicodemus (Jn 3:3-8)—the whole of which are both essential in their trinitarian likeness (discussed further in chap. 7).

Essential also to a complete Christology and the substantive face of God, and for this whole relational outcome and its relational completion, is the conjoint ontology and function of the Uncommon Spirit—just as Jesus initially identified the Spirit for this essential relational outcome (Jn 3:5-8), and John (the Baptist) witnessed to (Jn 1:32-34). Later, Jesus as 'embodied Truth' told his disciples that there was much more depth to reveal for them to know and understand, namely disclosing God. But, and this is critical to the trinitarian theological task, this relational epistemic process would only be communicated by "the Spirit of truth," who would integrally lead them in this relational-specific process and constitute the essential relational outcome (Jn 16:12-15). The Spirit of truth communicates for the Subject constituting 'embodied Truth' as Subject-Truth's relational replacement (Jn 14:25-26; 15:26; 16:7, cf. Gal 4:6). As the Word's relational replacement, not only does the function of the Spirit further unfold from YHWH but so too does the ontology of the Spirit in substantive relational terms to be integral with the ontology of the Word and the Father in order to constitute the essential relational outcome (Jn 14:15-18,23, cf. Eph 2:19-22; Rom 8:14-16; 2 Cor 3:17-18). When Jesus disclosed the presence and involvement of the Spirit as distinct Subject jointly with the

Father, what is essential for Christology is complete. The irreplaceable Spirit as the Truth's relational replacement unfolds in reciprocal relationship to transform the church as the new creation family of God (as Paul illuminated). Yet, contrary to just a concept and in contrast to just a force (even of love) that counter the primacy of relationship, the Spirit can only be involved in reciprocal relationship as Subject; not even an Object engages in reciprocal relationship. Moreover, how can we be involved in this reciprocal relationship with anything less than a person, the Subject of whom also experiences emotional pain (*lypeo*, grieve, mourn, be distressed) when we don't fulfill our participation in reciprocal relationship together (Eph 4:30)? God's whole presence and involvement cannot be reduced to anything less, not can we receive God's presence and respond to God's involvement with anything less than our person as subject from inner out, and still have the essential relational outcome.

The truth essential of this relational outcome is the essential reality of knowing the whole of God in intimate relationship together (1 Cor 3:9-16; Rom 8:11,27), the wholeness of which is constituted by the triune God, the whole and uncommon Trinity (Num 6:26; Jn 14:27; Rom 8:6). The knowledge and understanding of the Trinity is first revealed in and by the embodied Word as Truth, and then extended in the church by the Subject-person of the Spirit as relational replacement of Subject-Truth. The early church determined its whole theology and practice on the substantive basis essential to the Trinity; even though the name of the Trinity was not used, the identity of the whole of God was unmistakable (e.g. Mt 28:19; Eph 4:4-6). At the same time, whole theology and practice likely reflected only a minority of early churches; for example, in Jesus' post-ascension critique of churches (Rev 2-3), only two of the seven representative churches received positive evaluations while the other five engaged in variations of reduced theology and practice. Yet, this whole theology and practice distinguished the most significant earliest Christian tradition, which unfolded from the whole ecclesiology that Paul made definitive with his complete Christology (the *pleroma* of Christ, Eph 1:23; 4:11-13; Col 1:19; 2:9). This essential wholeness emerged in substantive relational terms only because of the completeness of God's relational-specific response of grace (Jn 1:16), of which Paul was a direct face-to-face recipient that transformed his person and thus his theology and practice to wholeness.

Since the Word of and from YHWH signifies the communication of God's revelation, this theological trajectory and relational path of the Word are the irreplaceable means to know and understand God (cf. Ps 119:130). Therefore, to have relational-specific knowledge (*epignosis*) and whole understanding (*synesis*) of the Trinity (as Paul disclosed, Col 2:2-3) is directly connected to and inseparable from the sole initiative of God's relational response of grace, which Peter later experienced with epistemic and ontological humility (1 Pet 1:3; 2 Pet 3:18). And Peter also experienced the truth and reality that God's ongoing relational involvement has the relational outcome of wholeness (2 Pet 1:2,8, cf. Eph 6:15). Accordingly, Peter wrote to his readers in order "to stimulate [arouse, stir up] you to wholesome thinking" (*eilikrines* and *dianoia*, 2 Pet 3:1, NIV); that is, more than wholesome or "sincere intention" (NRSV), Peter awakens us to have greater clarity of thought and a perspicacious perceptual-interpretive lens by deeply focusing with coherence on the relational (nor referential) words of God (3:2-7). This will take us beyond the limits of human thought and ideas and past the bias of the human context. As discussed previously, Peter also lacked this clarity and lens earlier himself.

This relational process integrates knowledge of God with salvation for the reciprocal relational involvement necessary to be compatible with the whole Word for the relational outcome of wholeness—for which Peter rightfully highlights Paul as having the key to whole theology and practice (3:13-16).

In Paul's clarification for and correction of the church, the new Paul (not from biblical studies) makes the whole Word from God the relational imperative, with the wholeness of Christ's whole person the only determinant for our integral theology and practice in the primacy of new relationship together in wholeness as family (Col 3:15-16, cf. 1 Cor 4:6). Paul fought for both the essential truth of the whole gospel composed only by complete Christology, and the essential reality of its relational outcome in full soteriology. At the same time, Paul fought against both reductionism's fragmentation of the gospel with an incomplete Christology, and reductionism's counter-relational workings that truncate soteriology. What Jesus embodied *into* Paul, with the Spirit, further unfolds the whole Word to distinguish the whole and uncommon God (Acts 9:15; 26:16; Col 1:25-26), which is indispensable for the trinitarian theological task even though Paul was not a traditional trinitarian.[9] The whole in Paul's theology and practice illuminates the whole Word and the essential relational outcome of God's whole ontology and function, as well as the wholeness of our ontology and function (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10). This is 'the gospel of wholeness' (Eph 6:15) clarified by Paul, the essential relational outcome of which Paul further illuminates that all of creation longs for in frustration for it to be distinguished by God's new creation family (Rom 8:19-22).

All Christians need to join Paul in the fight against reduced Christology, soteriology and thus ecclesiology, and fight for wholeness in our theology and practice, because we are ongoingly subjected to reductionism and its counter-relational workings. Unfortunately, as early Christian tradition also became subject to fragmentary heretical views that reduced the whole and uncommon God to common human thought and idea, the early Church Fathers fought against this reductionism but without wholeness in theology and practice. With all good intentions, for the most part they also inadvertently reduced God's revelation given in whole relational terms by referentialization of the Word. In other words referentialized, they made secondary the relational-specific purpose of God's self-disclosures for only the primacy of relationship together, and instead made primary having so-called certainty in the referential doctrines of the church in order to establish the Rule of Faith—the results of which increasingly lacked qualitative relational significance. Orthodoxy appeared to function more as a template for conformity rather than distinguishing the essential truth and reality of the whole and uncommon God's presence and involvement. Jesus' critique in whole relational terms would certainly apply here: "you have abandoned the love you had at first," (Rev 2:4) and "I have not found your *theology and practice* complete in the sight of my God" (3:2).

Misplaced, or at least ignored, in this formal theological task was the earliest church's whole theology and practice, which was defined and determined by God's self-revelation integrally in the Word—communicated orally and in writing just in relational language and terms—and by the reciprocal relational involvement of the Subject-person of the Spirit. As the embodied Truth's relational replacement, the Spirit composed a

[9] A full discussion of this relational process and outcome is found in my study, *Jesus* into *Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online at http://www.4X12.org.

mindset (*phronēma*) of "life [*zoe* not *bios*] and peace [wholeness not fragmentation]" (Rom 8:6). That is, this involves having a qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework and using its lens (*phroneō*) of whole relational terms (not fragmentary referential terms)—the clarity of thought and perspicacious lens that Peter awakens his readers and those in his succession to.

The issue here centers on knowing and understanding the whole and uncommon God, which revolves around God speaking for God in self-disclosure, or subtly substituting human church leaders speaking for God with enhancement of God's Word, even with good intentions. This pivots in the theological task on the complex Subject distinguished by God alone or a simple Object observed/shaped by the human lens—a non-interchangeable distinction in the trinitarian theological task. The difference between Subject and Object is also a subtle distinction that is irreversible once used, which determines who or what will compose our trinitarian theology and practice—just as Jesus definitively declared that "the measure [Subject or Object] you use will be the measure you get *in your theology and practice*" (Mk 4:24). Only what God communicated in self-disclosure as Subject is congruent with the relational-specific knowledge (*epignosis*) of the whole and uncommon God, and therefore is compatible with the whole understanding (*synesis*, Col 2:2-3) of the Trinity. Issues and problems arise and remain when this congruity and compatibility neither exist nor are pursued in trinitarian theology and practice, resulting in rendering the essential relational outcome from complete Christology at best to either a propositional-doctrinal truth or a virtual reality but likely both. Paul was astonished whenever anyone in the church (notably its leaders) turned to anything less or any substitutes (Gal 1:6; 2 Cor 11:3-4).

The Essential Implications of Anything Less and Any Substitutes

Underlying the entire discussion about theology and practice is the intrinsic concern to identify God's presence and involvement, by which the essential identity of God can be defined and determined. This basic concern involves correctly locating God's presence and adequately understanding God's involvement. What is essential for God in the theological task involves distinguishing (*pala*) the whole and uncommon (the three essential dimensions discussed above) presence and involvement of God. Whatever other discourse about God assumed to be essential have no qualitative relational significance integral to both theology and practice, which means that essentially they would compose a pseudonymous God. The essential profile of YHWH's face is contingent on the substantive face of the Word disclosed only in whole relational terms, whose qualitative relational significance is irreducible and nonnegotiable and thereby who composes the full profile of the triune God indispensable for trinitarian theology and practice.

Anything less of the Word would not be whole, and any substitutes in this profile of the Face would no longer be uncommon, that is, distinguished distinctly from the shaping by human thought and ideas—the source of idealized stereotypes, pseudonyms and idols. The implications of anything less and any substitutes in the theological task encompass issues and problems accounting for the essential presence and involvement of God in our theology and being accountable for nothing less and no substitutes in our practice. This raises the urgent question for us that is unavoidable in the theological task:

If God's presence and involvement do not compose our theology and practice with their essential truth and reality, then what are the truth and reality of God we claim to have?

This returns us to the critical matter of our Christology and soteriology and their essential relational outcome. While the theological community needs to pay serious attention to an incomplete Christology and a truncated soteriology, churches cannot ignore these issues because God holds us all accountable for the whole of Jesus' self-disclosures—just as he did with two of his followers on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-32). What Christians follow and what churches practice are rooted in their Christology; and church mission is determined by their soteriology—the significance of which composes their gospel. Therefore, churches need to examine their ecclesiology: what is it based on, what does it pay attention to and what does it ignore, thus how congruent is its theology and how compatible is its practice with the whole and uncommon God's thematic relational-specific action distinguished by the intrusive complex Subject of the Word?

Jesus openly asserted, "Blessed are those who hear the word of *the Father* and *relationally respond*" (Lk 11:28), "*they are my family*" (Mt 12:50). The Father vulnerably shared, "This is my Son, whom I love…Listen to him!" (Mt 17:5, NIV). The Son communicated the Father's words (Jn 7:16; 12:49-50; 14:10,24) and functioned only for the Father (Jn 5:19-20; 6:57; 14:31) and his family (Jn 17:6-8,26); and the Father expressed his affection for his family and directed the attention to his Son for the purpose of their family. These vulnerable assertions by the trinitarian persons are integrated in their mutual relational context and process for the same essential relational outcome. And their conjoint function was made evident by the qualitative relational significance of God's complete relational action in the incarnation of the substantive Face's relational work of grace and his relational involvement in the relational progression (as complete Christology), which constitutes his followers in the new relationships of wholeness necessary to be the whole and uncommon Trinity's family (as full soteriology). The whole Word in substantive relational terms is in essential contrast and conflict with the reductionism rendered in anything less and any substitutes, and also with reductionism's counter-relational workings composed notably by incomplete fragmentary referential terms.

Moreover, as the trinitarian persons' communication signified throughout the incarnation, their assertions interacted together to establish the new perceptual-interpretive framework, providing the lens to determine what to pay attention to and ignore. This is the qualitative framework and lens of wholeness that only the Spirit constitutes in "*zoe* and peace" (Rom 8:6). For example, we cannot ignore the implications of Jesus saying "they are my family" because the Father says "listen to him, *who communicates my words*." And we cannot pay attention to the Son disclosing the Father's words (which is not just their content) and their functional implications while ignoring the Father and the relationships necessary to be whole together as his family in their likeness (Jn 17:20-23), because Jesus functioned only for the Father and his family (Jn 17:6-11)—which the Father said to pay attention to. This is the uncommon and transcendent whole of God vulnerably disclosed to us—as improbable as it appears. To pay attention to anything less and any substitute, or to ignore the qualitative relational significance of nothing less and no substitutes, demonstrates the lens from a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework, which reduces the complex Subject's ontology and

function of Jesus, the Father, with the Spirit emerging, and thus the whole and uncommon Trinity.

The complex Subject is always subjected to human shaping in the theological task, which underlies the fragmentary profile of Jesus in an incomplete Christology. In spite of God's self-disclosure in the incarnation, the full profile illuminating God's face is commonly not distinguished in our view of Jesus. Given the primacy of the incarnation, what 'face' is perceived and received from the embodied Word is the critical challenge *of* face that defines and determines what unfolds with the Word. The whole person and substantive face of Jesus are not concepts or anthropomorphism imposed on him but rather his vulnerable function as "the image of the *transcendent* God…in *his person* all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col 1:15,19), "in *his person* the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9). The full profile of Jesus' face is the epistemological, hermeneutical, ontological and relational keys to the whole of God's glory (being, nature and presence, 2 Cor 4:6). Moreover, his person as the image of God (2 Cor 4:4, cf. Jn 14:9)—along with the person of the Spirit, Jesus' relational replacement (Jn 14:16-18; 16:13-15; 2 Cor 3:17-18)—is essential for the human person both to know the qualitative relational significance and to have whole understanding of what it means to be and function as the person created in the image of God. There are certainly irreducible differences between God as Creator and creatures. However, as the substantive face of Jesus vulnerably disclosed (e.g. in his formative family prayer, Jn 17:21-23, cf. Col 2:9-10), there is also an irreducible likeness between the persons of the Trinity and the human person (including persons together) created in the image of the whole and uncommon God (cf. Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). Anything less and any substitutes for God or humans are reductions rendered to reduced ontology and function.

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

Furthermore, in this relational epistemic process our "eyes" are even a higher priority than our "ears" and must antecede both our "mouths and "ears" as the determinant for their function; this was the lesson Job deeply experienced (Job 42:3-5). Yet, this hermeneutic lens should not be confused with the priority of observation in the scientific method. This has less to do with the function of sight and critically involves how and what we see, most importantly the person constituted in the full profile of the face. For example, how and what we see in the person determines the profile we get, and an incomplete profile of the person becomes the basis for stereotypes—speaking for the person rather than letting the person determine who, what and how the person is. When

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

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

And Jesus' context cannot be limited to historical human contextualization but needs to include "in the beginning" and his relational context from outside the universe constituted within the Trinity, which has been vulnerably accessible in the human context by the trinitarian relational process of family love. His defining-context horizon is both nonnegotiable to human terms and irreducible to human shaping and construction; and thus his defining context is never subject to human context, even though it certainly is subjected to human contexts. This composes the 3-D lens required to distinguish the whole and uncommon Trinity, and anything less and any substitutes distort the view of God—making God's presence and involvement ambiguous if not elusive.

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

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

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

Either the substantive Face distinguished the complex Subject disclosing the whole and uncommon Trinity, or the most that can be attributed to the Face is a simple Object that lacks the qualitative relational significance necessary to constitute the whole ontology and function of God, and thus of ours in likeness. Who, what and how does a simple Object define persons *to be*, presumably in their essential substantive profile?

Social media today provides us with a contemporary analogy yet recurring example of persons reduced to simple objects. In spite of the increasing quantitative engagement in social media preoccupying persons, there is minimal-to-no qualitative involvement required for a person's presence. Thus, that person's presence is based on the quantitative engagement of a simple object, which projects a person of essentially a pseudonymous identity. This simulated human transaction has become a prevailing substitute for the human communication involved in human interaction, notably in face-to-face relational involvement. The profile of a person's face on social media becomes an illusion constructed by a quantity of referential terms (including visuals and symbols); and the prevailing consequence is the reduced, fragmentary and misleading identity of persons composed only by the so-called presence and involvement of a simple object. This pseudonymous identity, unfortunately but not surprisingly, is commonly mistaken for the substantive presence and involvement distinguishing the full identity of a complex subject. For example, has the identity of Christ become reduced to the profile of a cross, perhaps signifying the ultimate emoticon (or emoji) of social media?

Most importantly, the prevailing perception of God as a simple Object is also commonly mistaken for the complex Subject distinguished only by the substantive Face—whose qualitative relational significance is constituted in nothing less than and no substitutes for whole relational terms. Accordingly, if we accept (willingly or inadvertently) the incomplete or distorted profile composing a simple Object in our theological task, the essential implication for which we must assume responsibility is the absence or loss of the complex Subject's presence and involvement in our theology and practice. This, therefore, composes a critical condition without the full profile of the substantive Face integrally distinguishing the whole and uncommon Trinity, that is, without the essential of nothing less and no substitutes.

When Jesus asked Peter "do you love me" in relational terms (Jn 21:15-22), our familiarity of this interaction often transposes it to referential terms. This has consequences not only for Peter (and all other disciples) but most importantly for Jesus. John's Gospel records this crucial interaction not for its narrative significance but for its theological significance composed in substantive relational terms. Jesus is asking his followers (including us) for the compatible relational response and involvement that is congruent with *me*—integrally signified by the nonnegotiable relationship-specific imperative "follow *me*" (vv.19,22; 12:26). Compatibility in practice is contingent on congruence in the theology of who, what and how the whole Word of YHWH is in integral function and ontology. Did Peter respond to merely the embodied face of Jesus from outer in—"you know that I love you *or else I wouldn't be here*"; or did he declare his relational involvement with the substantive Face essential to the profile of Jesus' whole person, who also vulnerably distinguished the function and ontology of the Father and the Spirit for his disciples to follow? Therefore, essential to "love me" and "follow me," and all theology and practice related to "my name," involves this whole person of the complex Subject, whose wholeness is constituted inseparably, interchangeably and thus integrally with the ontology of the Father and the Spirit as persons (as in Jn 10:38; 14:9-11; 16:14-15).

We cannot claim to follow and love Jesus fragmented from the trinitarian persons—the whole of who, what and how together constitute in only substantive relational terms the *person*-al Trinity, distinguished whole and uncommon in the human context also as the inter-*person*-al Trinity. Jesus embodied, enacted and disclosed only the uncommon presence and whole involvement of this whole-ly Trinity. Along with the essential implications in the trinitarian theological task, nothing less and no substitutes "follow me" and "love me," even worship "my name"; nor can anything less and any substitutes compose the uncommon truth of God's vulnerable presence and the whole reality of God's relational involvement essential for us to worship, love and follow.

At this point in our discussion, on what basis did Jesus tell his disciples "and you still do not know me"? And how well would you say that you know Jesus?

Chapter 5 The *Person*-al Trinity

Boast in this, that *you* understand and know me, that I am YHWH;
I act with steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the *human context.*
Jeremiah 9:24

The continuity of the Christian God with the First Testament is problematic as the Trinity. The Trinity as commonly perceived is considered incompatible with monotheism, both of Judaism and Islam, which was the central issue consuming Paul as an unwavering orthodox monotheist. What is essential for monotheism, of course, is to have one God. That's why polytheism in the human context was a major cause of conflict in the First Testament, yet whose common influence was also a major source for shaping a pseudonymous God that both misrepresents the full identity of YHWH and misuses the name of YHWH essential to who, what and how the one God is. In this way there was also discontinuity with YHWH within monotheism itself, the human shaping of which must not be duplicated in trinitarian theology and practice in order to have the continuity essential to the name of YHWH, and to be congruent with the full identity of YHWH unfolding in the Second Testament.

As stated above in relational terms, God is present and involved in the human context for the relational-specific purpose for us to know *who* and *what* God is and to understand *how* God is (cf. Jer 24:7)—thus the only boast we can make that has significance to God. This means that God's presence and involvement are defined and determined only by God or else there is no continuity with YHWH. While human perception of God's presence and involvement is certainly needed to receive God, it is not the determinant for the identity of God and for what is essential to who, what and how God is. The human shaping and construction of God is in discontinuity with the name of YHWH and is incongruent with the whole ontology and function of YHWH unfolding vulnerably and intimately in the incarnation. That is, if our theological task is to have continuity and be congruent with YHWH, it must be based on what the embodied presence and involvement of YHWH reveals.

To boast in the theological task of understanding and knowing "me, that I am YHWH, *the substantive relational verb*" can only be based on correctly perceiving YHWH's embodied presence functioning as enacted: (1) in the relational involvement of love ("steadfast love"), (2) for the well-being of the human community in wholeness and not merely by the rule of law ("justice"), and fulfilling this function according to (3) the whole of who, what and how YHWH is that can be counted on in relationship together ("righteousness"). What is essential for the embodied presence of YHWH's function in the above as the Word is also the ontology of the whole Word, who distinguished the integral ontology and function of YHWH. Yet, what is unfolding with the Word's ontology and function is neither in discontinuity with YHWH nor incongruent with the one God. Again, this can only be determined by God's presence and involvement, the truth and reality of which must be humanly perceived in order to be received but are not determined by human perception. In the theological task of knowing and understanding God, when we focus on God's presence and involvement as disclosed in its primacy, one

issue that has to be understood for this continuity and congruence is that the Christian God is constituted by neither tritheism nor modalism (having three main forms of function). What must also be understood for continuity and congruence within monotheism itself is that to truly know YHWH is to know the whole of who, what and how God is, that is, as complex Subject uncommon to the human context and distinguished beyond human thought and ideas—all while vulnerably present and intimately involved with us for relationship together.

This whole and uncommon God is distinguished as the *person*-al Trinity for us to know and understand, nothing less and no substitutes—the qualitative relational significance of eternal life (Jn 17:3). Even though in recent years there has been more discourse about knowledge regarding the Trinity, most Christians still don't talk about the Trinity in their practice. This reflects a trinitarian theology and practice not specifically knowing (*epignosis*) and whole-ly understanding (*synesis*) the qualitative relational significance of the Trinity as revealed in complete (*pleroma*) Christology, which is essential for the church family's theology and practice (as Paul illuminated, Col 2:2-3, 9-10). On the basis of Jesus' substantive presence and whole involvement, he chastened his disciples for not knowing "me" after all their time together—that is, knowing the complex Subject who composed the epistemological, hermeneutical, ontological and relational keys to the whole and uncommon Trinity (Jn 14:6-11).

Continuity and Discontinuity in Trinitarian Thinking

When Moses pursued God in his theological task in order to know and understand God, the name of YHWH emerged and the glory (being, nature and presence) of God was distinguished, that is, as revealed by God (Ex 3:13-15; 33:18-20). To know and understand the Trinity in the trinitarian theological task must by its nature (not by duty to tradition) be in continuity with the whole and uncommon God revealed to Moses. Since the totality of God was not revealed by YHWH in the First Testament and has not been in the Second Testament, there is a limit to what can be known and understood about the uncommon God in transcendence beyond the human context composing the common. In the trinitarian theological task, this uncommon God has been referred to as the immanent Trinity, which may have continuity or discontinuity in trinitarian theology depending on the thinking. To have continuity with YHWH and the glory of God is contingent on being congruent with God's self- revelation; and to have discontinuity is to be either incongruent or incompatible with the disclosures of God (as Job learned, Job 42:3-5). The issue in trinitarian thinking is what has God revealed of Self, and what can be assumed or implied from the disclosures of God that would be congruent or at least compatible for the trinitarian theological task. To learn from Job, there is both a limit to what we can say about or for God, and also an immeasurable depth of what God self-discloses to us. This leads us directly to the whole and uncommon presence and involvement of God that distinguishes the Trinity.

In trinitarian thinking, God's presence and involvement in the human context converge in the economic Trinity to define the sum of God's actions/activity in the common context of human life. The sum of these parts of God, however, cannot be assumed to equal the whole and thus doesn't determine the whole of God. Nor can we

imply from the parts and sum of the economic Trinity what defines the uncommon God, which is essential to have some (not total) understanding of the immanent Trinity. Moreover, while the economic Trinity in the human context reflects the immanent Trinity beyond the human context, it is problematic to say they are the same. Such a conclusion is unwarranted, if not contradictory, based incongruently on what determines the whole basis for God and incompatibly to what defines the uncommon essential of God. When the whole is not determined and the uncommon is not defined sufficiently, then the Trinity cannot be distinguished whole and uncommon in the trinitarian theological task and thus for trinitarian theology and practice.

The whole of God's presence and involvement cannot be reduced to merely what God does in the human context. This basis of determination is narrowed down and thereby reduces God's ontology and function in both the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity it reflects. On the one hand, this narrowed-down basis is a common oversimplification of God's involvement that essentially perceives only a simple Object. Simultaneously, on the other hand, it indicates a qualitative insensitivity and relational unawareness of God's presence that misinterprets the complex Subject integrally present and involved. Accordingly, the Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement often has discontinuity in the economic Trinity of prevailing trinitarian thinking, even if the immanent Trinity is not equated to it, because the commonly perceived economic Trinity is not congruent with the uncommon nature of God's whole self-revelation. When the Trinity's presence and involvement are accounted for in the substantive relational terms of their disclosure—which is not limited to the function of God's activity—the economic Trinity will be congruent with the whole ontology and function of the immanent Trinity. On just this basis, the Trinity will have continuity with the whole Word unfolding from YHWH, who distinguishes nothing less than the whole Trinity and no substitutes for the uncommon Trinity.

The pivotal issue unavoidable in the trinitarian theological task is *who* and *what* define and determine God's presence and involvement in the human context, which then also provides whole (not total) understanding of YHWH's face whose total (not whole) profile cannot be seen. The distinction between whole and total is pivotal for both the congruity-incongruity of the who of God's presence and the compatibility-incompatibility of the what of God's involvement—the integral who and what essential for the continuity and not discontinuity with YHWH and God's glory.

In church history starting from the patristic tradition, *what* God is has typically centered on God's being, nature and essence—using the terms *ousia* and *physis* (Gk) and *essential* and *natura* (Latin). For *who* God is, the focus has been on Father, Son and Spirit—using the terms *hypostasis* and *prosopon* (Gk) and *substantia* and *persona* (Latin). The discourse for what God is has involved metaphysics and ontology, with various philosophical systems used to explain especially the immanent Trinity. Yet, in the pursuit of knowing and understanding a more *total* view of God, the *whole* of the what and who of God that is present and involved gets fragmented into these parts of God's existence, attributes and activities. That is, the whole ontology and function of God gets reduced in the trinitarian theological task. The results have commonly been the loss of significance in trinitarian theology that has rendered the whole and uncommon Trinity ambiguous, elusive, if not in a theological fog, and thus insignificant for practice

involving the presence and involvement of the Trinity. What kind of continuity exists with this trinitarian thinking and how can the discontinuity be addressed?

The influence of philosophy on trinitarian thinking has skewed the trinitarian task at the expense of, at the very least, diminishing God's vulnerable presence and minimalizing God's relational-specific involvement in the human context. This has constrained qualitative sensitivity and limited relational awareness—notably by doctrines such as divine simplicity—such that the qualitative relational significance of the incarnation is not sufficiently distinguished to know and understand the Trinity—that is, the whole and uncommon Trinity distinguished beyond human thought and ideas by the complex Subject of the Word from YHWH. The incarnation of the name and glory of YHWH "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6) integrates the improbable interaction between the spheres of physics and metaphysics. The convergence of physics and metaphysics is inseparable and irreducible—notably with one not considered more important than the other—thus integral to distinguish the Trinity in the theological task beyond the limits of the human context, and yet able to know and understand relationally in trinitarian theology and practice beyond the constraints of the human mind.

In current trinitarian thinking, the focus seems to give epistemological priority to the economic Trinity and ontological priority to the immanent Trinity. This thinking, however, is still fragmentary and does not account for the whole and uncommon that the improbable integral interaction between physics and metaphysics integrates in the incarnation of the whole Word. Part of the issue in the epistemological priority of the economic Trinity is the lack or absence of qualitative significance given to the incarnation, which cannot be limited to historical observation or constrained by referential terms. Likewise, in the ontological priority of the immanent Trinity is the lack of relational significance understood from God's self-disclosures—revealed indirectly in the world of nature and directly through the incarnation—that is essential for God's ontology. Lacking this essential significance then ironically leads to God's ontology being shaped in the theological task by the limits of human ontology and the constraints of human function—which includes negative theology shaping what God is not. In other words, epistemological priority and ontological priority only have significance when they are based on the relational priority given to the whole and uncommon Trinity, whose whole ontology and function are distinguished uncommonly by only the qualitative relational significance of the Trinity's presence and involvement.

The essential relational outcome of the Trinity's ontological footprints and functional steps is the improbable path that integrates the sphere of physics and the sphere of metaphysics for their integral interaction to wholeness epistemologically and ontologically. Anything less and any substitutes in trinitarian thinking limit physics epistemologically and constrain metaphysics ontologically, so that continuity with the whole and uncommon YHWH is ambiguous at best, and discontinuity with the whole and uncommon Trinity prevails and at least distinctly influences trinitarian theology and practice.

What certainly limits physics epistemologically is its epistemic field, which then inseparably includes its perceptual-interpretive framework and lens. While the latter in physics remains basically status quo, its epistemic field has been challenged to expand both in astrophysics and quantum physics—obviously with more expansion necessary to enter the metaphysical sphere. The sphere of metaphysics, however, must not be

contained by the limits of philosophy or else the ontology in this sphere will always be constrained. In relation to what God is, ontology cannot be a concept or idea of the *what* if it is to be substantive, and thereby have significance both qualitative and relational—integrally in metaphysics and physics. For ontology to be substantive requires jointly to qualify its qualitative significance and to quantify its relational significance. That is, ontology is the what that simultaneously defines and determines the *whole* distinguishing God in the sphere of physics, who is able to be experienced as the complex Subject. This whole of God, however, is not limited to physics but also extends limitlessly beyond physics to expand its epistemic sphere and integrate physics into the sphere integral to all of life from the innermost to the outermost. Ontology, therefore, is the what that constitutes the whole of God inseparably from function—defining the whole of who and what God is and determining the whole of *how* God is. Without this whole ontology and its integral whole function, the who, what and how of God cannot be present and involved in order to experience as an essential reality.

This uncommon substantive of ontology, which is commonly unknown to physics, is analogous perhaps in a limited way to the newly found Higgs boson in quantum physics (as noted in the last chap.). The presence of the Higgs boson was theorized as essential to hold particles together in a whole for physical matter to exist at all; and until its long-awaited discovery, why physical matter existed was a mystery. The reality of God's ontology holding together the innermost whole of God's existence also remains a mystery until discovered (not theorized) as disclosed to the human context by God (not by human construction or shaping). The sphere of metaphysics and the substantive of ontology certainly go beyond physics, yet they are not in conflict with physics when not biased by the human limits and constraints of these spheres. Going beyond them, the reality of metaphysics and the fact of physics are integrated by the incarnation of the integral ontology and function of the Word for the essential relational outcome to know and understand nothing less than the whole Trinity and no substitutes for the uncommon Trinity.

The truth and reality essential of this relational outcome cannot be conflated with human thought and ideas without reducing the ontology and function of who, what and how the Trinity is. There is simply no continuity with the whole and uncommon Trinity unless trinitarian thinking is congruent with the complex Subject of the Word. Any incompatibility with the disclosures by Subject Word will essentially compose discontinuity in the trinitarian task because this redacts the whole Word for an incomplete Christology, which fragments the Subject or reduces the complex Subject to a simple Object. Here again, anything less than and any substitutes for the whole Word are redactions that can neither be congruent with the whole Trinity nor compatible with the uncommon Trinity.

Likely most problematic for trinitarian thinking in both the economic and immanent Trinity is the issue of personhood, and how to define it without falling into tritheism yet still distinguished from modalism. That means who God is in terms of *hypostasis*, *prosopon* and *persona* do not refer to the Father, the Son and the Spirit as three "individuals" with their intellect, will and freedom—the psychological connotation of 'person' with self-consciousness. So, in the trinitarian theological task what defines them as persons that avoids both having three Gods and having one God in three modes?

Or perhaps even using the word person for the Trinity should be avoided altogether in trinitarian theology and practice, as Peter Phan comments:

> Given the widespread psychological connotation of "person" and given the fact the church cannot control the meaning of words in secular usage, there is a clear and present danger of tritheism, at least at the popular level, in using the word "person" for the Trinity.
>
> The question is whether, in order to forestall this danger, new words should be coined to express what Christians mean by "person" in the Trinity.[1]

The issue about the term person, however, involves more than locution. This gets to the heart of who and what God created humans to be, and to the innermost of the whole and uncommon God in whose likeness humans are created. The uncommon wholeness essential of the Trinity is neither subject to common terms nor amendable to anything less and any substitutes—both of which reduce Son Jesus' whole person and redacts the Word disclosing the *person*-al Trinity.

Redacting the whole Word takes various forms, notably in biblical and theological studies in the academy yet also throughout the church. Even in the early church, Paul confronted the redaction of the Word ("Has Christ been divided *and reduced*?" 1 Cor 1:13) and its results in composing "a different gospel" (Gal 1:6, cf. 2 Cor 11:4). The most consequential repercussion is for the complex Subject in the trinitarian theological task. Once this Subject is fragmented from wholeness and reduced of complexity, *what* emerges is something less than the whole of who, what and how God is, and *who* emerges is some substitute for the trinitarian complexity of who, what and how the Trinity is. (Please note in this discussion and what follows below, the terminology of who, what and how does not correspond exactly to the *what* and *who* used in patristic tradition.) Whether we are speaking of Subject or person, the whole Word cannot be reduced of its complexity without losing the trinitarian who, what and how as Subject-persons essential for the whole and uncommon Trinity.

The issue here is not about semantics and which appellative best describes the Trinity. In terms of knowing the whole Word (as Jesus required of his disciples) and understanding the Trinity (as Jesus expected of the disciples), the epistemological issue is not how much information about the Word to accumulate; nor is the hermeneutical issue how to understand the Trinity in referential parts or their sum. These result in knowing something less and understanding some substitute. God is neither a mere entity to know about nor a simple Object to understand in part. Such knowledge and understanding may appear appropriate for the immanent Trinity but they have no significance to the economic Trinity, whose reality has congruity and thus continuity with the truth of the immanent Trinity. The truth of the latter is not contingent on the reality of the former, yet they are inseparable from each other to constitute the whole and uncommon Trinity. Thus, one must not be emphasized over the other, nor should one be seen apart from the other. Having this congruity is irreplaceable in trinitarian thinking and keeping this continuity is indispensable for the trinitarian theological task.

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[1] Peter C. Phan, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 19.

YHWH declares to boast of knowing and understanding "me that I am," who acts in relational-specific terms involved in "steadfast love, justice" (*ḥesed*, *mishpat*) with the whole of who, what and how God is (i.e. "righteousness," *sedaqah* for *ḥesed*, *mishpat,* Jer 9:24). This legitimate boast only involves knowing and understanding the whole of God who is personally present and relationally involved; and this personal God extended further in physics and deeper in metaphysics by the qualitative relational significance of the complex Subject vulnerably embodying the whole ontology and function of the Word from YHWH. To know and understand the whole Word of YHWH integrally unfolds in only substantive relational terms from the essential relational outcome constituted by the Subject of Jesus' whole person—whose complexity cannot be known by the limits of quantitative terms or understood with the constraints of referential terms. These limits and constraints in trinitarian thinking lead to discontinuity in the trinitarian theological task, which results in incongruity in trinitarian theology and incompatibility in trinitarian practice.

The Subject-person of the Word has been ongoingly subjected to redaction. A major problem that certainly affects trinitarian thinking is shaping the Subject or constructing the person by anthropomorphism. Of course, Jesus' whole person cannot be reduced to the parameters of the human person, which was the basis for Arianism creating discontinuity in early trinitarian thinking. Yet, the person of Jesus also cannot be idealized or hypothesized such that the complex Subject is rendered without the qualitative relational significance necessary to distinguish the Trinity's whole ontology and function. When trinitarian thinking is engaged with qualitative relational significance, the whole ontology and function of the Trinity can be distinguished integrally in the spheres of physics and metaphysics to make unavoidable the personal presence and unmistakable the involvement of the Subjects in the Trinity.

This exposes us to the essential truth and reality of the Trinity, and thereby we are able to engage the whole and uncommon who, what and how of God to know and understand accordingly:

> The Trinity is constituted by three trinitarian Subjects (not Objects), whose integral ontology and function together is known in full (*pleroma*) as whole persons (not modalism) yet also whole-ly understood (*syniemi*, *synesis*) as complex Subjects (not as tritheism, as Paul illuminated the mystery of Christ, Col 1:19; 2:2-3)—the complexity of whom integrates physics and metaphysics beyond their human limits to distinguish beyond comparison (*pala*) the whole and uncommon Trinity. In spite of this full disclosure, the essential reality is that the whole Trinity is not completely explainable by physics alone; and the essential truth is that the uncommon Trinity is not totally understandable by metaphysics. This reality and truth do not render our knowledge and understanding to fideism, but instead we acknowledge human limits and constraints by deferring to the whole Word's disclosures in and beyond the spheres of physics and metaphysics.

Yet in trinitarian thinking, to refrain from attempting to completely explain the Trinity requires epistemic humility, and to be resolved from trying to totally understand the Trinity requires ontological humility. Without this humility in trinitarian thinking, we are relegated to a state of incongruity with *what* God is and to a condition of incompatibility

with *who* God is—neither understanding their essential truth (not in propositional limits) nor experiencing the essential reality (not in virtual constraints) of *how* God is.

The Dilemma: To Be or Not To Be

Trinitarian thinking, the trinitarian theological task, and trinitarian theology and practice are accountable for nothing less than the whole and no substitutes for the uncommon that distinguish the Trinity's presence and involvement in both the spheres of physics and metaphysics. The Trinity's presence has to be personal in order to be meaningful in metaphysics, and the Trinity's involvement has to be by substantive Subjects to be of significance in physics. An impersonal Trinity of conceptual Objects has no significance in the human context and is rendered meaningless even in continuity with Christian tradition—just ask the Samaritan woman at the well. Yet, in continuity with YHWH in the First Testament, 'personal' is not an adjective but the Subject whose ontology functions as the substantive relational verb distinguishing the presence-face (*paneh*) of the personal YHWH. To be congruent with the Word of YHWH is to know this Subject whose relational-specific actions of "love, justice and righteousness in the earth" (Jer 9:24) distinguish in faithfulness "the light of your presence-face" (Ps 89:14-15)—further unfolding the face (*prosopon*) of the complex Subject who distinguishes the presence of the Subjects constituting the personal Trinity (2 Cor 4:6).

To have congruity with the whole Word distinguishing this personal Trinity creates a dilemma for trinitarian thinking because for the personal Trinity of substantive Subjects to emerge in the trinitarian task, the Trinity has *to be*, that is, be Subjects as whole persons (not incomplete or fragmentary like human persons) to constitute the *person*-al Trinity. Anything less and any substitutes will *not to be*. This dilemma is what Jesus presented to the prevailing religious tradition, and which also faced his followers to know and understand. That includes what contemporary trinitarian theology and practice face in the accessible Face (*prosopon*) of YHWH, who opened vulnerably to us to bring the change necessary to establish new relationship (*siym*) together in wholeness (*shalôm*, Num 6:25-26). This essential relational outcome of the gospel is the uncommon whole constituted in the very likeness of the *person*-al Trinity, just as Jesus' person embodied whole and distinguished uncommon (Jn 17:21-26; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; Col 2:9-10).

Unless you assume no substantive significance to the Word in your sphere of physics (and related history) or simply ignore the whole significance of the Word in your sphere of metaphysics, we come face to face with the complex Subject of Jesus' whole person. Even as we engage face to face, our ongoing challenge or dilemma is unrestricting Jesus *to be* or constraining him *not to be*—as Peter struggled face to face with Jesus. In contrast to Peter, when Paul first came face to face with Jesus on the Damascus road, his physics was expanded and his metaphysics was deepened beyond what he could have imagined in his theological task, which centered on "Who are you?" (Acts 9:5). This Subject in these relational terms is the qualitative relational significance of the person, who must by his nature (*dei*) *be* distinguished in the trinitarian theological task and *be* known and understood in trinitarian theology and practice. For Jesus' person to be, he only can define and determine "Who are you?" as Paul, with epistemic and ontological humility, received Jesus' whole person. For Jesus not to be, his person is

constrained to the shape (or stereotype) imposed on him by others, as Peter imposed on Jesus with the consequence "you have no share with me, *my whole person embodying the Trinity*" (Jn 13:8), and along with the other disciples "you still do not know me, *my whole person embodying the trinitarian persons*" (Jn 14:9-10).

"Who are you?" continues to be pivotal for the trinitarian theological task, or at least should be. The whole significance of *who*, however, inseparably includes the integral dimensions of *what* and *how* his person to be in order to compose the full 3-D profile of Jesus' face disclosing "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" (being, nature and presence, 2 Cor 4:6). Underestimating the necessity for the whole significance of who, what and how will diminish the light of Jesus and thus render ambiguous (if not elusive) the knowledge of God's glory. God's full glory is best understood as God's being, nature and presence, which are distinguished in the human context with the integration of physics and metaphysics to disclose:

1. God's qualitative being—the *who* signifying the innermost heart of God.
2. God's relational nature—the *what* constituting the dynamic nature of God in substantive relational terms.
3. God's vulnerable presence—the *how* of God's integral function in intimate relational involvement from the inner out by the heart of God.

Without the full profile of these integral three dimensions, the answer to "Who are you?" is not really known and understood, and the presence and involvement of the Trinity in theology and practice lacks qualitative relational significance.

Furthermore, this whole significance is reduced when who, what and how are separated from each other, or one dimension is overemphasized over the others (e.g. in social trinitarianism) or ignores the others (as in essentialism); likewise, this whole significance is reduced when Jesus is overemphasized for an overly christocentric theology and practice, or as the Spirit becomes the focus in some Pentecostal or charismatic practice. The whole of who, what and how the Trinity is defines the ontology of Jesus' person and determines his person's function. The whole ontology and function of Jesus' person is pivotal, therefore, because his person is the epistemological, hermeneutical, ontological and relational keys to the other trinitarian persons and their *whole* together (not just unity), whereby the *person*-al Trinity is disclosed (namely in the sphere of physics) and distinguished (notably in the sphere of metaphysics). Accordingly indeed, "Who, what and how are you?" must by necessity be accounted for and responded to in order to have the integral essential truth and reality of the trinitarian persons in our theology and practice—the *to be* which is irreplaceable to know the presence and indispensable to understand the involvement of the *person*-al Trinity.

From the beginning John's Gospel established the Word unmistakably "to be" (*eimi*, verb of existence): God, Life (not *bios* but *zoe* integrating physics and metaphysics) and the Light to shine in the human context—disclosing the who, what and how essential to distinguish God's presence and involvement (Jn 1:1-2,4, 9-10,18). For the Word of God to be and "to become" (*ginomai*) vulnerable in the human context also required the inseparable inclusion of YHWH as Father (1:14,18). YHWH as Father was not only a function (as witnessed in the First Testament) but involved also the who, what and how of another Subject constituting an ontology like the Word. The ontology and

function of the Father emerged as Subject-person at Jesus' baptism to disclose the trinitarian persons' presence and involvement together: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Lk 3:21-22, NIV); also distinguished was the presence and involvement of the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:1,14,18). While the person of the Spirit as another Subject is not apparent at this stage, only a subject-person could make a communicative statement such as the Father disclosed to his Son. This is not anthropomorphism speaking for God and shaping who, what and how God is, but rather God's self-disclosure integrating physics and metaphysics beyond what is common and incomplete—the reality requiring epistemic humility to accept and ontological humility to receive. In this relational process composed by substantive relational terms, the who, what and how of the Trinity is unfolding to be the Son, the Father and the Spirit in whole ontology and function.

There is still a related issue causing a dilemma in trinitarian thinking that could be problematic in the theological task (as noted earlier). This involves even using the word *person* in trinitarian theology since individualistic understanding of personhood prevails in Western cultures and tends to dominate global perceptions. The lens of individualism biases, distorts and simply reduces the significance of the word person, such that its use in trinitarian theology gives an insignificant shape to the trinitarian persons in trinitarian theology and practice. Of course, philosophical theology and its doctrine of divine simplicity critiques the reduction of God not only with the use of a word but with the entire concept of 'God is a person', thus has disassociated any knowledge and understanding of God with person. David Cunningham, who argues against the continued use of the word in trinitarian theology, suggests an alternative to consider:

> One can argue that, by strongly asserting the relational and interdependent model of personhood that is specified by the Christian doctrine of God, theology can help postmodernity extend and deepen its overcoming of Enlightenment presuppositions.
>
> Specifically, Trinitarian theology insists that a "person" is *not* an autonomous centre of consciousness, nor a radically private entity; rather, persons are necessarily woven into the lives of other persons. They *participate* in one another's lives, whether they realize it or not. In God, the Three are all bound up in one another to such a degree that we cannot really speak of any One of them without implying something about the other Two as well.
>
> …Thus, if we are to continue to speak of "God in three persons," we must simultaneously define the word *person* in a highly interdependent, relational way: to be a person is to be a relation, or perhaps a multiplicity of relations. Rather than speaking of "individuals," we might better speak of "particular persons." This would help shift the focus away from persons as isolated centres of consciousness, and toward persons as modes in a network—a nexus of relations that is being specified, tentatively and temporarily, for the purposes of identification and discussion, but one that is never truly separable from the whole.[2]

Cunningham addresses only part of the issue, which potentially further fragments the underlying problem from becoming whole. First, his alternative doesn't address the

[2] David S. Cunningham, "The Trinity," in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 198-99.

three dimensional who, what and how integral to the trinitarian persons distinguishing the whole Trinity but only part of their persons. The p-word, however, should not be about locution in the theological task because this reduces discourse to referential terms, even in discussing relational descriptions. Referentialization narrows down the focus, whereby the Subject(s) is fragmented from the whole relational terms composing each Subject of the Trinity. Rather than about locution, the p-word composes the substantive significance of the whole Word's communication disclosing the who, what and how integral to the Subject-persons together as the whole Trinity. Secondly, his alternative appears to compromise the integrity of the uncommon Trinity by deferring to the prevailing common perceptions of the word person, and thus allowing those common limits and constraints to inadvertently influence (with good intentions) defining the trinitarian persons and determining their function more by the term relational rather than distinguishing the trinitarian persons—the whole persons constituting the uncommon Trinity beyond the spheres of physics and metaphysics. The results strain to account for the whole and uncommon Trinity in the theological task and further leave the presence and involvement of the trinitarian persons lacking in trinitarian theology and practice. To account for the presence and involvement of the personal God, we need *person*-al Subjects who are both whole and uncommon. Without the presence and involvement of persons—that is, persons defined from inner out contrary to commonly defined from outer in—the trinitarian Subjects are either reduced from *to be* to more like Objects, or rendered to referential Subjects *not to be* in their qualitative relational significance essential for who, what and how they are. Lacking the relational experience of the Trinity's presence and involvement by their whole persons is the most likely reason that most Christians don't talk about the Trinity in their practice, even for some of them who discuss the Trinity in their theology.

The trinitarian theological task has to understand the qualitative relational significance of the communication by the whole Word in order to know the who, what and how of the trinitarian persons. Foremost, this requires an epistemic process not limited to referential terms and a hermeneutic lens not constrained by a focus on referential language, because the Word communicates only in the relational language and terms essential to God. Only the Word's relational language and terms have the qualitative relational significance to integrally disclose the essential truth and reality of the Trinity's presence and involvement. These epistemological and hermeneutical issues must not be minimized if we want to get to the ontological and functional heart of the Trinity in our theology and practice.

For Jesus to be God was certainly not widely received in Judaism and a major cause of conflict with their God (Jn 5:18; 10:33). At the same time, for Jesus to claim to be a tripartite Subject of God was a source of contradiction to monotheism (Jn 5:19-23; 6:45-46; 7:16; 8:16-19 ,25-29; 10:30,35-38; 12:49-50; 14:9-11,26; 15:26; 16:14-15; 17:21-22). What Jesus communicated to distinguish the trinitarian persons also is the source challenging the trinitarian theological task, because the who, what and how disclosed of the Trinity are not reducible from *to be* to the shape of our limits or negotiable with *to be* otherwise contained in our constraints. This is the epistemological-hermeneutical-ontological dilemma that Jesus presents in substantive relational terms to trinitarian theology and practice: to be or not to be the whole of who, what and how essential to constitute the *person*-al Trinity.

When Jesus responded to charges of blasphemy, Jesus supported his claim to be the ontology of God's Son by highlighting his function with miracles (i.e. works, *ergon*, Jn 10:36-38, cf. the significance of v.31). By integrating his function with his ontology, Jesus illuminated the critical interaction between the spheres of physics and metaphysics that confirms his integral ontology and function. His purpose in this was not for apologetics to transmit information in referential terms, nor for that matter to have mere certainty about the Trinity. His only purpose (composed in relational terms) was for the essential relational outcome "so that you may know and understand that the Father *to be* in me and I *to be* in the Father." This essential relational outcome is requisite for the trinitarian theological task and thus indispensable for composing trinitarian theology and practice with the qualitative relational significance of the following:

> To know who, what and how Jesus *to be* is to understand the whole of who, what and how Jesus is in ontology and function integrally (without reduction) and therefore inseparably (without negotiation) with the trinitarian persons—who, what and how together constitute the whole and uncommon Trinity to distinguish the *person*-al Trinity's vulnerable presence and relational involvement in the human context; anything less is not essential for the Trinity and any substitutes are no longer of significance to the Trinity.

The contemporary trinitarian theological task needs to examine if its engagement is in continuity with trinitarian tradition, or congruent with the whole Word. The two are not always compatible, especially when the former's discourse in incomplete referential terms replaces the Word's communication in whole relational terms. The existence of both epistemological illusion and ontological simulation has consistently countered the essential relational outcome of the Word's disclosures, thereby often misleading those engaged in the theological task. Much to Jesus' frustration about the early disciples' theological task, they didn't experience this essential relational outcome to know and understand Jesus' whole person, since they apparently only focused on one dimension of who, what and how, and also didn't integrate their metaphysics with physics (Jn 14:11). This is the extent of what we can expect in the trinitarian theological task, when we also don't listen carefully to the defining self-disclosures communicated by the whole Word in substantive relational terms—the limits which Jesus also made definitive with the paradigm for theological engagement: "the measure you use will be the *who, what and how* you get" (Mk 4:24). This measure specifically includes the face (*prosopon*) used for Jesus, discussed shortly.

The key for the trinitarian persons to be is the Son. The who and what of the Trinity centers on disclosures by the Son to be in whole ontology, and the how of the Trinity pivots on the Son to be in whole function. The Son's whole ontology and function cannot be minimalized without loss of integrity for the trinitarian persons; nor can it be conceptualized without losing the qualitative relational significance of the Trinity's presence and involvement. The essential truth and reality of the *person*-al Trinity unfolds with the complex Subject of Jesus' whole person, and the qualitative relational significance of his person composes the key for the persons of the Father and the Spirit. Because the whole Word integrates the spheres of physics and metaphysics, Jesus' person cannot be perceived whole from outer in—which is the reason his teachings, miracles and

ministry don't define his whole person, the common definition used for the person in most theological anthropologies. His whole person can only be known and understood by the who, what and how of the Son from inner out, that is, by his whole person signified by the qualitative relational function of his heart in and beyond the spheres of physics and metaphysics. His inner-out person does not invoke an abstract or mystical metaphysical ontology but the person integrating physics and metaphysics in order to be known vulnerably and thus to experience his heart in specific relationship together—in other words, to experience the truth and reality of the glory of the Trinity disclosed in the who, what and how. It was on this specific basis that the early disciples should have but did not know "my person after all their time together."

The Son's inner-out person discloses the Father's and the Spirit's persons from inner out, whose persons become problematic when considered from outer in. In the strategic shift of God's ontological footprints and functional steps, Jesus disclosed to the Samaritan woman that "the Father is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24). Here again, Jesus didn't invoke the metaphysical realm to embed both the Father and his worshipers in an ultimate spiritual condition, but rather unmistakably discloses the qualitative relational basis for connection with the presence and involvement of the Father *to be* in the innermost. 'Spirit' then signifies the Father's whole person from inner out functioning vulnerably by his heart, whose presence and involvement cannot be vulnerably experienced with anything less and any substitutes for this person to be. Moreover, this person cannot be responded to compatibly in worship except by the congruence of our whole person from inner out functioning vulnerably by our heart in the essential relational outcome of this whole and uncommon reciprocal relationship together.

What the whole Word disclosed from inner out is irreplaceable for the presence and involvement of the trinitarian persons to be; and the whole who, what and how of the Word continues *to be* palpable through his relational replacement, the Holy Spirit. We first discussed in the last chapter the Spirit of Truth as the embodied Truth's relational replacement (Jn 14:16-18,26; 15:26; 16:14-15). The complexity of Jesus as Subject-person can only be replaced by the complexity of another Subject-person. Anything less than a person (such as a force, power or even love) and any substitutes for a subject (viz. a simple object) could not serve as a replacement for the Subject of Jesus' person from inner out. Furthermore, anything less or any substitute for the inner-out person essential to the Spirit does not grieve (Eph 4:30) but at best is a mere impassible Object. We must not reduce to referential terms the relational message communicated by Jesus at his ascension to further distinguish the person of the Spirit (Acts 1:8). Neither power nor common perceptions/practices of baptism by (in or with) the Spirit (Acts 1:5) compose the essential relational outcome of the whole of who, what and how is present and involved *to be* and continue *to become* known and understood. This profile of the Spirit is more than personal but an integral person essential for the *person*-al Trinity. If the Spirit's whole person composes our theology, then our practice needs to seek less of the so-called manifestations of the Spirit and pursue his person more in reciprocal relationship together.

As his relational replacement, the Word continues to be palpable because the whole inner-out person of the Spirit "will testify about me, *the whole of who, what and how I to be*" (Jn 15:26, NIV, not simply "testify on my behalf," NRSV). The Spirit will

not merely "guide you into all the truth" with information but will witness to and share with us the heart of the Truth from inner out, whose vulnerable presence and whole involvement will continue to be the essential reality through the Spirit's person, whose whole person from inner out will bring to conclusion the essential relational outcome of the Trinity. Therefore, if the Spirit's person is *not to be*, then the Son' person also will *not to be* in ongoing presence and involvement (as Paul illuminated, 2 Cor 3:17-18; Eph 2:21-22), and the Father's person who sent the Son and the Spirit is also rendered *not to be*. In the condition then of not to be, the Father, Son and Spirit essentially are reduced merely to functions that are insufficient *to be* congruent with the trinitarian persons who integrally—without the separation of their persons or the reduction of any person—together constitute the *person*-al Trinity. Even though in this subtle reduction their functions may have compatibility with YHWH's functions in the First Testament (discussed in chap. 2), they are not defined further to distinguish the 3-D profile of the who, what and how constituting YHWH's face that is vulnerably disclosed in the Second Testament.

This dilemma persists in the trinitarian theological task. When the trinitarian persons are not free to be as disclosed by the Word (as in Jn 1:18), the whole Word cannot be received and thus known in the human context (Jn 1:10-11). Consequently, the embodied Word that is perceived is not the who, what and how of God's glory (Jn 1:14; 2 Cor 4:6). The profile of the Son's face (disclosing YHWH's face) is never the whole profile without the Father's person and the Spirit's; and this whole profile unfolded for us to integrate such as the following:

> Just as Jesus cried out in substantive relational terms "whoever sees me sees *the person* who sent me" (Jn 12:45), this essential statement is irreducible and nonnegotiable and must be integrated in the trinitarian theological task with his essential declaration "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9), and thereby integrated in trinitarian theology and practice because "I am the first and the last, and the living one" (Rev 1:17-18) who speaks to the churches (Rev 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14) for them to "listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches" (2:7,11,29; 3:6,13,22), which illuminates the essential truth and reality "the Lord is the Spirit…seeing the glory of the Lord…the Lord, the Spirit" (as Paul unveiled, 2 Cor 3:17-18) that composes the whole profile of the *person*-al Trinity *to be* whole-ly integrated in trinitarian theology and practice.

To what extent any such integration resolves this dilemma depends directly on what reliability we give to the Word to speak for himself and the Trinity, and thus on what validity we give to whole profile of who, what and how the Word embodied, enacted and disclosed.

Moreover, this dilemma is not resolved by assuming to know the trinitarian persons based on a partial profile composed by their titles, roles and functions—no matter how well integrated. Any identity from a partial profile renders the trinitarian persons to stereotypes, which, even idealized, become idols of human shaping that fragment the whole Trinity and commonize the uncommon Trinity.

The Global Face or Localized Face Masks

The face (presence, *paneh*) of YHWH profiled in the First Testament had been limited (never total), elusive in presence, cast in referential terms, and subjected to human shaping and misrepresentation. Similarly, in spite of the fact that Jesus' face was a historical reality, the profile of his face has been revised historically and it continues to be variable in Christology, with a tenuous profile in trinitarian theology and practice. This condition extends Jesus' frustration with his disciples, to whom he vulnerably disclosed the full profile of his face (*prosopon*) and yet who still didn't know his whole person. Likewise, we are confronted today in the trinitarian theological task either to openly receive the face of the Trinity distinguished by Jesus' face, or to turn (even inadvertently) to anthropomorphism to shape the profile of his and thus the Trinity's face. Anthropomorphism includes the influence from the limits of our surrounding context and the constraints intrinsic to the common in and around us, which we need to account for in our trinitarian theology and practice.

When Christians experience the reality of the Trinity's presence and involvement, their experience will certainly vary in terms of extent and depth. Yet, any variation in this experiential reality neither signifies epistemological and ontological variation in the essential truth of the Trinity, nor composes relational and hermeneutical variation for the Trinity's essential truth. The truth essential of the Trinity is not subject to reduction or negotiation, even though the Trinity's presence and involvement are subjected ongoingly to them in Christian theology and practice. As the majority of Christians has shifted its center from the global North to the global South, the essential truth and reality of the Trinity are increasingly critical in order to know the whole of God's presence and to understand the uncommon God's involvement. Thus, Gerald Bray lays out a challenge for the Majority World with the following:

> Christians in the Majority World are thus faced with a series of questions about the doctrine of the Trinity that they must answer if they are to survive and prosper. The first and most basic of these is straightforward—do we need the Trinity at all? Can we not express our belief in God, Christ, and the Spirit in some simpler way that will avoid giving offense to other monotheists? How important is the traditional doctrine of the Trinity for expressing our Christian convictions? Can we safely leave it to one side as a complicated problem that the ordinary person does not need to bother with? Can it be reconstructed in a way that would help to indigenize it in recently Christianized cultures, making it seem less of a Western import and more attuned to the thoughts and needs of new believers? Or is the doctrine of the Trinity so totally bound up with ancient Greek thought that if the latter is discarded it would collapse of its own accord? In other words, can it be expressed in other thought forms, or is it just the product of a tradition that was once dominant but that is now being challenged and may soon lose its remaining influence in the Christian world?[3]

[3] Gerald Bray, "One God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity" in Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue and K. K. Yeo, eds., *The Trinity among the Nations: The Doctrine of God in the Majority World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 22.

Certainly many Christians in the West implicitly ask themselves many of these questions, all of which amplifies the need of all Christians to experience the personal presence and involvement of the whole and uncommon God.

Whether in the global South or North, the relational imperative directly from the face of Jesus' whole person is: "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). Even Matthew's Gospel, which was directed to monotheistic Jews, closed with the narrative focused on the trinitarian persons who inseparably and integrally constituted the triune God. Global theology needs to return even further back than Christian tradition—including any formulaic misrepresentations of Jesus' relational imperative—and embrace the whole profile of the face of our one God.

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

Now the issue remains, given "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6): Without falling into modalism by keeping the Father, Son and Spirit together through misrepresenting their names, how then can the trinitarian persons integrally converge without composing tritheism, three Gods instead of one triune God? Of course, the face of Jesus ongoingly faced this issue in conflict with monotheists, in tension with would-be followers unwilling to go beyond their limits and constraints, and even in subtle contrast with his disciples not vulnerably involved with his persons face to face.

Serving as a triage for the urgent care needed in trinitarian theology and practice, John's Gospel is unmistakable about the full identity of the whole Word. The evangelist was unequivocal about the essential truth and reality of Jesus' whole ontology and function, which John only summarized in his testimony (Jn 21:24-25). His definitive summary didn't speak *for* (in place of) the Word but clearly echoed (as a reliable witness should) Jesus' communication disclosing his full profile—the profile that by necessity composes the global Face. Unfortunately, many other books have been written since, which try to speak *for* the Word and compose profiles in discontinuity, incongruity or simply incompatible with the full profile of Jesus' whole person.

Jesus was unequivocal with his disciples: "Whoever has seen *my face* has seen the Father. …Believe me that *my person* is in the Father and the Father's *person* is in me" (Jn 14:9-11), and that "the Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30), even as he prayed to his Father "we are one" (Jn 17:22). We need to understand Jesus' definitive declarations both

ontologically and relationally, thus expanding on the Greek concept of *perichoresis* in trinitarian theology.[4] Accordingly in the trinitarian theological task, when Jesus communicated in substantive relational terms to "Believe me," he focuses them/us on the whole who, what and how of his person that can be reliably counted on (per his righteousness) to validly distinguish the face of his whole ontology. In disclosing the ontological footprints and functional steps of the Trinity, Jesus didn't ask for a blind faith without a reasonable basis, as in fideism. That kind of faith in Jesus' reliability has no valid basis. However, to "believe me because of the works themselves" (i.e. his miracles, 14:11), his whole ontology and function were disclosed to them face to face both within the integrated spheres of physics and metaphysics and beyond them. With the reliability and validity of his Face, Jesus also integrally takes their/our epistemic process beyond the epistemological limits of physics and in substantive relational terms provided whole understanding (*syniemi* and *synesis*) beyond the ontological constraints of metaphysics. Therefore, the who, what and how of the Trinity disclosed by Jesus has valid epistemological and ontological significance only to the extent that they are reliably based on his substantive relational terms—which are irreducible to referential terms and nonnegotiable to any human alternatives even with the best of intentions.

In trinitarian theology, for which John's Gospel provides the most reliable basis in relational terms, Jesus' first declaration of "The Father and I are one" (*heis eimi*) essentially revealed the dynamic existence (*eimi*, verb of existence) of their persons dwelling in each other together as one (*heis*). *Heis eimi* signifies the ontological oneness of the trinitarian persons in qualitative substance (or the traditional term consubstantial, *homoousios*), the nature of which cannot be differentiated in any of their persons from the whole of the triune God and differentiated in this sense from each other. Each trinitarian person is whole-ly God and an integral part of the whole of God, implying that each is incomplete without the others (pointing to the depth of pain Jesus shouted on the cross, Mt 27:46). Yet what Jesus disclosed is not the totality of God but only the whole of who and what God is and how God engages relationship.

This again faces us with two related theological issues that cannot be ignored in this discussion. The first issue involves either reducing the persons of the Trinity (intentionally or inadvertently) into the whole of God's being such that they lose their uniqueness or 'personness', the loss of which becomes susceptible to modalism; or, on the other hand, overstating their uniqueness as persons opens the possibility of shifting into tritheism. And merely eliminating the term person to distinguish the Trinity's ontology and function does not resolve this issue. The second issue involves reducing the whole of the Trinity (beyond our context in eternity called the immanent Trinity) into the prominent economic Trinity (directly involved with us in revelation for salvation) so that the transcendent God loses mystery.[5] This is not to imply two different Trinities but to clarify that God's self-revelation is only unfinished and thus provisional—not total, yet whole. Reducing the whole of each trinitarian person or the whole of God's being are consequential not only for our understanding of the triune God but also for understanding

[4] For an overview of *perichoresis* in trinitarian theology, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).
[5] For a discussion on these distinctions of the Trinity, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*.

what is important about our persons and our relationships together in order to be whole in likeness of who, what and how God is.

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

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

Their ontological and relational oneness constituted the embodied Word improbably beyond the explanations of physics and the understanding of metaphysics. The Son is the only one (*monogenes*) from outside the universe to fully exegete (*exegeomai*) the Father (Jn 1:18), not to merely inform us of the transcendent and holy God but to vulnerably make known the Father for intimate relationship together as his family (Jn 1:10-12), just as Jesus prayed (Jn 17:6,26). These relational aspects and functions provide the remaining basis for Jesus' claim that if we see the whole of his person we see the Father—and why the Father made it the relational imperative for us to "Listen to him" (Mt 17:5).

Whether before or after creation, God's action in relation to us is how God engages any and all relationships. This suggests *how* the triune God is throughout eternity because the righteous God cannot be inconsistent with the revelation of how God engages relationship. This does not, however, define or describe the totality of the immanent Trinity, which cannot be reduced to only the economic Trinity—a differentiation which is helpful to maintain to counter reductionism, not to mention to help us stop speaking *for* God. Definitively, we can only talk of God in relational terms of how the Trinity is with us—both before creation in anticipation of us and after with us in the human context to disclose the whole who, what and how of the *person*-al Trinity. The trinitarian theological task must observe these parameters if it is to know and understand the whole and uncommon Trinity.

Furthermore, as noted earlier, when Jesus said "The Father and I are one" (Jn 10:30), this understandably created major conflict for the Jews who were rooted theologically in the monotheism of the Shema (Dt 6:4). Paul certainly was among those whose monotheism would not allow for any variance from the theological basis of their

faith: 'God is one'. Yet Paul was sufficiently open to listen to the response to his query "Who are you?" (Acts 9:5), thereby gaining epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction to receive the essential truth of the *pleroma* (fullness, whole) of God. Jesus' response did not convert the object of Paul's faith to the new God beyond monotheism but rather engaged Paul in the relational epistemic process to open the ontological and relational doors to the Subject of the Shema, who was vulnerably present and relationally involved for reciprocal relationship Face to face to Face. In referential terms this revelation appears to be incongruent with monotheism and thus incompatible with the Shema, nevertheless in relational terms Paul remained irreducibly congruent with monotheism and nonnegotiably compatible with the Shema—as improbable as it rightly appears.

Thomas McCall concludes about Second Temple Judaism that it was reliably monotheistic: there is only one God, and this God is *the* Creator and Ruler. Yet "this account of monotheism is not centered on numerical oneness, nor does it obviously dictate that there is at most one divine person."[6] He quotes contemporary Jewish theologian Pinchas Lapide in support:

> The Oneness of God, which could be called Israel's only 'dogma,' is neither a mathematical nor a quantitative oneness…the difference between gods and the One God is indeed not some kind of difference in number—a more miserable understanding there could hardly be—but rather a difference in essence. It concerns a definition not of reckoning but of inner content; we are concerned not with arithmetic but rather with the heart of religion, for 'one' is not so much a quantitative concept as a qualitative one.[7]

Lapide's distinction between a quantitative concept and a qualitative one is necessary to make yet insufficient to understand Paul's monotheism.

The issue of the Shema involves *what* distinguishes its God and thus *how* this God is distinguished. God is distinguished as 'the only One' entirely from outside the universe, who therefore has no other qualitative kind in the world by which to be compared. 'God is one' means unequivocally 'God is incomparable'. Yet this qualitative distinction of God is insufficient to resolve the issue of the Shema. This exclusive identity is not a concept, quantitative or qualitative—though philosophical theology historically has rendered it as such. Rather the full identity of God emerges from the essential relational outcome of the qualitative being (the who) of God's vulnerable self-disclosure as Subject. Now the complex Subject illuminates the whole and uncommon God's direct relational involvement (the how of God's presence) in communicative action to clearly distinguish the relational nature (the what) of God—disclosing the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the innermost being of the who, what and how of "God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ." Without God's relational response from outside the universe, the whole and uncommon God is not distinguished to us and no one knows of the One who is incomparable. Therefore, the *who* of the Shema is fragmentary unless both *what* distinguishes its God and *how* this God is distinguished are

[6] Thomas H. McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism? Philosophical and Systematic Theologians on the Metaphysics of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 60.
[7] McCall, 60-61.

clearly defined qualitatively and determined relationally. Accordingly, the qualitative and relational whole of this One can neither be reduced to referential terms (even as the Shema) nor negotiated down to human shaping (a numerical One), both of which are contingent on and comparative to what is probable within the universe, and consequently is unable to go beyond self-referencing to distinguish the incomparable One of the Shema.

For Paul, "Who are you?" included "what and how are you?" and thus emerged only as the essential truth of the Subject of the Shema, the One from outside the universe who is incomparable (Col 1:16-17). This was his unmistakable relational experience with the whole and uncommon God and his whole understanding (*synesis*) of the qualitative triune God in relationship (Col 1:19-20; 2:2), whose whole ontology and function became known and understood as the Trinity. Though Paul never became a "trinitarian," his theology deepened into whole monotheism that distinguished the Father, the Son and the Spirit together indivisibly as the whole of God, distinguished only as uncommon. For the whole of Paul and the whole in his theology, it was evident that monotheism and trinitarianism were compatible since the monotheism of the Shema was not about the quantity of one but the quality of the whole in relationship.[8]

In contrast and even conflict with any referential terms ascribed to the Shema, and hereby imposed on monotheism, this distinguishing process of *who, what* and *how* illuminates the language that is both qualitative and thus relational. That is, this is the relational language that the whole and uncommon God necessarily used in ongoing communicative action for self-disclosure only by the One's relational context and process—not by human contextualization in the universe, though disclosed in human contexts—to vulnerably distinguish God's whole presence and involvement. Accordingly, this integrated relational language cannot be reduced to mere quantitative terms in the referential limits of human contextualization—for example, to construct tritheism or to shape modalism, on the one hand, or, on the other, to combat them with propositional truths and doctrinal certainty (including the dogma of the Shema). This relational language and its substantive relational terms are the hermeneutical key that the face of Jesus embodied whole-ly to enact integrally in order to reveal and know the whole and uncommon Trinity, and the functional key for this essential truth only in relationship together. Critically then for the theological task, the qualitative relational significance of this relational epistemic process is the theological key for the access of those relationally involved signified by "little children" and a barrier for those relationally distant typical of "the wise and learned" (Lk 10:21; cf. Mt 21:15-16).

Whole monotheism is illuminated solely in the qualitative from outside the universe and is distinguished only in the relational by involvement directly with us Face to face in the primacy of whole relationship together. The incomparably personal God's definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26) is inseparable from the Face in the Shema and indistinguishable from "the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). In Paul's whole monotheism, the improbable is indeed illuminated and distinguished by the essential truth

[8] Jews, Muslims and other monotheists, who cannot embrace Jesus as divine because that would compromise their monotheism, unfortunately are constrained by a quantitative monotheism which cannot receive the relational revelation of the qualitative whole of God. The consequence is to reduce God from whole monotheism to their referential terms and practice, whereby the holy (uncommon) God becomes commonized.

of “the Father and I are one,” indivisibly together with the Spirit who completes the whole of God’s uncommon thematic relational response and relational progression (1 Cor 2:9-10; Rom 15:13; Eph 3:20-21). Without whole monotheism the gospel is reduced to a truncated soteriology of deliverance—just saved *from*, notably from this situation or that circumstance—without the good news for whole relationship together in likeness of the Trinity. This good news defines the monotheistic shift that transformed (not converted) Paul by his relational involvement with the *pleroma* of God to epistemologically clarify, hermeneutically correct and deepen his monotheism to be whole.

Yet, Paul’s search in his theological task of “Who, what and how are you?” also remains unavoidably in juxtaposition with Jesus’ frustration over his disciples’ theological task “and you still don’t know me.” This tension exists in the trinitarian theological task, which continues to have consequences today in trinitarian theology and practice lacking the full profile of the global Face of God. Unavoidably then, Christians from all nations, tribes, cultures and human contexts also need epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction in order for the face of their one God *to be* whole and uncommon and *not to be* fragmentary and commonized by variable profiles shaped from the influence of their surrounding contexts. This clarification and correction do not emerge from Western theology and practice but unfold from beyond all human contexts, thereby also holding accountable Western profiles. Since the disclosure of the global Face, the face of YHWH can no longer be contained to just the functions of Father, Word and Spirit revealed in the First Testament. Nor can the global Face of the Word from YHWH in the Second Testament be constrained by the localized profiles of variable human shaping (cf. Mt 13:54-57; 16:13-14). The global Face of the one God needs to be understood, claimed and proclaimed in contrast to and even in conflict with localized profiles of God’s face.

Christian faith has to be involved further and deeper than in just the identity of God. If our faith is to go beyond referential terms and its narrowed-down epistemic field, then it has to connect with the front (*paneh*) of the whole of God as Subject—that is, connect directly with the face-presence of God revealed in face-to-face relationship together (cf. 1 Chr 16:10-11; Ps 24:6; 27:8-9; 67:1-2; 80:3,7,19). Therefore, two unavoidable interrelated issues of the face again need to be addressed: (1) subtle anthropomorphism intrinsic to human contextualization and the fragmentary human shaping of God’s face in surrounding contexts, and (2) the face (*prosopon*) functioning as a mask (as in early Greek theatre) that presents the face of Jesus from outer in (as in a stereotype, whose identity may not be congruent or even compatible with the whole person behind the face-mask, even if presented idealized. The first issue is critical for trinitarian theology and the second is crucial for trinitarian practice. And both are interrelated for defining our theology and practice, notably the *prosopon* of Jesus’ person, and also for determining our ontology and function, that is, as either whole or reduced.

A face from outer in is just a re-presentation of a person (e.g. ours in the mirror), which may not be a deception but still cannot be counted on for the whole person. God’s face from outer in (i.e. in referential terms) is a reduced face of an Object that cannot distinguish the whole of God, and thus does not have the full profile from inner out necessary to be distinct from anthropomorphism. Only God’s face as revealed from inner out in substantive relational terms distinguishes the whole of God’s profile as Subject—clearly distinguished from mere parts of God as Object. At the same time, God’s face

from inner out does not distinguish the totality of God, only the whole of God; *whole* is neither totality nor parts.

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

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

This limited parameter or constrained measure becomes problematic for what we talk about for Jesus. For example, Jesus' ethical practice is certainly special and would be beneficial to emulate. Yet, ethics is not what distinguishes the whole of Jesus' person beyond comparison, even though it is an important distinction commonly used for Jesus. There is an essential (critical if you wish) difference between a special Face and the distinguished Face. Both may be associated with the embodied Face and easily conflated. A special Face, however, is attached to Jesus by a narrowing-down process from a conventional view inside the universe that attempts to better explain Jesus, notably from outer in by what he does (hence ethics). Even with good intentions, a special Face is incompatible with the embodied Face from outside the universe; and though complimentary in christological discourse *about* the Face on narrowed-down fragmentary terms, it is still unable to speak *of* the Face in whole terms. The distinguished Face beyond human contextualization emerges only from the Trinity's relational-specific response of grace, in congruence with the whole ontology and function constituting the

full profile of the face of Jesus' person from inner out. Therefore, the distinguished Face can only be distinguished when he distinguishes his Self in the constituting relational context and process of the Trinity's relational grace, just as the embodied Face emerged. What emerges that is distinguished beyond a mere distinction of special?

In its irreducible relational context and nonnegotiable relational process, the Trinity's relational-specific response of grace has unfolded from the beginning in communicative action, which is conjointly qualitative from inner out, yet not mystical, and always in relationship, never isolated or disengaged (e.g. as some spiritual disciplines imply). This nature of the Trinity's relational dynamic is evident in the full profile composing the global Face to fulfill the Trinity's ongoing global relational response of grace with family love to all nations, tribes, cultures and their peoples and persons. What becomes further evident of the Trinity's relational dynamic of *who* unfolds is disclosed in *how* the global Face distinguishes his Subject-person and *what* he distinguishes of the trinitarian persons, the whole who, what and how of which are neither distinguished by nor in a special Face of whatever localized variation. Accordingly, the global church and its related academies must distinguish the global Face from localized faces in global theology and must be accountable for the global Face over localized faces in global practice.

The trinitarian persons distinguished by the global Face are not reversible, that is, reduced to mere functions in order to account for the unity of God; this just falls into modalism. Nor can their persons be reimaged such that their whole ontology lacks the functional significance of substantive Subjects in order to get around tritheism. The complexity of Subject-persons in whole ontology and function, on the one hand, integrates the spheres of physic and metaphysics while, on the other hand, takes their interaction integrally beyond their limits and constraints. This means inescapably for the trinitarian theological task that the complexity of the trinitarian persons distinctly within each other as the ontological One can only be known and understood as the functional Whole constituting their persons together. Beyond this there is no available total explanation epistemologically and complete understanding ontologically, which requires epistemic humility to accept this reality and ontological humility to embrace this truth.

Lacking total explanation exists not only in the Christian faith community. Total explanation also escapes physics itself, even as it approaches metaphysics. In a recent interview revealing some things he can't figure out, the world-famous astrophysicist Stephen Hawking wonders about the mystery of the following: "Why do the universe and all the laws of nature exist? Are they necessary? In one sense, they are, because otherwise we wouldn't be here to ask the question. But is there a deeper reason?"[9] Mystery, in other words, exists wherever and whenever humans are taken to the end point, beyond which only God determines to disclose or to remain inaccessible. Although for some, mystery is invoked either before accounting for or as a substitute for what God has disclosed. Making sense of the cosmos is a central question that maintains any dichotomy between physics and metaphysics. In the search for meaning, physicist Marcelo Gleiser adds: "Much of the tension stems from assuming that there are two mutually inconsistent realities, one within this world (and thus 'knowable' through the diligent application of

[9] Interviewed by Larry King on "Larry King Now," June 28, 2016. Available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/stephen-hawking-greatest-mystery.

the scientific method) and the one without (and thus 'unknowable' or intangible, traditionally related to religious belief)."[10]

In the epistemic process, for Gleiser "both the scientist and the faithful *believe* in unexplained causation, that is, in things happening for unknown reasons, even if the nature of the cause is completely different for each. In the sciences, this belief is most obvious when there is an attempt to extrapolate a theory or model beyond its tested limits…. These extrapolations are crucial to advance knowledge into unexplored territory. The scientist feels justified in doing so, given the accumulated power of her theories to explain so much of the world. We can even say, with slight impropriety, that her faith is empirically validated."[11] Using Newton and Einstein as examples, Gleiser adds: "To go beyond the known, both Newton and Einstein had to take intellectual risks, making assumptions based on intuition and personal prejudice. That they did so, knowing that their speculative theories were necessarily faulty and limited, illustrates the power of belief in the creative process of two of the greatest scientists of all time. To a greater or lesser extent, every person engaged in the advancement of knowledge does the same."[12]

In the epistemic process, mystery can be simply denied or rendered essentially unexplainable, which is insufficient for the trinitarian theological task if that ends the epistemic process without further heuristic engagement. In Paul's whole theology and practice, however, he further illuminated "the mystery of God, namely Christ," for our whole understanding (*synesis*) to know specifically (*epignosis*, not general knowledge) the whole (*pleroma*) of God, "so that no one may deceive you by fine sounding arguments" (Col 2:2-4, NIV). This mystery remained for the disciples in their early theological task, since they didn't put together the pieces of Jesus' self-disclosure to understand (*syniemi*, Mk 8:17-18) his whole person and thus to know the whole who, what and how he is *to be* (Jn 14:9).

Thus, only the presence and involvement of the Trinity speaks for the personal God, the whole of who, what and how we can indeed know and understand; searching for anything beyond that is simply academic, trying to speak for God from human thought and ideas. Therefore, in our trinitarian theology and practice we need to exercise epistemic humility to stop pursuing total explanation of the *person*-al Trinity, and to maintain ontological humility to refrain from grasping at total understanding of the Trinity other than disclosed by the global Face, who provides whole understanding. Only from this humility can we boast of knowing and understanding our whole and uncommon God, which is the boast in contrast to and conflict with any other boast made in the trinitarian theological task (Jer 9:23-24).

The global Face is the full profile of the one *person*-al God, whose presence and involvement in substantive relational terms—not in mere referential terms even if doctrinally correct—integrally distinguish the whole and uncommon Trinity. Therefore, the global Face is universal, and neither subject to change in the who, what and how presented (Heb 13:8) nor subject to revision in any representation. Variable profiles of Jesus' face both fragment the full profile of his person and thereby lose the substantive

[10] Marcelo Gleiser, *The Island of Knowledge: The Limits of Science and the Search for Meaning* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 3.
[11] Gleiser, 4.
[12] Gleiser, 7.

significance of the trinitarian persons in whole ontology and function together. Localized faces, shaped in the global South and North, are no minor issue insignificant to trinitarian theology and practice. Such faces, even as have prevailed in Western theology and practice, only mask the essential truth and reality of the true identity of the whole and uncommon Trinity—for example, by embellishing the Face of the Trinity with incongruent stereotypes and incompatible images, even as idealized. Unmasked, the full profile of the global Face then distinguishes the *person*-al Trinity's uncommon vulnerable presence and whole intimate involvement in the integral relational response of grace and love. This integrally involves the *person*-al trinitarian relational process of family love (as in Jn 14:23; 17:23,26), which needs to be engaged in the trinitarian theological task by Face-to-face reciprocal relationship that composes the relational epistemic process and the ongoing hermeneutic interaction (beyond a circle or cone) necessary in order to know and understand this *person*-al Trinity (as in Jn 17:3).

Without the global Face of the Son one with the Father and the Spirit, we cannot know and understand the *person*-al YHWH, whose ontology and function have further unfolded in the improbable integration of the spheres of physics and metaphysics to distinguish also the inter-*person*-al Trinity integral to the *person*-al Trinity. Nothing less than the global Face and no substitutes by localized face masks have the qualitative relational significance *to be* needed to know and understand the face of YHWH now fully disclosing the whole and uncommon Trinity. And the global church in all its diversity has no valid basis to boast of anything less and any substitutes in its global theology and practice—even with good intentions to deconstruct the dominant influence of the Western church's theology and practice.

The whole Word continues today, integrally together with the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the Spirit's person, *to be*: (1) the epistemological key that unlocks the qualitative relational door to the whole of the triune God, and (2) the hermeneutical key that unlocks the ontological door to the whole and uncommon Trinity. Along with Paul in the theological task, we are accountable to know and understand from inner out the whole "who, what and how you *to be*" in our trinitarian theology and practice. Therefore, in both theology and practice, all Christians are accountable *to be* from inner out, both vulnerably present and relationally involved as the subject-persons together composing one whole and uncommon church family in the qualitative relational likeness of the Trinity—the whole and uncommon Trinity who is disclosed *to be* integrally *person*-al and inter-*person*-al for our person(s) to know and understand without our needing to speculate epistemologically or enhance ontologically.

Chapter 6 The Inter-*person*-al Trinity

This is my Son, whom I love.
Matthew 3:17, NIV
Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit's *person* into the human context.
Matthew 4:1
So that the world may know that I love the Father.
John 14:31

In July, 2016, the latest electronic game "Pokemon Go" was introduced and immediately captivated the global network. By blending two-dimension electronic artifacts with real world vistas, engaging this game has produced what virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) fans call "presence"—which apparently has been satisfying, or at least feeding, a long-awaited yet elusive human need. Essentially, VR and AR didn't emerge with electronic development in the Information Age; in reality they have long signified the epistemological illusions and ontological simulations of so-called presence—even the presence of God.

The presence of God continues *to be* essential in the theological task, and therefore the central focus needing to be constituted in our theology and practice in order to fulfill the human relational need beyond VR and AR. For this essential outcome, however, a 2-D profile of God's presence converging with the real world is insufficient, no matter how captivating the profile and the extent of participation in the real world. In other words, God's presence can be neither a human construction nor even shaped by human terms and still expect to have the whole and uncommon God's presence *to be* involved in the human context to meet the human need existing from the beginning (Gen 2:18; 3:7). Therefore, accounting in our theology and practice for the presence and involvement of this self-distinguishing God requires the full 3-D profile of the Trinity, whose uncommon presence is *person*-al and whole involvement is inter-*person*-al. With this accounting, we can fully claim and truly proclaim: "You show me the path of life. In your presence [face, *paneh, prosopon*] there is fullness of joy" (Ps 16:11; Acts 2:28), thus in the real world "As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness…be satisfied beholding your *3-D appearance*" (Ps 17:15).

The Reality of God's Improbable Theological Trajectory and Intrusive Relational Path

When God disclosed the path of life to the human context, what was made known in the real world integrated the realm of physics with the realm of metaphysics to distinguish the qualitative relational significance of God's life (*zoe*) from inner out beyond the outer-in quantitative of *bios*. For the human context to be connected to the context of God's *zoe* involved the improbable theological trajectory that integrated the realms of physics and metaphysics, in order to constitute the intrusive relational path

necessary for the relational process of God's presence and involvement. The reality of God's presence and involvement beyond VR and AR is contingent on God's relational context and process making this improbable theological trajectory and thereby taking this intrusive relational path. Without this improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path, God's presence and involvement are only speculative since physics and metaphysics are not integrated—which then subjects reality to VR and AR.

The improbable has always been a difficult reality for the human mind to process, which includes those in the church. For example, until the discovery of Australia, people held the conviction that all swans had to be white. Then the first black swan was sighted. Nassim Nicholas Taleb uses this development to illustrate the severe limitation to our learning from observations or experience and the fragility of our knowledge based on predictability. Taleb addresses this prevailing condition which continues due to our dependence on the probability of expectations, with excessive focus on what we know in narrowed-down terms at the expense of learning more (or the whole) from the improbable signified by the black swan.[1] Even the church had difficulty going beyond this limitation to accept the improbable. Until Galileo demonstrated the truth of Copernicus' theory that the planets revolved around the sun, the earth was proclaimed as the center of the universe; and the church branded a heliocentric view as heresy. This limitation also reflects the left brain hemisphere's increasing dominance of the modern mind, according to McGilchrist.[2] The improbability of a black swan then is intrusive to the explainable and predictable, and its intrusion makes us vulnerable unless handled accordingly, that is, narrowed down to explainable and predictable terms. All of this is the dynamic outworking of primacy given to the secondary at the expense of the primary composed by the qualitative and the relational—the dynamic which reflects, reinforces and sustains the human condition underlying it.

Science has been based on a relatively closed system that renders the improbable beyond the realm of reality. Yet, physics has increasingly had to face an expanding universe that has challenged the limits of its epistemic field. Physicist Steve Giddings provides some perspective on the current state of human knowledge:

> Despite all we have learned in physics—from properties of faraway galaxies to the deep internal structure of the protons and neutrons that make up an atomic nucleus—we still face vexing mysteries…. We know, for example, that all the types of matter we see, that constitute our ordinary existence, are a mere fraction—20%—of the matter in the universe. The remaining 80% apparently is mysterious "dark matter"; though it is all around us, its existence is inferred only via its gravitational pull on visible matter.[3]

Since the discovery of the so-called God particle (Higgs boson) this past year—which Giddings also anticipated with hope for the human condition—physics is more optimistic than ever to possible discoveries of new forces of nature. Nevertheless, for this space odyssey to account for reality, it will have to answer the question of 'why' raised by

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[1] Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2007).
[2] McGilchrist, *The Master and his Emissary*, 163-64.
[3] Steve Giddings, "The physics we don't know", op-ed, *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 5, 2010.

physicist Stephen Hawking (noted in the previous chap.). And for that reality, physics will have to expand its epistemic field into the realm of metaphysics—that is, not philosophical metaphysics but the improbable trajectory of the whole and uncommon God.

The integration of the realms of physics and metaphysics is neither illogical nor unreasonable, but in reality is both heuristic and irreplaceable for the epistemic process to move beyond its limits. Physicist Marcelo Gleiser provides clarity of the limits of physics, which calls for any narrow epistemic field to be opened to the metaphysical realm of God's improbable theological trajectory:

> The combination of having a Universe with a finite age—the time elapsed since the Big Bang—and the finite speed of light creates an insurmountable barrier to how much we can know of the cosmos.[4]

> The Universe we measure tells only a finite story, based on how much information can get to us (the cosmic horizon placing a limitation here) and on how much of this information we manage to gather (our technological prowess placing a limitation here)…. The lesson here is distressing: not only are there causal and technological limits to how much we can know of the cosmos, but what information we do manage to gather may be tricking us into constructing an entirely false worldview. What we measure doesn't tell us the whole story; in fact, it may be telling us an irrelevantly small part of it.[5]

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

> The crack in the dam of mathematical perfection exposes the innards of human frailty, ennobling our attempts to construct an ever-growing Island of Knowledge…. We can't always answer our questions by following a closed set of rules, since some questions are undecidable. In the language we have developed here, the truth or falsity of certain propositions is unknowable. As a consequence—at least within our current logical framework—we can't conceive a system of knowledge constructed with the human brain that is formally complete.[6]

And what this lens does clearly make evident is the need for epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction. God's revelation challenges our primary lens and prescribes a lens change when our view is limited and our focus is narrowed by primacy given to human reason and related assumptions (cf. Rom 8:5-6). This neither renders the realm of physics unimportant nor precludes its necessary integration with the metaphysical realm.

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[4] Marcelo Gleiser, *The Island of Knowledge: The Limits of Science and the Search for Meaning* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 79.
[5] Gleiser, 92.
[6] Gleiser, 257.

To acknowledge the reality of God's improbable theological trajectory certainly requires epistemic humility. Yet, for this reality not to be subject to VR and AR, God's trajectory cannot be rendered as a thing, an idea or a simple Object to observe. The reality of God's presence in the human context means nothing less than God's improbable trajectory having traversed the expanding universe in order *to be* directly involved in the human context for relational response to the human relational condition and need. Therefore, the essential reality of God's presence and involvement required no substitutes for the whole and uncommon God as the complex Subject. The uncommon reality of God as Subject is constituted only by God's intrusive relational path. As the whole and uncommon Subject, God acted in the human context to disclose the *person*-al being, nature and presence of the Trinity (the glory of God), whereby the whole who, what and how of God responded in love to our relational condition and need with the qualitative being, relational nature and vulnerable presence of the inter-*person*-al Trinity.

There are essential dynamics unfolding in the human context that are irreplaceable for trinitarian theology and practice. Therefore, we need to have whole understanding (*syniemi* for *synesis*) of the following:

> The reality of God's presence by its nature must be composed by nothing less than the improbable theological trajectory God initiated for God's presence to have qualitative significance beyond any virtual or augmented reality. The reality of God's involvement by its nature must be composed by no substitutes of the intrusive relational path God enacted for God's involvement to have relational significance. For the uncommon Trinity's presence *to be* of qualitative significance then must by nature be *person*-al. And for the whole Trinity's involvement *to be* of relational significance then must by nature be inter-*person*-al. Anything less of the *person*-al Trinity and any substitutes for the inter-*person*-al Trinity reduce both the Trinity's uncommon presence to common referential terms and the Trinity's whole involvement to fragmentary human terms.

Without these integral dynamics, we are faced with the reality of the following in the trinitarian theological task:

> Referentialization of the Trinity's presence—for example by referential doctrines—renders the Trinity impersonal if not de-person-ed. Conjointly, commonization of the Trinity's involvement renders the Trinity de-relationalized, even in acts of serving and love. Consequently, in this narrowed-down process of reductionism, the truth and reality of the whole and uncommon Trinity are no longer distinguished whole and uncommon in the human context for the human relational condition and need—which then revises the truth of the gospel and fragments the wholeness of its essential relational outcome in integral likeness of the *person*-al and inter-*person*-al Trinity.

The fragmentation of wholeness, likely inadvertently and with good intentions, should not be surprising given reductionism's counter-relational workings.

Therefore, what is at stake here is the heart of what holds together Christian theology and practice in the innermost: the whole and uncommon Trinity, apart from whom the essential reality for theology and practice would not exist (cf. Higgs boson essential for physical matter to exist). The reality before us face to face must no longer be limited and constrained. Trinitarian theology and practice will not be whole without the reality of the triune God's intrusive relational path, because without this essential reality the improbable theological trajectory of YHWH's presence has no qualitative relational significance; and thus its reality is rendered as a thing, an idea or a simple Object—the VR and AR of God's presence that simulates God's involvement. In the First Testament, for example, YHWH's essential reality became a virtual reality when the bread for the tabernacle table only simulated "the Presence" (*paneh*, face of God, Ex 25:30, cf. Num 4"7). Though signifying YHWH's presence and involvement, "the bread of the Presence" became a quantitative end in itself augmented by secondary matter without qualitative relational significance (cf. Num 4:7)—bread which David understood as only secondary (1 Sam 21:4-6) to the primacy of God's presence that Jesus embodied on his intrusive relational path (Mt 12:3-8).

The indispensable dynamics of God's integral trajectory to the human context and path in the human context are complex, such that they are both improbable to the realm of physics and uncommon to the realm of metaphysics. Accordingly, the Trinity's trajectory and path can be neither oversimplified in quantified terms nor mystified in spiritual terms. That is, in essential terms of qualitative relational significance, the trajectory of the Trinity's presence is *to be person*-al, or will *not to be*; and the path of the Trinity's involvement is *to be* inter-*person*-al, or will *not to be*. These dynamics necessitate by their nature the vulnerability of the whole person for all those involved and engaged by this essential relational process, which was initiated, embodied and ongoingly enacted integrally by the *person*-al and inter-*person*-al Trinity. Vulnerable persons are indispensable for the trinitarian theological task and vulnerable persons in whole relationships together are irreplaceable for trinitarian theology and practice. This challenges, if not confronts, the reality of both the faith we claim and the gospel we proclaim.

Just as acknowledging the reality of the uncommon Trinity's improbable theological trajectory requires epistemic humility, integrally receiving the reality of the whole Trinity's intrusive relational path requires ontological humility. Yet, to enact this intrusive relational path also involved ontological humility by the Trinity. The response to the human condition by the Trinity's intrusive relational path is the relational involvement of love, the interaction of which only transpires between persons in relationship together, notably in intimate relationship together. For the whole and uncommon Trinity to enact this love required ontological humility of the trinitarian persons in order to basically 'love us downward'—that is, by necessity in a vertical process (not condescending) in contrast to the horizontal love inter-*person*-ally within the Trinity. This distinction of the process of love is critical for understanding the inter-*person*-al dynamics within the Trinity and what defines and determines the trinitarian persons (discussed below).

The integral trinitarian relational process necessary for loving us downward is the relational dynamic initiated and enacted by the *person*-al Trinity as Subject (Jn 3:16), whose intrusive relational path was embodied by the Son (Phil 2:6-8; 2 Cor 8:9) to

constitute the uncommon vulnerable presence and whole relational involvement of the inter-*person*-al Trinity (Jn 1:14; 17:26, cf. 5:18-23). Without the Trinity's ontological humility *to be* relationally involved to love us downward, there is no gospel and God's presence at best can only exist as VR and AR—an ontological simulation of what many skeptics would rightfully call an epistemological illusion. The whole and uncommon reality, however, before us face to face, heart to heart, person to person cannot be limited to anything less and constrained by any substitutes.

The Inter-*person*-al Dynamics Integral to the Trinity

Understanding the reality of the *person*-al Trinity's improbable theological trajectory and the inter-*person*-al Trinity's intrusive relational path enters into the heart of the gospel, which dwells in the innermost of the whole and uncommon Trinity. For this gospel to warrant the full significance of good news for the human condition and relational need, it must be distinguished beyond the limits and constraints of human contextualization and thus composed by the vulnerable qualitative presence and intimate relational involvement of the Trinity. The Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement are distinguished only in the trinitarian relational context and composed only with the trinitarian relational process initiated, embodied and ongoingly enacted by the dynamics integral to the Trinity. In other words, the reality of the Trinity's presence and involvement is not augmented (as in AR) by these dynamics but constituted by these essential dynamics integral for the innermost and thus to the heart of the Trinity.

In the tradition of trinitarian theology, the dynamics identified have been defined notably by the concept of *perichoresis*: the coinherence, mutual interpenetration and indwelling of the trinitarian persons that distinguish the unity of three-in-oneness composing the triune God. Issues of modalism and tritheism prevailed in the trinitarian theological task, and perichoresis has served arguably to describe the Trinity, both economic and immanent. Signified in this concept are inner communion and the community of relations essential for that communion. Whether perichoresis is a definitive concept or just an augmented idea, the dynamics integral to the heart of the Trinity still remain to account for the reality of the Trinity's presence and involvement. If the Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement are not accounted for integrally in the trinitarian theological task, then what significance do definitions, descriptions and even explanations have for our theology and practice, not to mention for the human condition and relational need?

The reality of the triune God's presence and involvement is composed by dynamics that involve the following questions necessary to account for in the trinitarian theological task in order to have distinguished the heart of the Trinity for our theology and practice *to be* whole in the innermost:

1. Why did YHWH enter the human context?
2. How did the triune God engage the human context?
3. What is disclosed of the Trinity while in the human context?
4. To what extent does this revelation also define the immanent Trinity, the triune God in transcendence, the totality of YHWH?

Accounting for the reality of the whole and uncommon Trinity is indispensable to distinguish God's presence and involvement from virtual and augmented realities.

1. Why did YHWH enter the human context?

When the LORD God created the cosmos, the earth was not left unattended as if detached by a deistic God. In creating the world, the name of YHWH as a substantive relational verb involved dynamics that included the Spirit and the Word (Gen 1:1-2; Jn 1:3; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:2). After many chronological years (i.e. in human time), human persons were created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27). The human person in the image and likeness of God required more than an individual from outer in to fulfill who, what and how the person was created *to be*. Human ontology and function in YHWH's image and likeness as a substantive relational verb required the whole person from inner out, who is integrally constituted in whole relationship together with other whole persons in likeness of YHWH's ontology and function as Spirit, Word and Father—whereby human creation was made whole (Gen 2:18,25).

This wholeness was reduced and fragmented by human persons in the primordial garden (Gen 3:1-10). The subtle reduction (beyond disobedience) of wholeness emerged with reductionism's epistemological illusion: "You will not die…your eyes will be opened…*persons* saw that the *resource* was good…a delight to the eyes….Then the eyes of both were opened *from outer in*." This fragmented the wholeness of persons and relationships with ontological simulation in a substitute likeness: "you will be like God…to be desired to make one wise…knew that they were naked *from outer in*…and made *masks to cover their person*…hid *their persons* from the presence of the LORD God."

The loss of wholeness for persons and relationships is critical to comprehend in the trinitarian theological task and cannot be diminished or minimalized without its corresponding effect on trinitarian theology and practice. The above relational consequence set into motion the human condition and relational need for persons to be made whole from inner out in the relationships together of wholeness in nothing less than and no substitutes for the likeness of the whole and uncommon YHWH. In other words, human persons and relationships needed salvation to be restored to wholeness, and YHWH as the substantive relational verb responded accordingly in essential dynamics with the whole of who, what and how YHWH is as Spirit, Word and Father. The only reason that YHWH distinguishably entered and intruded into the human context was for this relational-specific purpose and outcome.

The dynamics involved to compose this relational purpose and outcome are complex in that they involve both the whole Trinity, on the one hand, and specific trinitarian persons, on the other hand, without necessarily distinguishing between them. Paul illuminated that the process to save us was decided even before creation, the decision which he highlighted the Father as making (Eph 1:3-7). Yet, the Word was also present (Jn 1:2; 8:58) and participated in all that emerged (Jn 1:2-4; Col 1:16-17). Without engaging the discourse on the theological issues of predeterminism, election and irresistible grace, there are interpersonal dynamics underlying why YHWH entered the

human context that are more primary and thus significant and relevant for the theological task. The unfolding of these dynamics distinguishes the whole and uncommon Trinity.

The initiation of the LORD God's relational response of grace—both antecedent to and resistible by human dynamics—put into motion dynamics that are integrally *person*-al and inter-*person*-al. So, the triune "God loved the world…in order that the world might be saved" (Jn 3:16-17). These essential dynamics have been oversimplified in function, narrowed down in soteriology, and simply fragmented in theology and practice.

Salvation in the OT always involved deliverance by YHWH, which involved situations and circumstances but was always about the covenant relationship together (Ex 15:2; Isa 12:2; 43:3,11; Hos 2:19,20,23) in the covenant of love (Dt 7:9). YHWH's liberation (redeeming the chosen people) from Egypt epitomized the covenant of love enacted by the whole ontology and function of YHWH (not just by his strength) for this reciprocal relationship of love, even though land was involved (Dt 4:35-38; 7:7-9). In the covenant relationship, having YHWH's own presence and relational involvement was always intended to be the people's portion (Jer 51:19; La 3:24; Ps 119:57) and, conversely, YHWH's people were expected to be YHWH's portion in reciprocal relationship (Dt 32:9); "portion" (*heleq*) was always about persons and building covenant relationship, not about land and building nation-state. The more common salvation in the people's terms might have included the covenant relationship but was always foremost about the situations and circumstances. "To save" (*yasa*) in the OT connoted initially the aspects of physical deliverance (cf. Nu 10:9; Jdg 2:18) and later denoted its deeper theological meaning and its encompassing qualitative relational significance (cf. Isa 45:20-22)—which the Psalmist failed to find (Ps 119:123), that is, in situations and circumstances but pursued in relationship, as this Psalm seems to describe.

"To save" (*sozo*) in the NT denotes also to make whole, which necessitates not only being saved *from* the reductionism of persons and the fragmentation of relationships, but inseparably also saved *to* what is necessary to be whole. "To be apart" from this *whole* is the human condition, to which the triune God's thematic relational action has been responding since the original creation (Gen 2:18). This is the dynamic relational nature of salvation history and the ongoing relational involvement of the Trinity's creative activity (ultimately disclosed in Jesus' resurrection) for the new creation covenant relationship together. After the original creation, this notably emerged with the faithful of Israel as "the people of God" chosen by the triune God's grace. Then it extends to all the nations as "the kingdom of God," and thus born from above by the Trinity's relational work of grace as "the children of God": those redeemed by the Son and transformed by the Spirit from old to new, and adopted by the Father as "the Trinity's new creation family"—composed only in the new covenant relationship together necessary to be whole in the ontological image and the functional likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity.

The relational-specific purpose, process and outcome of why the now-distinguished Trinity intruded the human context can only be constituted by nothing less than the *person*-al Trinity and no substitutes for the inter-*person*-al Trinity—all of which then only emerge and unfold as the essential reality, neither virtual nor augmented. Knowing 'why' is indispensable for distinguishing the heart of the Trinity's presence and involvement in trinitarian theology and practice. In the trinitarian theological task, anything less of the Trinity's uncommon presence and any substitutes for the Trinity's

whole involvement reduce the Trinity's ontology and fragment the Trinity's function; and the consequence renders the Trinity to the ontological shaping and functional significance of mere human thought and ideas. That is to say, if we want to account fully for the Trinity's presence and involvement, we need to define not only *who* is present but also *what* is present; likewise, we need to define not only *who* is involved but also *what* and the *how* of the Trinity are integrally involved.

Therefore, in the trinitarian theological task, not to understand the Trinity's whole ontology and function uncommon to the realms of physics and metaphysics, then requires a revision, conflation or even an unintended distortion of why the Trinity is here, and thus who, what and how the Trinity is in engaging all persons and relationships in the human context.

2. How did the triune God engage the human context?

The psalmist summarized God's prevailing engagement: "It was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them" (Ps 44:3, NIV). The Second Book of Isaiah adds: "The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (Isa 52:10). To bare (*chasaph*) is to uncover and thus to be vulnerable, that is, not just in the actions of God's right hand and arm in quantitative terms from outer in. What constituted God's engagement involved being vulnerable with "his holy arm" in qualitative terms from inner out that distinguishes "the light of your face" in full profile, whole-ly engaged in the relational involvement of love. In other words, how the triune God engaged the human context could only occur and recur when God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement ongoingly concur in congruence *to be* integrally whole and uncommon.

For the whole and uncommon Trinity to engage the world in love essentially involved contextual, structural and systemic factors. These interrelated and overlapping factors simply must be illuminated in the trinitarian theological task in order for there *to be* wholeness in both the Trinity's ontology and function and thus in human ontology and function in likeness.

Contextual Factor: We cannot referentialize the difference and gap between the whole and uncommon Trinity and the fragmentary and common nature of the human context—that is, and expect the outcome in our theology and practice to be of qualitative significance. Whole and uncommon are both incongruent and incompatible with fragmentary and common, and any hybrid between them always results in the reduction of the former. This was the contextual factor facing the Trinity that had to be resolved to engage the human context. So, how did the Trinity bridge the insurmountable gap with the common yet *to be* vulnerably whole as the Uncommon?

The only understanding we have for how the Trinity resolved this contextual issue is that God so loved the world. But, for God to love also involved a contextual issue that cannot be reduced to comparative common terms or a hybrid process. Love (*ḥesed* and *agapē*) is not defined in fragmentary terms merely by what God does in situations and circumstances—notably with sacrifice epitomized by Christ dying for our sins. Rather God's love ("his own love," Rom 5:8, NIV) engages the primacy of how *to be* involved in relationship vulnerably with nothing less than the Uncommon and thus no substitutes

for the whole of who, what and how the *person*-al and inter-*person*-al Trinity is (cf. Eph 2:4-6, 17-18).

To distinguish the Trinity's own love, Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you" (Jn 15:9). The Father, "This is my Son, whom I love" (Mt 3:17, NIV). And the Son engaged the human context in that love "so that the world may know that I love the Father" (Jn 14:31). To turn this love essential to the Trinity into the narrow notions of sacrifice and to center it merely on dying reduce the uncommon Trinity to common terms and thereby fragment the whole Trinity to the parts of trinitarian sacrifice. Certainly in the human context, the trinitarian persons' sacrifice was important but not defining. This is a critical distinction to make in the trinitarian theological task. How the trinitarian persons love each other is neither defined by sacrifice nor determined by it. Their love only involves the primacy of their relationship together and the intimate depth of their whole persons integrally connected with each other inter-*person*-ally. No matter how personal that God's love may be perceived, that love must by God's whole and uncommon nature be vulnerably inter-*person*-al in order to engage the human context.

By the Trinity's own love—which is irreducible to fragmentary parts and nonnegotiable to common terms—the insurmountable gap with the common was bridged by the uncommon trinitarian relational context of family, whereby the contextual issue was resolved in the whole trinitarian relational process of family love. The disclosure of the whole profile of the Trinity is only distinguished in this uncommon trinitarian relational context, and any human contextualization of the Trinity neither resolves this contextual issue nor identifies the whole and uncommon Trinity. There are, however, still structural and systemic factors to account for. These interrelated and overlapping factors further illuminate the inter-*person*-al dynamics essential to the Trinity and what is disclosed for us to know and understand the whole and uncommon Trinity—including the immanent Trinity without reducing it to the economic Trinity.

3. What is disclosed of the Trinity while in the human context?

The essential dynamics integral to the heart of the Trinity unfolds in the human context by the intimate depth of the trinitarian persons integrally involved with each other in love inter-*person*-ally. These dynamics converge in Jesus' disclosure: "the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10:38; 14:10-11), and on this ontological basis, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9; cf. 1:18; 12:45). What Jesus disclosed illuminates the existing structure basic to the composition of the Trinity, which counters tritheism; furthermore, it also points to the systemic process at the heart of the Trinity that counters modalism.

Structural and Systemic Factors: In Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17), he further defined "we are one" (*heis eimi*, 17:11,21,23) to make primary the trinitarian relational context of family in the primacy of the trinitarian relational process of family love that distinguishes the Trinity's ontological oneness. What distinguishes ontological oneness involves more than unity and such notions, for example, used to bring together diversity or heal fragmentation. Ontological oneness distinguishes the Trinity's basic structure that constitutes the trinitarian family together as the ontological One. Therefore, each trinitarian person neither exists separate from nor is distinguished apart from the

ontological One, the we-are-one trinitarian family—the innermost essential for the Trinity *to be*, without which the Trinity does not exist.

The ontological One structures the Trinity as family such that the trinitarian persons cannot be reduced or fragmented to tritheism. Each trinitarian person is the who, what and how of God without distinctions that would reduce their persons from that whole, thus they are inseparable. In the structure of their essential identity, on the one hand, if you see one trinitarian person you have seen them all; while on the other, to see the whole Trinity is to see the trinitarian persons because each person is distinct in the whole but not distinguished from the whole. This constitutes the main basis for Jesus' startling claim to his disciples: "anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9, cf. 12:45). He did not merely resemble (*homoioma*, cf. Rom 8:3) the Father but is the exact copy (*charakter*, cf. Heb 1:3) of the Father. Moreover, as proclaimed in the First Testament (Isa 9:6), the identity of the Son was also specifically named (*qara*) both Father and Counselor to distinguish (*pala*) the trinitarian persons' ontological oneness in their basic structure. This proclamation also pointed unmistakably to the relational Whole (*shalôm*) that the Son would enact—which determines how "righteousness and *shalôm* will kiss each other" (Ps 85:10).

The structure of the ontological One also overlaps with the systemic factor of the trinitarian persons in relationship together. To review and expand on Jesus' words (discussed in the previous chap.), his disclosure "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (*en eimi*, Jn 14:10-11) further reveals the ongoing existence (*eimi*) of their persons in the presence of and accompanied by (*en*) the other; and this integral bond thereby also signified their essential relational oneness constituted by their intimate involvement with each other in full communion composed by whole relationship together—just as their relationship demonstrated at his baptism, in his transfiguration, in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, along with the presence and function (*meno*) of the Spirit. Their deep intimacy in relationship together (*en eimi*, the relational Whole) composes the relational significance of the Trinity's systemic process, which is integrated with the qualitative significance of the structure essential to their ontological oneness (*heis eimi*, the ontological One) to constitute the trinitarian persons in the indivisible and interdependent relationships together to be the whole and uncommon Trinity as inter-*person*-al family. This essential integral interaction of the ontological One and the relational Whole provides further functional understanding of *perichoresis*.

The Trinity's uncommon ontological and relational oneness exclusively (sui generis) constituted the embodied Word, the only one (*monogenes*) from outside the universe to fully exegete (*exegeomai*) the Father (Jn 1:18)—not to merely inform us of the transcendent and holy God but to vulnerably make known the Father for intimate relationship together as his family, as Jesus prayed (Jn 17:6,26). These essential relational dynamics and ontological functions provide the remaining basis for Jesus' claim that if we see the whole of his person we see the Father—and the basis for the Father's relational imperative "Listen to my Son."

What is disclosed of the Trinity is indispensable for understanding the Trinity:

> The essential nature of the Trinity's structure as the ontological One is integral for the Trinity *not to be* fragmented into three Gods (tritheism), because the trinitarian persons do not function as individuals apart from their being the ontological One—

> even though each trinitarian person has a *person*-al identity. Rather, the Trinity functions in the synergism of the Trinity's systemic process wherein the relational Whole is greater than the sum of the trinitarian persons—which is integral for the Trinity *not to be* reduced to mere modes of function (modalism) instead of whole persons. This essential structure and synergistic systemic process integrally define the *person*-al Trinity and determine the inter-*person*-al Trinity.

What we are exposed to is vital for trinitarian theology and practice:

> The inter-*person*-al dynamics of the trinitarian relational context of family are enacted by the systemic trinitarian relational process of family love at the heart of the Trinity as the relational Whole, and are composed in the essential structure of the Trinity as the ontological One, in order to fulfill the Trinity's essential relational purpose and outcome to make whole the human condition in uncommon likeness.

The inter-*person*-al dynamics of the trinitarian family converged in their *person*-al nature when Jesus enacted the depth of his love with the footwashing of his family (Jn 13:1-8). The family love Jesus enacted—not as Teacher and Lord but with his whole person as Son—was also enacted by the Father's and the Spirit's presence and involvement, who always function together as the ontological One and relational Whole. Thus, when Jesus declared (as he told Peter) "Unless I *am intimately involved with you and you relationally respond*, you have no share with me," the *me* by his nature always involved the whole of who, what and how the Trinity is. That is, Jesus' whole person involved the nature of the interdependent overlapping factors that distinguish the trinitarian relational context of family (contextual factor) by the trinitarian relational process of the relational Whole (systemic factor) in the essential reality of the ontological One (structural factor). Accordingly, to "share with me" and thus be relationally involved with the Trinity is neither optional nor negotiable in trinitarian theology and practice.

In the OT, YHWH was ongoingly involved with the people of Israel in situations and circumstances. Yet, the presence of YHWH was accessible only in limited contexts such as Mt. Sinai (Ex 19:11,20) and the tabernacle (God's dwelling place, Ex 25:8,9; 40:34). This structure promoted a common perception of God as holy and transcendent. The incarnation functionally changes the context of God's accessibility while maintaining the qualitative integrity of the triune God as holy and transcendent. As Jesus disclosed, "I came from the Father" (*ek*, out of, indicating motion from whom he belongs), "and now I am…going back to the Father" (Jn 16:28, NIV). The motions "out of" and "back to" are a singular relational dynamic that is integrated in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love. The incarnation of Jesus' whole person in uncommon life and practice was the continuous relational action fulfilling the whole and uncommon Trinity's thematic relational action beginning with the first Adam. Thus the transcendent triune God was present now as never before and accessible in a further and deeper way. This reflects the strategic shift in the Trinity's thematic action (discussed in chap. 3), which unfolds in the essential reality of the *person*-al and inter-*person*-al Trinity.

Therefore, it is important to understand in trinitarian theology and practice: In Jesus' claim that seeing him was seeing the Father, he disclosed in this twofold ontological and relational reality (ontological One and relational Whole) the importance of both what constitutes the full glory of God's qualitative being and relational nature, as well as what matters most to God in God's presence and involvement. God's self-disclosure embodied in Jesus was the *who* (being) and *what* (nature) of the whole of God, and about *how* (presence) God only engages relationships to be Whole. It is in this trinitarian relational context by this trinitarian relational process that the whole and uncommon Trinity's thematic action is extended in response to the human condition for relationship together as family in family love. While those who respond back cannot experience ontological oneness (*heis eimi*) with the uncommon Trinity, they can have in reciprocal relationship the experiential truth and reality of relational oneness (*en eimi*) together with the whole Trinity. The essential reality of *en eimi* with the Trinity is the definitive basis for Jesus' followers to have *heis eimi* with each other together as his church family for the ontological oneness to be whole in likeness of the Trinity (*kathos*, in congruence with the Trinity, Jn 17:21-22).

Jesus' whole person improbably embodied and uncommonly enacted who, what and how the *person*-al and inter-*person*-al Trinity is in his relational-specific work of grace only for relationship together and to make relationships together whole, the Trinity's whole family distinguished by the Trinity's relational terms. His defining family prayer constitutes his followers together in this qualitative relational significance—composed in the primacy that matters most to the whole and uncommon Trinity. Therefore, his church family lives "ontologically one," *heis eimi* together, *en eimi* the relationships with each other necessary to function to be "relationally whole" in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity.

As this whole and uncommon God's presence and involvement are distinguished in the human context by the reality of the inter-*person*-al Trinity—in contrast to and conflict with virtual and augmented realities—there is still another question to account for.

4. To what extent does this revelation also define the immanent Trinity, the triune God in transcendence, the totality of YHWH?

The basic structure holding together the innermost of the Trinity without fragmentation and the synergistic systemic process at the heart of the Trinity need further clarification for the Trinity *to be* more defining in our theology and determining of our practice.

For the whole and holy God to engage in relationship with human persons involves a very distinct relational process appearing both paradoxical and incompatible, which illuminates what matters most to God and therefore how God engages relationships. In ultimate relational response to the human condition "to be apart" from inner-out wholeness (as in Gen 2:18,25; 3:7), the Father extended his family love to all human persons in the embodied trinitarian person of the Son (Jn 3:16-17). Yet, unlike how the trinitarian persons love each other in the relational Whole by a "horizontal" relational process between equals, the inherent inequality between Creator and creature

necessitates a vertical relational process. This vertical process would appear to preclude the Trinity's intimate involvement in relational oneness (*en eimi*) as family together to be whole; that is a logical conclusion from interpreting this process apart from the whole relational context and process of God. Additionally, critical to this vertical equation, the incompatibility between the holy God and sinful humanity compounds the difference of inequality between us. The perception of God's ultimate response from a quantitative lens might be that God reached down from the highest stratum of life to the lowest stratum of life to bridge the inequality, which certainly has some descriptive truth to it yet is notably insufficient both for understanding the Trinity and for an outcome beyond this intervention—that is, for the relational outcome of what Jesus saves us *to*. Deeper understanding emerges from the horizon of the Trinity's relational context, which must have primacy in the hermeneutic of the trinitarian theological task.

Of most importance and significance, God pursues us from a qualitatively different context (holy, uncommon) in a qualitatively different process (eternal and relational) to engage us for relationship together only on God's terms in the trinitarian relational context of family and process of family love. That is to say, unlike the Trinity's "horizontal" involvement of family love, the triune God had to initiate family-love action vertically downward to us in response to our condition "to be apart" in order to reconcile us to come together in relationships *en eimi* the whole and uncommon Trinity. The enigma of this response of the so-called economic Trinity's relational grace can only be understood in a vertical process, which must be distinguished not only from the "horizontal" relational process of how the immanent Trinity loves among themselves, but also from the horizontal process implied in the human reductions of the vertical process that signify renegotiating our relationship with God on our terms. This subtle renegotiation of terms—functionally, not necessarily theologically—pervades Christian and church practice (cf. the early disciples and the churches in Jesus' post-ascension discourse, Rev 2-3). Yet, without the immanent and economic Trinity's family-love initiative downward, there would be no compatible relational basis for the Trinity to connect with us or for us to connect with the Trinity, both initially and ongoingly.

In the essential dynamics of this qualitative relational process, the whole and holy Trinity can only love us by a vertical relational process because of the inherent inequality between us. The Trinity, both immanent and economic, can only engage in relationships as the whole and uncommon Trinity, which Jesus embodied and enacted yet never on any other terms, specifically ours—which points to our not having ontological oneness (*heis eimi*) with God, even with a theology of deification. Nevertheless, in spite of the Trinity's obvious distinguished (*pala*, beyond comparison) ontology and superior position and authority, in loving us downward the Son came neither to perpetuate nor to expand the quantitative and qualitative differences between us, though his working assumptions never denied the extent of those differences. Nor did he come to condemn us to or bury us in those differences (Jn 3:17). In the qualitative difference of the Trinity's family love, the Son's whole person vulnerably disclosed how the Trinity engages relationship for relationship together to be whole, which the Spirit's relational work extends for us to experience this primacy of relationship further and deeper to completion. It is vital for us to understand the implications of this qualitative relational process engaged by the whole and uncommon Trinity (cf. Jesus' footwashing)—both in our relationship with the Trinity and in our relationships together as church family, then in our relations with others to

embody the good news of whole relationship together, all of which must be composed by persons and relationships in likeness of the *person*-al and inter-*person*-al Trinity.

For the eternal and holy triune God in transcendence to be extended to us in family-love action downward required the enigma of some paradoxical sense of "reduction" of the immanent Trinity (cf. Jn 17:4-5; Phil 2:6-8), suggesting a quantitative-like reduction (not qualitative) of the totality of YHWH that appears incompatible to God's whole integrity. That is, the inter-*person*-al dynamics of the *person*-al Trinity's family love downward underlie the basis for the functional differences in the Trinity revealed to us in the Scriptures—functional differences present in the Trinity even prior to creation, yet differences only about the economic Trinity in relation to us (Jn 3:16, cf. Rom 8:29, Eph 1:4-5, 1 Pet 1:2, 1 Jn 4:9-10). These differences among the trinitarian persons appear to suggest a stratified order of their relationships together. Jesus indicated that "the Father is greater than I" (*meizon*, greater, larger, more, Jn 14:28) only in terms of quantitative distinctions for role and function but not for qualitative distinction of their ontology as the immanent Trinity. There is indeed a stratification of function in the economic Trinity, yet their different functions only have significance in the relational process of enacting family love downward to us. The inter-*person*-al dynamics of their functional differences correspond to only the economic Trinity, and Scripture provides no basis for a stratified order of relationships in the immanent Trinity in eternity, the triune God in transcendence. While the economic Trinity integrally reflects the immanent Trinity to distinguish the Trinity's wholeness, the immanent Trinity cannot be reduced to the economic Trinity as if to define the totality of YHWH. Yet, in contrast, others such as Karl Rahner simply state that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity, which is simply an assumption without biblical basis.[7]

In other words, the Trinity's functional differences are provisional and cannot be used to define the relational ontology of the totality of the Trinity, the triune God and YHWH. To make that application to the total God yet to be disclosed can only be an assumption, the theory of which says more about ourselves than God. What the embodied whole of the Word of God vulnerably disclosed helps us understand the Trinity sufficiently to preclude such an assumption. That is, what is disclosed is provisional for the following:

> Specifically to distinguish the Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement in the human context in order to (1) know the righteousness (the who, what and how) of God, and (2) to understand the glory (the qualitative being, relational nature and vulnerable presence) of God, for the relational-specific purpose and outcome of the primacy of relationship together.

Relationship together in the human context required the whole Trinity *to be* engaged, neither just fragmentary parts of the Trinity nor also the essential totality of the Trinity. Therefore, what is disclosed enacts the righteousness and glory of God that can neither be reduced to common terms nor totally elevated to transcendence.

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[7] See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen for a summary of this view and its variations in *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

As the Word of God who created all things, the Son embodied the most significant function of subordinating himself in order to extend family love downward (as Paul highlighted, Phil 2:6-8). This subordinate action of family love is further extended downward by the Spirit as the Son's relational replacement to complete what the Son established (Jn 14:16,18,26). God's initiative downward in the Son, however, must be distinguished from a view that the transcendent God needed an intermediary (i.e. Jesus) to do this for God—a form of Arianism that claims Jesus is less than God in deity, being or substance (*ousia*). Despite any apparent sense of quantitative reduction of God to enact family love downward, the incarnation was the nothing-less-and-no-substitute God revealing how the whole and uncommon Trinity engages in relationship. This is the complete Christology that composes the epistemological, hermeneutical, ontological and functional keys for the inter-*person*-al Trinity, which distinguishes the whole ontology and function of the *person*-al Trinity.

The relational context and process of the Trinity's focus on human persons (even before creation) and involvement with us (during and after creation) compose the functional differences in the Trinity necessary for the triune God in transcendence to love us downward. Each of the trinitarian persons has a distinct role in function together as the relational Whole and ontological One to extend family love in response to the human relational condition. Therefore, it is in this uncommon relational context and whole relational process that the Trinity's functional differences need to be examined to understand the significance of trinitarian uniqueness. There are **two approaches** to the Trinity's differences that we can take.

The **first approach** is a static and more quantitative descriptive account of their different functions and roles in somewhat fixed relationships. With this limited lens, for example, gender complementarians use this approach to establish the primacy of an authority structure within the Trinity that extends to marriage and usually to church. Meanwhile, many gender egalitarians use the same approach but come to different conclusions about the meaning of the Trinity's functional differences—sometimes even to deny them; yet their primary focus remains on human leadership and roles also, though who occupies them is open to both genders.

As an example of the first approach, Wayne Grudem argues that the differences in trinitarian relationships indicate a functional difference of roles (not substance) that subordinated the Son to the Father eternally. Even though the Son was begotten of the Father, Grudem emphasized that this difference in their relationship *never began* ("begotten of the Father before all worlds"), which includes the authority of the Father over the Son and the Spirit as always part (also "never began") of their eternal roles (on the basis of Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4).[8] Grudem affirms the equal substance (*homoousios*), value and personhood of the trinitarian persons while maintaining their differences in authority and roles. This certainly mitigated an Arian controversy. Yet it is problematic to say that the trinitarian differences indicated by begetting and authority "never began."

The term "begotten" is associated with two terms used in the Bible. The most common Greek term is *monogenes*, traditionally rendered "only begotten" with reference to Jesus (Jn 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 Jn 4:9). *Monogenes* means unique, one of a kind, one

[8] Wayne Grudem makes his argument to support a complementarian gender view of human relationships in *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Sister, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 405-418.

and only, and is more accurately rendered "only one," "one and only"—defining the unique relationship of the Son with the Father without implying any element of procreation. We will discuss the significance of this designation for Jesus shortly.

The other term for begotten occurred initially in a messianic Psalm about the Christ: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" (Ps 2:7, NIV, *yalad*, meaning become the father of). This verse is quoted in the NT (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5) with the Greek term *gennao* meaning to beget, become the father of, generate, originate. This term more directly involves the function of begetting and distinctly defines the relationship between the Father and his Son. Yet when the Father said "today I have become your Father," the term for "today" (*yom*) denotes both a point in time and a period in time. This certainly indicates that God became the Father of the Son from some point by a purposeful action—action, however, neither to be reduced to the procreation in Arianism, nor to overlook and fail to understand its purpose.

If the Trinity functions in subordinate relationships, either this structure always existed eternally (without beginning as Grudem argues) or it was generated/originated (at some point, even if an enigma). It is disputable, however, to think these two can validly be combined. If the structure always existed, the Father did not initiate it by his action or authority; like God, it just is and always was. If generated of the Father at some point, the question "why so?" remains unaddressed—which unanswered leaves open the door to some form of Arianism or even modalism.

The quotes of Psalm 2:7 in the Second Testament help us understand the Father's purpose to beget (*gennao*) the Son. In Acts, when asked to speak words of encouragement Paul summarized YHWH's ongoing faithful response to their condition "to be apart" and the good news that the triune God fulfilled the promise to be the family of God now in Jesus by repeating the reality of Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:15ff). The whole truth and reality of this gospel is established further in the Hebrew epistle by clearly defining the equality of the Son in the being (*hypostasis*) of God (Heb 1:2, 3) and his superiority even to the angels (1:4ff). In this comparison with the angels, what is the significance of quoting Psalm 2:7 and also quoting "I will be his Father and he will be my Son"? This distinguishes the essential reality of being God's family, disclosing that the Father never said this to the angels. They did not inherit the Father's family name and its rights (1:4), apparently indicating that even though they were God's personal messengers and servants they were not full family members. But, as Paul declared in Acts, this is the good news for the rest of us. And this full membership in the Trinity's family is secured by the Son as the great high priest (Heb 4:14ff). Yet this is not about role identity because Psalm 2:7 is quoted again (5:5) to focus on the relationship-specific purpose and action of the Father to extend the Son to us in the primary function of relationships in family love (not priestly duties)—the primary relational purpose and primacy of relational action to reconcile us to the whole and uncommon Trinity so that we can be full members in the Trinity's family.

Role identity and function are not fixed ends in themselves but always serve the whole and uncommon Trinity's design and purpose even before creation, and thereafter as God's thematic relational response to the human condition of persons and relationships "to be apart" from wholeness. We also need to understand this more deeply about authority and the function it serves. In addition, the fact that the Father's authority existed even before the foundation of the world does not automatically mean that it never began.

While eternity exists beyond our time and space, whatever exists or took place before this created context are not necessarily "eternal without beginning" (e.g. as with angels). "Never began" has to be assumed by Grudem without biblical support.

Besides assuming "never began," Grudem also gives a static and quantitative descriptive account of these functions and thus ascribes fixed roles to the trinitarian persons in their eternal relationship. In this narrow framework the eternal nature of these different roles constitutes the basis for eternal subordination in the Trinity and establishes the primacy of trinitarian relationships in its authority structure. It is a major assumption, however, to define the immanent Trinity by the economic Trinity (which includes before creation)—again, an assumption without biblical basis. Since this authority structure and these fixed role differences are also used as the basis for constituting gender relations in marriage and the church, this implies the same authority and role differences to continue eternally for men and women—even though marriage does not exist in heaven. Furthermore, we need to see if authority and subordination adequately define the primary function of the relationship of God within the Trinity and if they signify the primacy given to the relationship of God as revealed by the Trinity in relationship with us. Certainly, if we lack understanding of what is disclosed of the Trinity in the human context, we are freer to render the immanent Trinity, the triune God in transcendence and the totality of YHWH to the shaping by human though and ideas.

Based on these fixed role differences, what becomes primary in how God engages in relationship? For Grudem, it is the following: "The doctrine of the Trinity thus indicates that equality of being together with authority and submission to authority are perhaps the most fundamental aspects of interpersonal relationships in the entire universe."[9] I can understand his bias for order and for the need for constraint on free will. Most certainly, there is need for this. Yet Jesus vulnerably revealed more than this about relationship both within the Trinity and for us as his church family. These are the primary aspects of the Trinity's disclosures that need *to be* put together in the trinitarian theological task in order to understand (*syniemi* for *synesis*) the whole and uncommon Trinity and the *person*-al and inter-*person*-al Trinity's desires in the big picture of trinitarian theology and practice.

Moreover, Grudem identifies the differences in authority among the Father, Son, and Spirit as the only interpersonal differences existing eternally in the Trinity. In his approach, he needs this difference not only to define the trinitarian persons but also to determine how they will engage in relationship. Moreover, he boldly declares that functioning without this quantitative distinction "would destroy the Trinity."[10] Since Grudem defines the person by one's role—a critical reduction of the person both trinitarian and human—in order to differentiate the trinitarian persons and to delineate the way they relate to one another, he argues that without this they would be identical not only in being but also in role and how they relate together. This stands in contrast to Jesus' declarations noted earlier.

Further, Grudem uses the name "Father" and "Son" to support these distinctions. Though he suggests a biblical basis that only indirectly may define the immanent Trinity (in eternity), he makes assumptions for a syllogistic-like conclusion: since "those names

[9] Grudem, 429.
[10] Grudem, 433.

have belonged to the Father and the Son forever"[11] then their roles are also eternally theirs "*because* by nature they have always existed as Father and Son,"[12] therefore the Son is eternally submissive to the Father "simply because He eternally existed as Son, and submission to the Father was inherent in that relationship."[13] Yet he does not account for the Son as messiah also being named "Everlasting Father" (Is 9:6), not to mention Psalm 2:7 noted earlier. Besides making assumptions for the immanent Trinity based on the economic Trinity (as revealed even before creation), Grudem does not adequately put the pieces of revelation together to understand (*syniemi*) the triune God because he focuses on the quantitative distinctions from reductionism—which have fragmented persons and relationships from their wholeness from the beginning. Such a narrowed-down epistemic process is always inadequate to understand the qualitative ontological One and relational Whole of the Trinity.

The **second approach** to the Trinity's differences, contrary to the first static approach, is more dynamic and qualitative, focusing on the relational process in which their differences occur. While this approach fully accounts for the different functions and roles in the Trinity, the relational significance of those functions involves how each of the trinitarian persons fulfilled a part of the total vertical relational process to love us downward as the whole Trinity, not as different parts of the Trinity in common terms. In this qualitative approach, the primary significance shifts from authority (or leadership) and roles to love and relationships. This distinction is pivotal for trinitarian theology and practice. When churches assess their practice in likeness of the Trinity, they need to understand which approach to the Trinity they use. For example, the successful and highly regarded churches in Ephesus and Sardis certainly must have had an abundance of leadership and role performance to generate the quantitative extent of their church practices, yet Jesus' post-ascension discourse exposed their major deficiency in the whole and uncommon Trinity's primary function of love and primacy of whole relationship together (Rev 2-3, to be further discussed in chap. 9). And, as Jesus made evident in this discourse, central to a church's assessment is the awareness of the influence of reductionism—the influence that increasingly diminishes qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness, notably by giving priority to secondary matters deemed more important.

Understanding the relational significance of trinitarian differences requires more than the descriptive accounts of authority and roles. The more dynamic and qualitative approach by necessity goes beyond this to the qualitative whole of persons and relationships and the dynamic process in which they are involved to be whole and not fragmentary. This requires the theological framework (both for the Trinity and anthropology) that redefines persons not based on what they do (notably in roles) or have (namely authority) but on who and what they are in qualitative relational significance together, thus understanding relationships as a vulnerable process of the relational involvement in family love (as at Gethsemane) between such whole persons (unreduced by what they do or have) and not as relationships based merely on authority and roles (basically reductionist distinctions, erased by Jesus' claims with the Father). These

[11] Grudem, 413.
[12] Grudem, 438.
[13] Grudem, 435.

qualitative relationships help us understand what is necessary to be whole as constituted in the Trinity, and whereby the church is to live whole in likeness of the Trinity—which requires a compatible theological anthropology that perhaps may even be antecedent for a congruent trinitarian theology.

When relationships are defined and examined merely on the basis of roles, the focus is reduced to the quantitative definition of the person (at the very least by what one does in a role) and a quantitative description of relationships (e.g. a set of roles in a family) according to the performance of those roles. This is usually in a set order for different roles (as in a traditional family) or even mutually coexisting for undifferentiated roles (as in some non-traditional families). Yet this limited focus does not account for the variations that naturally occur in how a person sees a role, performs that role and engages it differently from one situation to another; for example, compare Jesus' initial prayer at Gethsemane of not wanting to go to the cross (Mt 26:39) with what he had clearly asserted in various situations earlier. Nor does this narrowed focus account for the inter-*person*-al dynamics composing the relational process in which all of this is taking place—the process necessary for roles to have relational significance; for example, examine Jesus' intimacy with the Father at Gethsemane and assess its significance for his role to die on the cross.

Moreover, when primacy is given to the Father's authority and role to define his person and also to constitute the relationships within the Trinity, this tends to imply two conclusions about the Trinity—if not as theological assumptions, certainly in how we functionally perceive God. The first implication for the Trinity is that everything is about and for primarily the Father (an assumption congruent with patriarchy); the Son and the Spirit are necessary but secondary in function to serve only the Father's desires. While there is some truth to this in terms of role description, the assumed or perceived functional imbalance reduces the ontological oneness (*heis eimi*) of the triune God, the ontological One. Interrelated, this imbalance creates a further assumption or inadvertent perception of the Son's and Spirit's roles as being "different thus less" (as in identity deficit) than the Father's, thereby operating in stratified relationships preventing the relational oneness (*en eimi*) necessary for the whole of God, the relational Whole. This points to the second implication for the Trinity, that such primacy of the Father also tends to imply a person who exists in relationships (presumably together) yet without interdependence and essentially self-sufficient from the other trinitarian persons—similar to the function of individualism in Western families. This unintentional assumption or perception counters the ontological One and relational Whole by reducing the relational ontology of the triune God as constituted in the Trinity, the innermost relational nature which is at the heart of who, what and how the whole (not totality) of YHWH is (as emerged in the covenant).

These two implied conclusions (or variations of them) about the Trinity are problematic for trinitarian theology, notably when integrated with Christology. They also have deeper implications for our practice of how we define persons, how we engage in relationships together and how these become primary for determining the practice of church, and in whose specific likeness our church practice is. While the priority of the Father's authority and role must be accounted for in the revelation available to us, our understanding of trinitarian functional differences deepens when examined in the relational context and process of the uncommon Trinity and the whole Trinity's thematic

relational response of grace to the human condition in the vertical process of love. God's self-revelation is about how the whole and uncommon God engages in relationship as the persons of the Trinity in response to us for relationship together in God's whole—the ultimate disclosure and response of which were embodied by the whole of Jesus.

As noted earlier, Jesus clearly disclosed that his purpose and function were for the Father. Their functional differences indicated a definite subordination enacted by Jesus. Even going to the cross was his submission to serve the Father—not us, though we benefit from it—as the ultimate fulfillment of the Trinity's family love and the redemptive means for adoption as the Father's very own in his family together without the veil of distinctions. The critical question about Jesus' functional position that we need to answer is what this subordination signifies. Directly related to this is why the Son is designated as "the only One" (*monogenes*, Jn 1:14,18) of God. Does this define fixed roles in a hierarchy or does it signify the relational process of the whole *person*-al and inter-*person*-al Trinity loving downward necessitating transitional subordination among the trinitarian persons, in order to make a compatible relational connection with us, and, thereby, us with the uncommon Trinity with the relational outcome of belonging to the whole Trinity's family?

A hierarchy is about structure and is static. But authority (*arche*) is not merely what someone possesses, rather it is always exercised over another in relationship, thus it involves a dynamic relational process. Hierarchy and authority conjoined together need to be understood as the dynamics of stratified relationships that involve more than order and includes how relationships are done. Stratified relationships can range from the oppression in power relations at one extreme, to degrees of defined vertical separation in relations, or merely to distance in relationships caused by such vertical distinctions and related comparative differences, intentionally made or not. How can Paul deconstruct distinctions and differences for those 'in Christ' if the Son himself is permanently defined and determined by them (Gal 3:28), or erase them from the image of God if the ontology of the Trinity is defined by them (Col 3:10-11)? At whatever point in this range of stratified relationships, the relationships together would be less intimate than what is accessible in horizontal relations; this is the significance of Jesus' teaching on leadership in his church family, not reversing a stratified order (Mk 10:42-45), as demonstrated also with his involvement in footwashing. Does a stratified relationship represent the sum of Jesus' relationship with his Father, or do his two earlier declarations about him and his Father define the whole of their relationship?

The ontological One and the relational Whole, which is the *person*-al and inter-*person*-al Trinity, is what Jesus' whole person embodied in his life and enacted in his practice throughout the incarnation. Though unique in function by their different roles in the whole and uncommon Trinity's thematic relational response to the human condition, what primarily defines their trinitarian persons are not these role distinctions. To define them by their roles is to define the trinitarian persons by what they do, which would be a qualitative reduction of the triune God to fragmentary common terms. This reduction makes role distinctions primary over the only purpose for their functional differences to love us downward, consequently reducing not only the essential who, what and how of the Trinity but also the qualitative relational significance of what matters most to God, both as Creator and Savior.

For whole knowledge and understanding of this God—the *syniemi* of the enigmas disclosed by God—role distinctions neither define the trinitarian persons nor determine their relationships together and how they engage in relationships with each other. God's self-disclosure is about God's essential relational nature and function only for relationship together, which required the whole of God's righteousness and glory. Thus, YHWH defines our boast of knowing and understanding God only on the relational basis "that I am the ontological One and relational Whole who enacts the relational reality of my love, justice and righteousness (the who, what and how I am) in the human context" (Jer 9:24). As disclosed of the persons of the Trinity, namely in the narratives of Jesus, the following relational summary can be made:

> The Father is how the Trinity engages in relationship as family—not about authority and influence; the Son is how the Trinity engages in relationship vulnerably—not about being the obedient subordinate; the Spirit is how the Trinity engages in relationship in the *whole*—not about the helper or mediator.

In their functional differences, the Trinity is always loving us downward for relationship together—to be whole, the triune God's relational Whole. This is the relational basis for the ancient poet to declare: "Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace *as wholeness* kiss each other" (Ps 85:10, NIV).

The primacy of whole relationship together distinguishes the ontology and function of the Trinity. Anything less and any substitutes for the Trinity give primacy to secondary aspects, however important that aspect may be to the gospel. Therefore, we cannot utilize how each trinitarian person discloses an aspect of how the whole and uncommon Trinity engages in relationship for loving us downward, in order to make reductionist distinctions between them by which to eternally define their persons and determine their relationships. The consequence of such a reductionism of the whole Trinity alters the embodied-enacted whole of the uncommon Trinity's theological trajectory and relational path, with repercussions reverberating to the innermost of YHWH's ontological footprints and the triune God's functional steps. This reduces the primacy of the whole and uncommon Trinity's desires, purpose and actions for redemptive reconciliation from our relational condition as well as ongoing tendency "to be apart" from wholeness as persons and relationships—our default condition and mode. Furthermore, this reduction removes trinitarian *person*-al identity from the relational context of the eschatological big picture and from its relational process constituted by the primacy of how this God engages relationship within the Trinity and thereby in relationship to us. The shift from this primacy of the relationship of the inter-*person*-al Trinity reduces who, what and how God is and thereby can be counted on to be in relationship that is, such a shift reduces the righteousness of God, who thus can't be counted on. The gospel then shifts away from this primacy and the essential truth of whole relationship together to a referential truth of a truncated soteriology—thereby transposing this essential relational reality to a virtual or augmented reality. Given this consequence, what significance would the Trinity have for our relational condition?

What irreducibly constitutes this nonnegotiable primacy in the Trinity's ontological One and relational Whole is how they function in their uncommon relationships *in* the whole of God *as* the whole of God and *for* the whole of God. This

functional-relational oneness of the whole and uncommon Trinity is not signified and cannot be constituted by their authority and roles. Primary function in the distinctions of authority and roles would not be sufficient to enable Jesus to say seeing him was seeing the Father, whereby their whole ontology and function is distinguished in the human context by their essential relational dynamics. Their whole ontology and function discloses unmistakably the whole Trinity, the uncommon nature of which discloses only provisional knowledge yet whole understanding of the immanent Trinity, the triune God in transcendence and the totality of YHWH.

YHWH already told Moses that the totality of YHWH would not be revealed. Whether that just meant not to be disclosed to Moses or also to the human context then and now can be arguable. Paul illuminated that Christ is the *pleroma* (fullness, complete, whole) of God (Col 1:19; 2:9). His theological discourse in human contexts was based primarily on the whole of God's communication to him in the relational context and process initiated by Jesus and deepened by the Spirit. In Paul's Christology the incarnation set in motion the relational dynamic embodying the *pleroma* (fullness, complete, whole) of God (Col 1:19), the *pleroma* of the Godhead (Col 2:9), who is the image of God (Col 1:15) vulnerably revealing the whole of God's glory (qualitative being and relational nature) in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6) only for relationship together as God's family (Eph 1:5, 13-14; Col 1:20-22). God's relational action 'in Christ' involves these complex theological dynamics, which often need the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of *tāmiym* (the whole relational terms in the covenant, Gen 17:1) for their wholeness. Paul's theology of wholeness, and thus his gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15), is the underlying dynamic of his *pleroma* Christology. The irreducible and nonnegotiable dynamic of wholeness is what Jesus constituted *in* the incarnation of his own person and, likewise, constituted for human persons (both individually and collectively) *by* his incarnation in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes for all life and function (both for his person and human persons, Col 2:9-10). Thus, for Paul what was disclosed was nothing less than the whole of God. Even as a monotheist, what he discovered in his theological task of the *pleroma* of God unmistakably made his monotheism whole.

Paul was likely aware that the psalmist declared: "Righteousness will go before YHWH, and will make a path for his steps" (Ps 85:13). And indeed, who, what and how of the Trinity determined the functional steps disclosed on the Trinity's relational path—not just fragmentary parts of who, what and how the Trinity is but the whole of who, what and how the Trinity is. This wholeness of God is the qualitative relational significance of *pleroma*, which is definitive of the whole Trinity without having to distinguish inclusively the totality of the uncommon Trinity.

Therefore, the totality of YHWH remains undisclosed but YHWH's ontological footprints and the triune God's functional steps have been revealed in whole ontology and function. Unmistakably then, the whole and uncommon Trinity continues *to be* vulnerably present and intimately involved integrally distinguishing the trinitarian relational context of family as the *person*-al Trinity in order to enact and bring to completion the trinitarian relational process of family love in the inter-*person*-al Trinity. Nothing less and no substitutes compose trinitarian theology and practice in the whole and uncommon; and the truth and reality essential of the Trinity's who, what and how unfold to constitute the whole gospel and fulfill the uncommon relational response of

grace necessary to make whole the human condition and relational need.

Social Trinitarianism

Contemplate this statement on the Trinity's presence and involvement:

> The whole and uncommon Trinity does not give what the human context wants, only what humanity needs.

Certainly in our theology and practice, God's presence has been defined in various forms, much of which misrepresents God with idealized images and stereotypes. God's involvement also has been determined in various ways in order to be compatible or even congruent with our diversity, which reflects what we commonly want more than what we basically need. In getting what we want over what we need, we have to examine how much this reflects, reinforces and sustains the human relational condition in the human context in general and our surrounding contexts in particular—which perhaps not so obviously would be deficient to fulfill what's needed.

When we ask, however, what God offers us with the presence and involvement as the Trinity, this theological trajectory has not been well-defined and this relational path has not been whole-ly determined. Integrally defining the presence of the Trinity in the human context and determining the Trinity's involvement with humanity is the purpose of social trinitarianism in theology and practice, or at least should be. Yet, for social trinitarianism to fulfill this purpose requires it to define the Trinity's uncommon theological trajectory and to determine the Trinity's whole relational path, such that the ontological footprints of the *person*-al Trinity and the functional steps of the inter-*person*-al Trinity are the essential reality experienced by human persons and relationships—the reality needed over any other virtual and augmented realities wanted. Therefore, contemplate further that there can be no hybrid combining essential reality and virtual-augmented realities, and thus no hybrid between what's needed and wanted—just as Jesus clarified and corrected (Jn 6:25-66).

Issues of Significance

Historically in trinitarian theology, social trinitarianism emerged as the solution to better define what had been variable understanding of the term *person* as applied to the Trinity. The perception of person apart from relationship increasingly became insignificant to account for God's presence and involvement, and understandably so if the Trinity has anything of substance to offer—namely in the qualitative relational significance of love. This lack of significance was problematic, for example, for an indigenous theological framework in North America, which Randy Woodley clarifies for Western thinking:

> Native American views of God are defined almost completely by relationality rather than by function. In other words, the different aspects of the Trinity are not determined by their function so much as by how they relate in community. Recent

> theological discussions are focusing more on sacred community/*perichoresis* in developing an understanding that the ontology of the Trinity is not to be found in the persons but rather in the relationship (Zizioulas, Barth, Moltmann, Boff, Grenz, Olson). In terms of common dialogue potential with First Nations theologians, this is a positive change from the usual Western form.[14]

Yet, understanding trinitarian persons in relationship together also became problematic when that understanding did not account for the essential reality of relationship beyond a concept, a simulation or other referential terms (like the noun relationality and the adjective relational). For example, *perichoresis* has struggled in trinitarian theology and practice to have qualitative relational significance both for the relational Trinity and human relationality in likeness. These lacks evidence not only a lack of understanding of the person but also of relationship, both of which reflect the influence of reductionism. Therefore, the major issues for social trinitarianism in the theological task involve the need to fully understand both the Trinity and what *social* constitutes.

This primacy of whole relationship together in the Trinity is irreducible to human contextualization and nonnegotiable to human shaping of relationships. The integral relationship of the Trinity is the righteousness of God—that is, the whole who, what and how of the Trinity's presence and involvement—which Jesus clearly made the primacy for his followers as whole persons from inner out to seek first in God's kingdom-family to distinguish them from reductionism (Mt 6:33), namely from those functioning from outer in (5:20ff). This primacy of the trinitarian persons in whole relationship together is neither reducible for the Trinity nor negotiable for human persons and relationships. Without this primacy of wholeness, persons become reduced to outer in, defined by secondary matter (such as roles), whereby relationships are fragmented and engaged accordingly. Thus the primacy of whole relationship together in the Trinity is irreducible to human contextualization and nonnegotiable to human shaping of relationships. This is the full significance of what Jesus made primary for all his whole followers to seek first, making all else secondary even if vital for daily life (Mt 6:25-32).

In creation, God constituted the human person in the image of the qualitative innermost of the whole and uncommon God signified by the function of the heart, not in dualism but in wholeness (Gen 2:7). The trinitarian persons and human persons in likeness cannot be separated or reduced from both this essential quality and relational substance and still be defined as whole persons. This wholeness signified by the heart is the innermost the Father seeks in worshippers (Jn 4:23-24) *to be* compatible with his uncommon presence in order to experience him (cf. "see God," *horao*, Mt 5:8) in the primacy of relationship in whole relational terms, and what the Son searches in church practice to be whole (Rev 2:23). This primacy of the heart challenges the level of our qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness and our assumptions of theological anthropology. The qualitative significance of the heart is an integral necessity for the primary definition of the person from inner out, both trinitarian and human, not the secondary definition of what they do (roles) or what they have (authority) from outer in,

[14] Randy S. Woodley, "Beyond *Homoiousios* and *Homoousios*: Exploring North American Indigenous Concepts of the *Shalôm* Community of God" in Gene L. Green, Stephen T. Pardue and K. K. Yeo, eds., *The Trinity among the Nations: The Doctrine of God in the Majority World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 46.

and therefore is vital for both human ontology and the ontology of the Trinity. In other words, persons lose significance when detached or distant from their heart—that which integrates and holds together persons and relationships in their innermost.

The Cappadocian fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa, between 358-380) formulated the initial doctrine of the Trinity by distinguishing the trinitarian persons (*hypostasis*) from substance (*ousia*) to clarify relationality; but they advanced the person as ontologically more important than substance in order to give priority to the relationality of the triune God—establishing a social trinitarianism—though for the Cappadocians their persons were based on begottenness and spiration. While this significantly countered the prevailing idea of God's essence as unrelated (or nonrelational), complete Christology does not allow reducing the importance of the qualitative relational substance essential to God—that is, the innermost of God who functions from inner out in the primacy of the heart for the primacy of relationship. Jesus vulnerably disclosed his whole person and the substantive relational quality of his heart, while interacting together in relationship with the Father to make definitive both whole persons as necessary to define the *person*-al Trinity (the ontological One) and whole relationship together as necessary to determine the inter-*person*-al Trinity (the relational Whole).

This lack of understanding the ontological One and relational Whole in trinitarian theology creates a gap in understanding the Trinity as well as what constitutes social trinitarianism, and as a result a gap in church practice based on likeness of the Trinity. Complete Christology provides whole understanding of the qualitative relational significance of God to intimately know and understand the relationship essential in the Trinity.[15] In trinitarian theology, the predominant explanatory basis for relationality has been the Greek idea of *perichoresis*: the interpenetration of the trinitarian persons in dynamic interrelations with each other. The importance of *perichoresis* has certainly been critical for our perceptual-interpretive framework (notably of Western influence), and it could serve as a conceptually more complete term to define the ontology of the Trinity. But, as noted previously, this idea of relationality needs further and deeper understanding because it lacks the functional clarity to be of relational significance both to more deeply know the whole Trinity (not just fragmentary parts) and to intimately experience who, what and how the Trinity is in relationship together—which are the relational basis and ongoing relational base of Jesus' defining family prayer for all his followers (Jn 17). The Eastern church, rooted in trinitarian theology from the Cappadocians, appears to lack this functional clarity in their ecclesial practice based on the Trinity.[16] If this is accurate, I would explain this as primarily due to the functional absence of the whole person in their relationships together as church—given the reduction of *ousia* inadvertently diminishing the function of the heart and as a result unintentionally minimizing intimacy together, perhaps by substituting icons. This shape of relationship together would not be the likeness of the Trinity. The whole of Jesus provides this clarity in how he vulnerably

[15] For a broader development of this aspect of trinitarian theology, see my overlapping study *The Person, the Trinity, the Church: the Call to be Whole and the Lure of Reductionism* (2006), online at http://www.4X12.org.

[16] For a modern Eastern view conceptualizing personal being as a communal ontology of the Trinity and the church, see Eastern theologian John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

functions with his person in relationships throughout the incarnation—signifying his intrusive relational path—for which he holds his church accountable by family love as demonstrated in his post-ascension discourse on ecclesiology to be whole (summarized in Rev 3:19).

This clarifies the existing weakness in trinitarian theology that continues to diminish or minimalize trinitarian practice. The major problem in the trinitarian task is having an insufficiently defined person to try to determine the significance of relationship composing the Trinity. In other words, the significance of relationship—and thus the significance of social trinitarianism—is contingent on the significance of the person present and involved in the relationship. The qualitative significance of the trinitarian persons defines the *person*-al Trinity that integrally determines the relational significance of the inter-*person*-al Trinity—the essential reality of who, what and how enacting the Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement in irreducible response to the human condition and relational need, nonnegotiable to human want.

The Significance Necessary *to be* Social

The Trinity was disclosed for relational involvement in the human context that has been defined and determined by the common. For the Trinity *to be* in this common context is problematic for both theology and practice unless the Trinity is distinguished whole and uncommon. *To be* distinguished whole and uncommon is the core issue necessary for our theology and practice to have the qualitative relational significance congruent with the Trinity.

The qualitative relational significance of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity's presence and involvement converges in Jesus' formative family prayer to fulfill integrally the purpose of social trinitarianism, whereby the essential relational outcome of the whole and uncommon Trinity emerges for trinitarian theology and practice to be composed whole and uncommon. The qualitative relational significance of this relational outcome does not emerge with the traditional view of Jesus' prayer as his high priestly prayer. Though Jesus as our high priest certainly has importance, to assume his prayer is based on that then narrows down the definition of Jesus' person to fragmentary parts of what he does, notably in his high priestly role. This insufficient definition renders his essential person to reduced ontology and function, which thereby no longer has the qualitative relational significance that discloses the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement.

Whatever aspects of relationship that converge in Jesus' prayer—which include multiple aspects—their significance for relationship is contingent on the whole definition of the person(s) present and involved in the relationship composed integrally by all these aspects (not just fragmentary parts). Whether for Jesus' person, the Father's person, the Trinity's and those in the church family, fragmentary parts always relegate persons and their relationships to reduced ontology and function. Jesus' defining family prayer, however, constitutes the needed response to the common existence of this fragmentary condition—also commonly existing in church trinitarian theology and practice—to make persons and relationships together whole and thus uncommon in likeness of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity as family. The essential relational purpose, process and outcome of Jesus' prayer are irreducible to anything less and nonnegotiable to any substitutes.

The integral relational aspects composing Jesus' prayer involve the following relationships:

- the relationship within the Trinity,
- the Trinity's relationship with the human context (the common cosmos),
- the Trinity's relationship with Jesus' followers,
- those followers' relationship with the human context in uncommon likeness with the Trinity,
- the relationship between those uncommon followers and the uncommon Trinity as family together in wholeness,
- this whole and uncommon relationship together as family enacted in the human context to make whole the human condition of fragmentary persons and relationships.

Only as these inseparable relationships are understood can social trinitarianism compose the qualitative relational significance necessary for these relationships to unfold in the essential relational outcome of the gospel of the Son, the Father and the Spirit.

Understanding the what of salvation's good news for whole relationship together is contingent on understanding the whole of the Who constituting the gospel. If salvation does indeed go further and deeper than just saved *from* sin, this necessitates an integral relational basis (not referential) for the whole relationship together of what salvation saves *to*—which includes by necessity an ongoing relational base to function in whole relationship together. The whole and uncommon Trinity—the ontological One and relational Whole from outside the universe—composes the meaning, significance, purpose and means of whole relationship together, apart from whom relationship together lacks the meaning, significance, purpose and means to be whole, and thus lacks what's essential for the human relational condition. Understanding the whole of the triune God, the whole of the Who constituting the gospel, provides the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base for whole relationship together. That is, only the Trinity both illuminated the essential truth of who came and distinguished the essential reality of what has come. Therefore, understanding *what* distinguished the Trinity and *how* the Trinity is distinguished are indispensable for those claiming the gospel and irreplaceable for proclaiming the good news of whole relationship together. This understanding is distinguished in the whole and uncommon Trinity's thematic relational action enacted in relational-specific response to the human condition—the integral dynamics of which converged in Jesus' prayer.

In his defining prayer for the Trinity's family, Jesus summarized what has been his relationship-specific purpose and function to disclose (*phaneroo*, not merely *apokalypto*) his Father and thus the whole and uncommon Trinity. His disclosure in relational terms distinguished the who, what and how integrally constituting the essential reality at the heart of the gospel and its essential relational outcome (Jn 17:6,21-26). Jesus' disclosure by *phaneroo* over *apokalypto* is a vital distinction that is defining for the trinitarian theological task and determining for social trinitarianism. *Apokalypto* merely reveals the Object in referential terms that transmits information about the Trinity, which may be considered important information to know (especially in the academy) yet neither goes any further nor has deeper significance. *Phaneroo*, however, discloses the

Subject to those to whom the Trinity communicates in relational terms within the context of relationship, not to merely have information about the Trinity but to know the *person*-al Trinity and understand the inter-*person*-al Trinity in relationship together as family.

The inter-*person*-al dynamics composing Jesus' prayer go beyond the intercession of the High Priest and encompass all the above relationships. His prayer begins with the depth of relational involvement within the Trinity that distinguishes ("glorify," *doxazo*, Jn 17:1) the ontological One and relational Whole shared together by the trinitarian persons (as in Jn 13:31-32). These relational dynamics are essential to the Trinity and must not be perceived in referential terms merely to transmit information about God. The only relational purpose for disclosing the Trinity's intimate life (*zoe*, not *bios*) is "that they may know *the* person-*al Trinity*, the only true God" (17:3). The Son enacted the relational-specific work that the Father gave him in the inter-*person*-al Trinity's relational context of family and relational process of family love (17:4-6,24), whereby the relational outcome is relationship together as family (17:25-26).

Yet, what the Son enacted does not distinguish ("glorify") the *person*-al and inter-*person*-al Trinity unless these relational dynamics are unequivocally uncommon—that is, unmistakably distinguished from the common human context (17:14,16). The Trinity is holy and the integrity of the ontological One (the *person*-al Trinity) and the relational Whole (the inter-*person*-al Trinity) is contingent on being uncommon (17:11). Who, what and how the Trinity is can be nothing less and no substitutes, or the Trinity's whole ontology and function is reduced—namely, to comparative terms no longer distinguished beyond the common. In the human context, anything less and any substitutes of the Trinity's whole ontology and function common-ize the *person*-al Trinity and derelational-ize the inter-*person*-al Trinity, such that the Trinity's presence and involvement don't have the qualitative relational significance to whole-ly constitute the gospel and fulfill its essential relational outcome for the human condition. Anything less than whole and any substitutes from the common defining the Trinity relegate social trinitarianism to this relational consequence, which then challenges social trinitarianism's engagement in the human context.

As the Son enacts with the Spirit (Lk 4:1,14,18) the inter-*person*-al dynamics from the Father, the synergism of the Trinity emerges "as we are one" (Jn 17:11,22)—with no trinitarian person greater than the others ("All I have is yours, and all you have is mine," 17:10, NIV, cf. 16:14-15) or more important than the others ("As you, Father, are in me and I am in you," 17:21), such that the whole Trinity is greater than the sum of the trinitarian persons. This essential structure of the Trinity's synergistic systemic process is irreplaceable for the whole and uncommon Trinity. Their synergism illuminates the ontological One and relational Whole, whose inter-*person*-al dynamics distinguish the Trinity's uncommon presence in the human context and disclose the Trinity's whole relational involvement specifically with Jesus' followers (17:6-12). Thus, the Trinity's synergism is pivotal in Jesus' prayer, integrating the whole and uncommon Trinity who emerged in the human context with his whole and uncommon church family that will unfold in the Trinity's likeness. Unless social trinitarianism extends this synergism essential for the Trinity's inter-*person*-al dynamics, what it composes does not account for both the *person*-al and inter-*person*-al Trinity's presence and involvement. Accordingly, what it offers cannot have the qualitative relational means to make whole the human relational condition, our relational condition; but, in fact, its good intentions

may even reinforce or sustain the human condition, notably serving merely 'the common good' rather than working for the depth of *whole good*.

Jesus clearly understood from direct experience with his disciples that their persons and relationships with him were still shaped by the common of their surrounding contexts, even their Judaism. This demonstrated the inner-out change needed for his followers *to be* transformed from the common's reduced ontology and function to the uncommon's whole ontology and function in likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity—"because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world" (17:14,16). This is nonnegotiable for the terms of relationship together *to be* in uncommon wholeness with the Trinity.

Jesus' prayer makes definitive what he wants, enacts and fulfills for all his followers: For us to intimately experience the relational reality of the Trinity's family love, and thereby *to be* the essential reality of the Trinity's uncommon family that is constituted by whole ontology and function in the very likeness of the uncommon Trinity's whole ontology and function (17:20-26). For this essential relational outcome, the common notion of unity is insufficient for defining the ontology of his followers *to be* one as the Trinity is one, the ontological One and relational Whole. Nor does unity get to the depth for determining the function of his followers to mature whole-ly ("completely," *teleioo*, v.23) into one ontological family and relational whole—at the depth of being relationally (not ontologically) "in the Trinity" as the trinitarian persons are in each other (17:21,26). For the essential reality of this relational outcome, Jesus has given his followers the glory of the Trinity, that is, the Trinity's qualitative being, intimate relational nature and vulnerable presence (v.22). On this definitive basis, then, Jesus' prayer is both irreducible for relationship together as his family, as well as nonnegotiable for the terms of this relationship.

The synergism of these inter-*person*-al dynamics emerges for this essential relational outcome only on the basis of whole ontology and function, integrally for the uncommon Trinity and his uncommon followers. Therefore, anything less and any substitutes of the Trinity's family relationship together and any negotiation of its relational terms relegate ontology and function to a reduced condition; and its fragmentation emerges in the church with ontological simulation of relationships together to compose merely virtual-augmented realities of family—the social reality of the common.

The Unavoidable Conflict for Social Trinitarianism

Since the Trinity was disclosed for relational involvement in the human context, the Trinity's vulnerable presence and relational involvement have *to be* in uncommon presence and whole involvement in order to be distinguished from what prevails in the human context. This is an ongoing process because the Trinity's essential relational purpose, response and outcome are ongoingly subjected to the prevailing influences, pressures, terms and shaping—even subject to that which have permeated the church. The prevailing reality of this ongoing condition presents the unavoidable conflict for social trinitarianism.

The human context exists from the beginning under the influence of reductionism, the commonizing influence of which infects persons and relationships with reduced

ontology and function. Until the reality of the common is redeemed, the influence of reductionism and its counter-relational workings remain defining for persons and relationships—even by default, as discussed previously for the early disciples—which required Jesus to include in his prayer the defining dynamic that transforms his followers from the common in the human context to the uncommon in the Trinity's context. Without this dynamic interaction of contexts, the common prevails to determine our practice no matter how much notions of the holy may define our theology—with the latter defined by renegotiated general referential terms no longer distinguished in the depth of the Trinity's relational terms. Therefore, the transformation from the common to the uncommon is pivotal in order *to be* distinguished with the whole and uncommon Trinity; and this requires challenging the prevailing presence of the common and confronting its reductionist influence, which involves unavoidably taking on this conflict in order *to be* relationally involved in the human context congruently with the Trinity (as with Jesus, Mt 10:34).

To claim this gospel of transformation and the essential reality of its wholeness in relationship together, and to proclaim this gospel of wholeness and live its whole relationship together in the world, necessitate integral understanding of *who* came and *what* has come that embody the gospel in the realm of physics to enact the gospel in the realm of metaphysics. The whole ontology and function of the who is inseparable from the what (saved *to*); and the essential reality of salvation's good news for relationship is contingent both on *the integral relational basis* constituted in the whole ontology and function of the Trinity and on *the ongoing relational base* composed by the uncommon presence and whole involvement of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. This contingency needs to be met in relational terms in order for our ontology and function to be in whole and uncommon likeness to embody and thereby enact the relational outcome of the gospel. This integral relational basis and ongoing relational base are illuminated in Jesus' defining prayer that clearly distinguished the whole ontology and function of his family in uncommon whole relationship together with and in likeness of the uncommon whole of the Trinity. What is defining for the church family is also by its nature defining for social trinitarianism.

The church family's ontology and function are distinguished on the relational basis and ongoing relational base of only the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity. As Jesus continued to pray to the Father, this whole relationship together (defined as eternal life, 17:3), theirs and ours together, cannot function while under the influence of the surrounding context "*of* the world" (*ek*, preposition signifying out of which one is derived or belongs, 17:14,16). That is to say, "of the world" signifies relationship determined by our terms (even with good intentions) or by reductionist substitutes from the surrounding context, including alternative shaping of relationship together. In contrast and conflict with this, Jesus made evident the following:

> He illuminated the ongoing conflict with reductionism this relationship encounters and distinctly pointed to the relational dynamic necessary to live as whole persons in whole relationship together, the uncommon nature of which Jesus vulnerably enacted in whole-ly distinguished life and practice to be intimately involved with his followers for their integrally distinguished life and practice—that is, to "be

sanctified" (*hagiazo*, make holy, uncommon, 17:19) in the essential difference that makes the substantive difference for relational involvement in the human context, in order *to be* congruent in the likeness of the Trinity that makes the difference "into the world" for the human condition (17:18,21,23).

This defining process is indispensable, essential *to be* distinguished, and thus cannot be overlooked, diminished or minimalized without incurring relational consequences for the gospel and its relational outcome composed by the whole and uncommon of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity.

In his prayer, Jesus commissioned (*apostello*) his followers for the specific mission "just as" (*kathos*) his Father commissioned him: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (17:18, cf. 20:21). In Jesus' paradigm for serving (Jn 12:26, discussed previously), the first priority is the primacy of intimate involvement with him in relationship together, which is necessary over the priority of the work of serving, ministry and mission. For conventional paradigms for mission, sending workers out to the harvest fields becomes the urgent priority dominating our focus, thereby shifting away from whole persons in the primacy of relationship to both disembody and derelationalize the commission (however well meaning). Yet, as Jesus made definitive, the call to discipleship is the call to be whole, which, in order not be reduced, involves the need to be sanctified (to become holy, uncommon) to distinguish this wholeness from the common's function in the surrounding contexts of the world, including those notable harvest fields. This call clearly qualifies 'Christ's commission' for mission and challenges prevailing perceptions of it by defining the following from the relational basis in Jesus' prayer: *what* to send out, *whom* to send out, *why* and thus *how* to send out. His integral call and commission must also be defining for social trinitarianism, if our relational involvement in the human context is *to be* congruent with the whole-ly Trinity.

The Relational Outcome of the Inter-*person*-al Trinity

For the Son's purpose and function from his Father to be transferred to his followers, the enactment of the commission has to be made both uncommon and whole *to be* compatible ("just as," *kathos*) with the Father-Son relationship and then the Father-Son-disciples relationship—with the Spirit's involvement central to both relationships. Jesus' prayer integrates the call to be whole and his commission in the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love (17:21-23). This clearly established the context of his commission in uncommon life and practice with the whole-ly Trinity, not the context of "into the world." When there is congruence in intimate relationship together and compatibility of function in the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love, his followers together (the church as God's new creation family) are not statically "still in the world" (*en*, remaining in it, 17:11) but now dynamically sent "into the world" (*eis*, motion into) to function whole in likeness of the Father and the Son with the Spirit in further response to make whole the human condition. What is disclosed to us in relational terms makes definitive the likeness that makes the difference to intrusively enact the good news of whole relationship together, which is integrated by the ongoing relational base of the Trinity's whole ontology and

function. Therefore, in this unfolding synergism, his followers' call to be whole is conjointly his followers *sent to be whole*. This composes the significance of *what* to send out and signifies the importance of *whom* to send out and defines more deeply *why* to send out (with the full soteriology), while providing the relational basis for *how* to function in his commission. Only this likeness will make the difference that distinguishes the gospel of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement in the human context.

This inter-*person*-al relational dynamic for involvement in the human context (whether in mission, in culture and/or Christian ethics) is made further definitive in Jesus' formative family prayer. While the whole of life together in his relational context and process is uniquely intimate and uncommon, its practice cannot remain private or individual—which urgently calls the church to fulfill the vital relational purpose of social trinitarianism. As he directly related the world (and life and practice in its surrounding contexts) to himself and then to his followers (in relationship together), Jesus prayed using the prepositions "in" (*en*, 17:11,13), "of" (*ek*, vv.14,16), "out of" (*ek*, v.15) and "into" (*eis*, v,18). Each preposition has its own significance that needs to be distinguished in any discussion on church life and practice and its function in the human context.

For Jesus to be "in the world" only described a general surrounding context in which he remained (*en*) temporarily. While *en* also signifies his followers remaining in the world, this functional (not ontological) position is governed by the preposition *ek*. How Jesus functioned while remaining in the surrounding context was determined by the ontological nature of his context of origin (relationship together in the Trinity), not by what prevailed in the surrounding context "of the world" (*ek*, out of which one is derived, belongs to) since he didn't belong to it. Likewise, for his whole followers, those also "not of the world" (v.14, "do not belong to this world"), *ek* involves a dynamic movement from being embedded in that surrounding context to motion out from within the surrounding context, yet freed only in terms of the common's function and practice, not physically removed out of the common's surrounding context. This dynamic of *ek* signifies going from being defined and determined, for example, by the prevailing culture (or situations and circumstances) in a surrounding context to movement out from within its influence (hence "not of the world")—which certainly necessitates engaging culture.

Yet, the dynamic of *ek* is not a statement or resolve of self-determination "not to be of the world." Rather this dynamic more deeply involves a relational dynamic, a relationship-specific inter-*person*-al dynamic. Implied in the phrase "not of the world" is the relational process that involves distinct movement not only away from the common's influence but integral movement to the holy (Uncommon) and whole Trinity. This primary relational movement and involvement signifies both *what* his followers together are and *whose* they are, which necessitates triangulation and reciprocating contextualization to constitute them in this uncommon wholeness while remaining "in the world"—just as Jesus was "not of the world" and sanctified himself for his followers to practice "in the world" (17:19).

The ongoing practice of this primary relational involvement is always while "in the world," which the above *ek* phrase does not include since it is limited to a shift only in purpose and function. In the same breath Jesus also prayed for his followers not to be removed "out of the world" (17:15). "Out of" is the same preposition *ek*, which is used differently in this second phrase not for being embedded but for the matter of spatial

location. The dynamic of this second *ek* phrase signified the direction of their purpose and function to be relationally involved not away from but directly in the midst of the surrounding context and in the lives of persons in that context—yet always in congruence with the Trinity's relational involvement. Eliminating this sense of separation (spatially and relationally) also applies to not being removed from relational involvement even while practicing service, ministry and mission by maintaining subtle relational distance. This certainly includes righteous involvement with others beyond merely Christian ethics, so that those persons can count on his followers to be of qualitative significance and their actions to have relational depth in likeness of the Trinity ("so that the world…," 17:21,23). The depth of this relational involvement is the what, who and how social trinitarianism is distinguished in the world to make the difference needed (not always wanted) for persons and relationships in the human context.

Clearly then, Jesus gave his followers no option but to remain (*en*) and to be relationally involved—not the spatial and relational separation of *ek*, "out of the world"—both vulnerably and intrusively in the surrounding contexts of the world in likeness ("as," *kathos*) of his whole ontology and function. Whole ontology and function composes the identity of subjects taking initiative and actively involved in the lives of others, in contrast to objects re-acting to whatever or whoever enters their lives. Such reaction also to the needs and conditions in the surrounding context should not automatically determine social trinitarianism's action, because it may not be based on relational involvement and thus lack the significance needed for the human condition that is composed by only the inter-*person*-al Trinity's relational involvement. Therefore, he distinctly qualified what (who) is to define them and determine how they function in those contexts—*en* is governed by the first *ek*, out from within its influence—with the ongoing relational base for their ontology and function to be in his likeness to enact the relational outcome of the gospel.

While this inter-*person*-al relational dynamic is irreducible and nonnegotiable, there is always the functional alternative to remain "in the world" on ambiguous terms—for example, on the referential level in an ambiguous or shallow identity (cf. Mt 5: 13-16)—which essentially become defined and determined by reductionist substitutes, notably in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion that are indistinguishable from the shaping of relationships in those contexts. In this essential relational dynamic, understanding the juxtaposition of *en* and *ek* (out of) conjoined with the first use of *ek* (of, belong) is a crucial distinction, the subtle difference of which is commonly blurred by reductionism. Being "not of the world" (first *ek*, "not belong to the world") goes beyond having a static identity or self-determination status and deeply involves an inseparable functional-theological framework imperative for the ongoing relational base of the trinitarian relational process to define the life and determine the practice of those who remain (*en*) in the surrounding context but emerge beyond (second *ek*, "out of") the common's function—indeed, beyond the reductionists, as Jesus made imperative for his followers' whole person (Mt 5:20).

These interrelated dynamics are the integral relational basis in his prayer for Jesus making imperative his call and his commission in conjoint function. The call to be whole (thus uncommon, holy, sanctified) emerges in life and practice in the surrounding contexts of the world as *sent to be whole* in likeness (*kathos*) of Jesus sent whole by and in the Father. For this emergence to be unambiguously distinguished and thus clearly

distinct from the common's function in a surrounding context, it is necessary in function for the call to precede the commission because the commission alone is insufficient to fulfill the transfer of the Son's purpose and function in likeness, that is, without enacting the qualitative relational significance to be whole in the primacy of relationship together constituted by his call. Thus, if social trinitarianism composes any commission without its basis in this call, it loses the qualitative relational significance both to live whole and to make whole—regardless of the extent of its service in the human context and its benefit for the so-called common good.

The uncommon life and practice to be whole, the whole of the Trinity's family in uncommon identity distinguishing "not of the world" (first *ek*), constitutes his commission and signifies the integral relational basis for the whole undertaking of their mission in salvific life and practice to make whole in the surrounding context. To be whole *kathos* the Trinity is the relational basis for his followers, in the likeness that makes the difference, to be sent "into the world" (*eis*, 17:18). As *ek* governs *en* with the "motion out from" the world's influence necessary to constitute their qualitative relational significance to be whole, *eis* now governs "motion (back) into" the surrounding context for enacting the gospel in likeness for their function to make whole in order to fulfill the transfer of the Son's purpose and function from his Father to his family. *Ek* and *eis* are not in dialectical tension but operate ongoingly together in a reflexive interrelated process (with triangulation and reciprocating contextualization) for his followers to mature (*teleioo*) completely as one in their integrated call and commission of wholeness (17:23). Therefore, by enacting the inter-*person*a-al Trinity's relational involvement in the world, Jesus made this definitive:

> Salvific life and practice to make whole emerges from uncommon life and practice to be whole in order to join together congruently in likeness with the Trinity's thematic relational response to the human condition "in the world"—the essential truth of the gospel of transformation to whole persons in whole relationship together as the Trinity's uncommon family.

This is the relational outcome of the inter-*person*-al Trinity's relational involvement in the human context, which is the only relational outcome of significance that social trinitarianism can compose for the human condition.

How his followers live and practice in the surrounding context emerges from *who* and *what* they are; that is, who and what define them determines how they function. This defining and determining process necessitates their theological anthropology of who and what they are, to be composed on the integral relational basis of the whole and uncommon Trinity's ontology and function. The truth of this functional paradigm was enacted by Jesus throughout the incarnation: his full identity (composed by the Trinity's context) integrated with his minority identity (composed in but not by the human context, cf. 17:14) in uncommon life and practice, the integral function of which constituted his salvific relational work of grace for the good news of relationship together in the Trinity's uncommon whole family. Jesus prayed to deeply establish his followers in this interrelated process that is indispensable for the following: *To be* "in the world" and "not of the world," salvific life and practice must by its nature (*dei*) function distinguishably in the minority identity he enacted "in the world," thereby qualitatively distinguishing "not

of it"; this minority identity necessarily by its nature is functionally integrated in uncommon life and practice with the full identity of who, what, and how his followers are in relationship together in likeness of the Trinity—therefore relationally congruent and compatible with the whole-ly Trinity and the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity's relational action (17:16-19).

Yet, what defines his followers in the surrounding context and determines how they function is constantly being influenced, challenged, even coerced by that context—for example, to be assimilated into its surrounding culture, for us today to be absorbed into the Internet and virtual-augmented realities. To the extent that surrounding context's culture is incompatible with the whole-ly Trinity and the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity's relational action, this is the ongoing tension and conflict with reductionism—the common's function and practice contrary to uncommon life and practice. It is essential, then, for his followers to engage any common culture on his uncommon relational basis and whole relational terms, and thus to ongoingly practice triangulation and reciprocating contextualization with the Spirit in order to mature in difference and likeness. Reductionism's subtle influence shifts human ontology from inner out to the outer in, thereby redefining the person and how persons function—notably in relationships "to be apart" from the qualitative significance of the wholeness composed by the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. Under such influence how his followers practice relationships together is compromised, and how they engage in mission is fragmented—namely without the qualitative relational significance to be whole and to make whole. Any lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness has this consequence, which social trinitarianism must account for in its understanding of the Trinity and the meaning of social.

As Jesus prayed, it is imperative for his family's public life and practice that *eis* ("into" as the dynamic integrated with the first *ek*, "not of") is not to be confused with only being *en*, that is, merely to be in the same context, remain in the same space, even merely occupy ministries in surrounding situations and circumstances. *En* only statically describes where we (notably as objects) remain, not what, who, why and how we are as whole persons in that context congruent with the inter-*person*-al Trinity. *Eis*, however, is not simply dynamic "movement into" a surrounding context, which is the reason "into the world" is not the context for his commission. The *eis* dynamic further signifies active engagement (intrusive) of other persons in deep relational involvement of family love, the depths of which is "just as" (*kathos*, indicating congruence) the Father sent his Son in the incarnation (17:18) and has loved him (17:23,26)—that is, the relational outcome in complete likeness of the inter-*person*-al Trinity (17:21-23). *Kathos* is nonnegotiable in order for the essential reality of this relational outcome *to be*.

This essential relational process of embodying from inner out and enacting inter-*person*-ally invokes God's self-disclosure principle of nothing less and no substitutes. Accordingly, in the depth of the whole embodying of his followers enacting to live whole, anything less and any substitutes of this depth of direct relational involvement to make whole are reductions of his family's inseparable call and commission and no longer is *kathos* the inter-*person*-al Trinity. While the commission takes place "in the world," it can only be enacted and fulfilled "into the world"—and not detached "out of the world," (second *ek*)—as salvific life and practice (to make whole) emerging from sanctified life and practice (to be whole) distinguished by both "not of the world" (first *ek*) and not from

the influence "of the world." Anything other than relational involvement in this integrated *ek-eis* process is less than whole, a substitute of reductionism no longer defined and determined by the integral relational basis and ongoing relational base of the inter-person-al Trinity. Without this basis and base, his family is subject to variable shaping from surrounding contexts, which is why and how Jesus' formative family prayer is defining for his church in likeness (discussed further in chap. 9).

Reciprocating Contextualization with the Trinity

All Jesus' followers and his church family cannot underestimate the subtle influence of reductionism and its counter-relational workings in the human context. In our unavoidable relations with our surrounding contexts, it is inevitable to be common-ized in some way due to having a weak view of sin that does not encompass the scope of reductionism. Jesus never ignored sin as reductionism and ongoingly addressed the sin of reductionism that defines the common and determines the human context. That's why in his prayer he highlighted his uncommon context as the only basis to address the common context and not to be common-ized in our relations with it. For example, even notions of peace get common-ized in theology and practice, which counteract the uncommon peace Jesus gives and saves his followers with, and thus to and ongoingly in (Jn 14:27; 16:33). Primary relational involvement in the uncommon context of the Trinity is the only way to avoid being subject to reductionism even though we are ongoingly subjected to its subtle and not-so-subtle workings—which Jesus doesn't pray for us to be removed from and separated, but protected from and distinguished whole (17:15) in order to live whole in the human context and make whole the human condition (17:21,23). Thus, in trinitarian theology and practice, reciprocating contextualization is critical for social trinitarianism to fulfill its purpose with the qualitative relational significance of the who, what and how essential to the Trinity.

In the full picture of Jesus' life and function, even he depended on reciprocating contextualization to fulfill his purpose in the human context (e.g. Jn 5:19-20; 8:28-29; 12:27-28, 49-50). John's Gospel contextualizes (by the uncommon, not the common) the narratives of Jesus' relational involvement with common life and practice in the surrounding context (notably its culture), distinguishing his person as the embodied whole of the Word composing God's communicative action—for example, starting with his participation in the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11) and finishing with his intimate involvement of his disciples' footwashing (13:1-17). As the whole 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 in his relational context of the Trinity and in his context's relational process of intimate relationship together in family love. This involved the relational significance of his own culture (and his full identity) composed by the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity, which determined his life and function by this reciprocating relational process while in other surrounding human contexts—defining only his minority identity and never determining the full identity of who, what and how he is.

Jesus, therefore, personally understood what was necessary to prevent being defined and/or determined by the common's surrounding context, and ongoingly *to be* distinguished in the primacy of the uncommon's context of the Trinity. *To be* in his full identity is *not to be* in a hybrid with his minority identity; his full identity distinguishes his primary identity within the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity, while his minority identity is only a secondary distinction in the common context that necessarily points to and thus further distinguishes his full identity. If Jesus' followers are *to be* distinguished with him in relationship together as the Trinity's family, they must also emerge uncommon from the *ek-eis* dynamic of reciprocating contextualization—in ongoing relational involvement with the whole-ly Trinity in triangulation with engaging the human context (17:17-19).

It is vital to understand the indispensable dynamic of *reciprocating contextualization*, and to practice this integral relational process in necessary conjoint function with *triangulation*, both of which can only be engaged in the Trinity's relational terms. This irreplaceable relational process is imperative—as the Father declared to listen to his Son—for the qualitative distinction in the surrounding common's context: in order *not to be* defined or determined by the common's reduced ontology and fragmentary function and *to be* distinguished uncommon in the whole ontology and function of our persons and relationships—in likeness of the uncommon *person*-al Trinity and the whole inter-*person*-al Trinity. And it is urgent for his followers to understand, and thus address as Jesus prayed, that culture is the common's most subtle and seductive influence on the ontology and function of persons and relationships. Social trinitarianism must encompass, embody and enact this urgency if it is *to be* distinguished and thereby have qualitative relational significance for the human condition, including our condition in the church.

All these relationships and their integral dynamics converge in Jesus' prayer neither by coincidence nor as an ideal plan, any results of which would have no basis in essential reality. The presence and involvement of the whole and uncommon Trinity are on the line here; and at stake for all Jesus' followers is the whole ontology and function of his family in likeness of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity, whose whole ontology and function is essential reality or rendered to virtual-augmented realities. If the latter, the human context has nothing substantive to receive and gain (17:21,23). With the former, however, the human relational condition in general and our relational condition in particular have the relational basis to be made whole and the ongoing relational base to live whole and thus also to make whole. These integral relationships and the synergism distinguishing their interrelated dynamics, which are essential for their ontology and function to be whole, are made definitive in Jesus' formative family prayer—composed only in relational terms for just the essential reality of this whole as well as uncommon relational outcome.

Therefore, his defining family prayer for all his followers is the irreducible call and nonnegotiable commission that social trinitarianism must fulfill by its nature (*dei*, not out of duty or obligation, *opheilo*) in likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity. Nothing less and no substitutes are essential *to be* whole and have the qualitative relational significance to live whole, and thereby to make whole the human relational condition, our relational condition. Anything less and any substitutes perhaps are the

reason that the lens of social trinitarianism has diminished in recent trinitarian theology and practice.[17]

If we claim the whole profile of God's presence and involvement, then we are claiming the whole and uncommon Trinity—the whole who, what and how of the Trinity integrally *person*-al and inter-*person*-al. If we embrace the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity, then we also claim the gospel that encompasses making whole the human condition (and our relational condition) in trinitarian theology and practice, because making whole persons and relationships together in wholeness is the only purpose that the whole-ly Trinity's presence and involvement are disclosed to us. This composes the whole understanding (*synesis*) of the Trinity and what 'social' means. When these essential relational dynamics and relational outcome compose social trinitarianism, its qualitative relational significance fulfills its purpose of wholeness in trinitarian theology and practice and thereby enacts the whole who, what and how necessary to make whole our relational condition and the human condition. Accordingly, if not understandably, this also means that Trinitarianism must be uncommon by its essential nature and thus be distinguished from its common tradition. Uncommon Trinitarianism, moreover, further involves the need for orthodoxy uncommon to traditional orthodoxy and that is not common to the theological task.

[17] An overview discussion of the development of social trinitarianism is found in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*.

Chapter 7 The Essential Reality of Uncommon Orthodoxy

When many of his disciples heard *the Word*, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"

John 6:60

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

Colossians 2:9

If we return to the opening question raised in this study concerning whether all Christians worship the same God, we also need to ask whether the presence and involvement of God defines our theology and determines our practice. If given the opportunity, the whole and uncommon God will clarify this for us and correct us where needed. Of course, this is the God disclosed primarily in the Scriptures *to be* the essential reality of the Trinity, which then further raises the question of having the same Trinity in our theology and practice. Moreover, underlying this issue is whether orthodoxy has become a traditional transmission of a theological meme shaping our practice.

The issue of *to be* or *not to be* ongoingly emerges throughout the First and Second Testaments, because it involves the extent of our epistemology defining its epistemic field and process and the depth of our hermeneutic determining what we pay attention to and ignore of the Trinity's self-disclosures. What's primary for the Trinity, which is the primacy given by the Trinity in the human context, is often secondary for others and not what people want—as demonstrated in John's challenging narrative of Jesus quoted above. What we pay attention to and ignore are critical to the trinitarian theological task, which even his main disciples learned the hard way (Jn 6:68-69; 14:9). The pivotal issue of ignoring the primary and paying more attention to the secondary in Scripture is illustrated in the following cartoon called "Peanuts." The little boy Linus, who has been known to engage in theological discourse with surprising knowledge, is immersed in his theological task and explains this to his sister Lucy: "Here's something I'll bet you didn't know. The Bible contains 3,566,480 letters and 773,891 words!" Lucy continues to jump-rope and is totally unimpressed. Linus looks puzzled at her and then concludes, "You're just not interested in theology, are you?"[1]

This extreme example speaks to a common interest centered in the theological task that impacts theology and practice. Certainly, the theological task is engaged at many different levels, yet the extent and depth of this engagement have resulted commonly in explanations and conclusions that strain for significance in trinitarian theology and practice. Having the same Trinity in our theology and practice is an open question, along with the issue of the Trinity's essential reality *to be* or *not to be* in some virtual or augmented reality. The recent surge in theological discourse on the Trinity is

[1] Created by Charles M. Schulz, *Los Angeles Times*, August 22, 2016.

faced with this issue. Whether recent discourse merely recapitulates traditional Trinitarianism in so-called fresh ways or goes beyond this common understanding of the Trinity remains to be seen—that is, seen less so in the academy and more as the essential truth and reality in the church. Yet, at this latter stage in the trinitarian theological task, do we really need more discourse on the Trinity—even from the Majority World?

The answer depends on such discourse's epistemic source composing its theological framework and interpretive lens. For the Trinity, this epistemic field and its related process cannot be defined and determined by conflating the primacy of the trinitarian context with the secondary of the human context. At best, conflation only constructs a hybrid theological framework whose interpretive lens pays attention to secondary matter over the primary (not necessarily at its exclusion)—as seen to an extreme with Linus engaged in his theological task. In other words, what needs to be recognized as *common* exerts its subtle influence to assume priority over what is uncommon, and likely over what's more difficult, less acceptable and perhaps unpopular. This priority includes containing the epistemic source of the Trinity within the quantitative limits of physics and the reasoned constraints of metaphysics, which narrow the focus of the interpretive lens to pay attention in simply common terms—even in discourse about uncommon subject matter. This prominent lens prevalent even in Christian contexts is contrary to the qualitative whole mindset constituted by the Spirit (*phronēma*, Rom 8:6). To adequately address the conflating influence in trinitarian discourse requires the uncommon shift (not an unorthodox shift) to the reciprocating contextualization of the primary trinitarian context interacting with the secondary human context, in ongoing relational involvement in triangulation with the Trinity. This uncommon shift composes the essential reality in which the Trinity's presence and involvement are the primary source for distinguishing the whole and uncommon Trinity.

Keep in mind the following about the need for this uncommon shift: Discourse alone—no matter its expertise and persuasive composition—does not create reality, specifically the essential reality of the Trinity, though common trinitarian discourse has promoted virtual and augmented reality in trinitarian theology and practice. The uncommon shift composing the irreplaceable relational epistemic process is the uncommon relational basis for Jesus' family prayer *to be* defining for the trinitarian theological task and the whole relational base *to be* determining trinitarian theology and practice. Therefore, if any new trinitarian discourse is to have significance as the gospel and thus relevance for persons and relationships, it will have to go beyond common Trinitarianism and its common orthodoxy and be distinguished by uncommon Trinitarianism and its uncommon orthodoxy.

No doubt this uncommon shift—perhaps analogous to the Copernican shift, at least in principle if not in substance—will create tension, resistance and even rejection as heresy, since the whole who, what and how Jesus embodied, enacted and thus disclosed, commonly "is difficult, who can accept it?" Even though this primacy is what we all need, it's always easier and more palatable to stay within the limits and constraints of the secondary.

Uncommon Trinitarianism Integrally *Person*-al and Inter-*person*-al

With the unfolding of YHWH's grace (from Gen 6:8)—the relational response of grace constituted by YHWH the essential relational verb—what the triune God's presence and involvement offer the human context is congruent with the gospel. Yet, what the Trinity gives us is not commonly what the church (past and present) has wanted in its practice, if not its theology. If the Trinity is to have significance in our theology and practice and thus relevance for our persons and relationships, what the Trinity gives is inseparable from the significance and relevance of the gospel. This is not the common understanding of the Trinity, which reflects both the trinitarian gap in our theology and practice and the need for uncommon Trinitarianism.

For us to claim the gospel in our theology and practice necessitates claiming not just Jesus and the cross but involves relationally claiming the whole and uncommon Trinity. This relational involvement goes beyond merely claiming general referential information about the Trinity to directly engage the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity disclosed to us in relational-specific terms for relationship together. Anything less and any substitutes of this gospel that we claim and proclaim misrepresent the gospel and fragment the Trinity—that is, *re*-present the gospel and the Trinity in less than whole terms. Not to claim the whole and uncommon Trinity is to deny how the Trinity is present and involved for relationship together and thus to deny who, what and how the Trinity is, which then effectively disclaims who and what are essential to the gospel and how it is composed.

The good news of salvation unfolded with the incarnation but did not emerge from the incarnation. The incarnation composes the shift of the gospel's theological trajectory into the gospel's intrusive relational path, yet the latter always needs to be understood in the dynamics of the former. In the uncommon context of the Trinity's thematic relational action for human persons and relationships to be whole—God's metanarrative, as it were—what unfolded and continues to unfold is briefly summarized:

> Initiated with Adam for the human person not "to be apart" from the relationships necessary to be whole in the image and likeness of the triune God (Gen 2:18); formalized in the covenant with Abraham, yet not for a people in nation-state together as mere kingdom but for all peoples in relationship together as the family of YHWH (Gen 17:1-8); partially fulfilled in the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt to be God's people and the establishment of the Tent of Meeting (tabernacle) in their midst, yet only on YHWH's terms (signified by giving them the Law and the specific details for the tabernacle) for the sole relational purpose "so that I might dwell among them" (Ex 29:44-46); the promissory covenant with Abraham is extended and clarified with the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:5-16); and, with a strategic relational shift, now fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus, whose only relational function was to constitute the whole person in the intimate relationships necessary to be whole together as the new creation of the triune God's family (Jn 14:23; 17:21,23; cf. Gal 4:4-7, Eph 2:19-22); then, this relational outcome is all brought to completion at the eschatological conclusion of the Trinity's whole and uncommon purpose by the ongoing relational presence and function of the Spirit (Jn 16:13-14, Rom 8:11,23, 2 Cor 1:21-22, Eph 1:13-14; 2:22).

This is the integrating theme of all God's relational work of grace that defines the context for discussing the strategic, tactical and functional shifts by the Trinity in the incarnation (discussed previously).

We need to also keep in focus that as a function of relationship, God's metanarrative is essential truth to be experienced in relationship; without this relational basis, it is reduced to merely information about a sovereign God with no qualitative relational significance, thus a gospel without relational clarity—which likely is the main reason many postmodernists reject God's metanarrative. Those claiming such a reduced gospel render themselves without qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness in their persons and for their relationships, in spite of how doctrinally correct their theology might be.

Unless our theology and practice of salvation unfold in a truncated soteriology, an unfragmented full soteriology is the relational outcome of the relational progression in the Trinity's thematic relational-specific response, namely in "the covenant of love" (Dt 7:9,12; 1 Ki 8:23; Ne 1:5; Da 9:4), which was fulfilled in Jesus' relational work of grace. Salvific expectations prevailing at the time of Jesus appeared to have stalled in this progression to become fixated on the kingship of God and on the current situations and circumstances of God's people (or kingdom), narrowing the focus to the nation of Israel. They diverged from the primacy of the relationship in the covenant and reduced its significance, thus not affirming the following relational reality: In the relational progression of the triune God's thematic action and the covenant relationship, the whole of God (not parts of God) is the only portion for the people (Ps 119:57; Jer 10:16; 51:19; La 3:24), and, in relational reciprocity, God's people are the whole of God's portion in this uncommon relationship (Dt 32:9, cf. Ex 34:9; Dt 9:29).

Their divergence demonstrated a renegotiation of the covenant relationship, plus a reinterpretation of God's words (promises and desires defining the terms of relationship). These alternative terms indicated their quantitative shift in reductionism, which either did not pay attention to or just ignored the qualitative relational significance of the covenant and God's salvation. The consequence is totally relational, and understanding this relational consequence helps us get to the heart of soteriology, that is, the full significance of the gospel and who and what composed it.

There is an ongoing dynamic that is the lowest common denominator in God's story, which is essential to the Trinity, the gospel's composition and their outcome:

> At the qualitative heart of the whole and uncommon God's ontology is relationship, inter-person relationship, as constituted in the inter-*person*-al Trinity and by the relational involvement of the trinitarian persons within the *person*-al Trinity. At the heart of creation is this relationship, and that God made human ontology in the Trinity's likeness. Thus, at the heart of human ontology is inter-person relationship, the function of which constitutes human persons in the relationships necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. In response to human dysfunction (initially due to volition, not imperfection) "to be apart" from this wholeness, the ongoing heart underlying all of God's thematic action in relational response involves the depth of restored relationship together. Thus, the heart of the incarnation is the convergence of the trinitarian and human ontology of relationship; and God's self-revelation and

> truth are only for this relationship. The heart of the gospel, therefore, is clearly the good news of relationship together in wholeness, the essential relational outcome of which is salvation whole-ly enacted by the embodied heart of the ontology of not simply God but the whole and uncommon Trinity.

God's story makes evident that at the heart of soteriology is not just relationship together, but only the relationship of the whole and uncommon God, the whole-ly Trinity—the uncommon relational context and whole relational process of who, what and how Jesus saves us *to* only in irreducible and nonnegotiable likeness, the integral likeness of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity.

To account for the whole and uncommon Trinity's presence and involvement, this ongoing dynamic of relationship must by nature also become the primary function in our perceptual-interpretive framework as the lowest common denominator for our own theological story. Without this primary function of our lens, we can quite easily be found diverging in our own practice—namely by reinterpreting the relational purpose of God's words and renegotiating the terms for our relationship with God. As we continue to pursue the Trinity's self-disclosure in Jesus, our deeper understanding of the Trinity's uncommon presence and whole relational involvement emerges only from a distinct interpretive process. This process (1) engages God in self-disclosure as an act of communication, and (2) is involved with God's communication in its full context, both in the primary relational context of the Trinity and the secondary social context of the world, as narrated in the biblical texts. This relational dynamic involves us in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit. This crucial relational involvement is imperative because only the Spirit transforms our perceptual-interpretive framework (Rom 8:6) to have the eyes to "see" the whole and uncommon Trinity "face-to-face" (distinguished by qualitative relational involvement), and to have the ears to "hear" and "Listen to my Son" in his whole person without fragmenting into parts (in the relational process of intimate involvement, Jn 14:26; 16:13-15, cf. Mt 13:15-17).

In the *person*-al Trinity's communicative action, Jesus enacted the Word as the inter-*person*-al Trinity's thematic relational response, and thus he disclosed the vulnerable relational work of the Trinity's grace in response to the human relational condition "to be apart" from the uncommon Trinity's wholeness. The language Jesus used (both verbal content and nonverbal relational messages) in self-disclosure of the Trinity's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement needs to be understood in the whole Trinity's uncommon relational context and, in that uncommon relational nature, must be engaged (both received and responded to) as relational language for its whole meaning—which the early disciples didn't engage and thereby lacked whole understanding of Jesus (*syniemi,* Mk 8:17-18; Lk 9:44-45; Jn 14:9).

In contrast to traditional Trinitarianism stated in common referential language and terms, the whole person Jesus vulnerably presented in the incarnation and the purpose of his communication were only to engage relationship—nothing less. It is this whole trinitarian relational process of family love initiated by the Trinity's uncommon relational grace that necessitates a reciprocal depth of relational involvement (with no substitutes) in order to know and to experience the whole of Jesus (cf. Lk 10:21). Otherwise, any attempt at relational connection would be incompatible, which would create a relational barrier to understanding (as in Lk 9:45, cf. Mt 13:15). In this incompatible relational

position, Jesus' disclosures can seem unreasonable or can lack coherence, thus be disjointed into essentially unrelated words without the functional significance of the whole—that is, specific to the whole and uncommon Trinity's thematic relational action in salvation history.

The uncommon relational context and whole relational process of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity further progresses to its eschatological conclusion:

> As Jesus disclosed, "The Spirit of truth…you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you" (Jn 14:17); "My Father will love [you]; and we will come to [you] and make our home with [you]" (Jn 14:23); this is, by the uncommon nature of the ontology of the Trinity, the essential relational outcome for both each person and those persons in relationship together by necessity in whole likeness of the Trinity, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us…. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me…and have loved them even as you have loved me…that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (Jn 17:21-23,26). Then in Paul's accounts of the church, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Cor 3:16); "in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph 2:21-22); and to the Johannine account of the eschatological conclusion in the New Jerusalem, "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev 21:22).

And Jesus was constituting this relational progression throughout the incarnation, not only on the cross—which the Spirit, as Jesus' relational replacement, completes only in the relational terms of his reciprocal relational work. The synergism of the Trinity unfolding above is not a referential account, because the whole who, what and how of the Trinity's presence and involvement cannot be accounted for in common referential terms but only in substantive relational terms, as initiated by uncommon YHWH the substantive relational verb.

What unfolds in the gospel to its relational conclusion can only be composed in theology and practice by uncommon Trinitarianism, which is integrally constituted by the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. Yet, the essential reality is that the presence and involvement of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity cannot be conflated with any common Trinitarianism, or else trinitarian theology and practice become reduced, fragmentary and no longer whole. For example, in the *person*-al Trinity, personal is not an adjective but the whole persons of the triune God, whose ontology as the Subject of YHWH functions as the substantive relational verb. The difference between person and personal distinguishes the Subject from a mere Object (regardless of how personal), and thereby distinguishes the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the person's whole ontology and function. In other words, even a personal Trinity does not constitute the gospel because that Trinity's identity (in flat 2-D profile, not full 3-D) is *not to be* whole to make whole persons and relationships in uncommon likeness. Likewise, relationship should not be confused with the adjective relational and all the common notions signified in relational. The inter-*person*-al Trinity goes beyond being merely relational *to be* involved in the interrelationships essential for the Trinity's ontology and

function *to be* whole—*not to be* just relational. The psalmist declares that YHWH "remembers [reflects on, *zâkar*] his covenant forever" (Ps 105:8, NIV)—that is, YHWH keeps the primary focus on the covenant relationship, not a relational covenant. "Forever" is not a poetic hyperbole but signifies the essential reality that constitutes the ontology and function of the triune God: relationship and the ongoing primacy of relationship together, which emerged in the covenant and unfolds in the new covenant.

Given what distinguishes person from personal and relationship from relational, what significance and relevance do merely a personal Trinity and a relational Trinity have? And how essential is such a Trinity, not to mention how essential has such a Trinity been in our theology and practice?

The essential reality (not virtual or augmented) is that the Father sent only the whole of the triune God into the world. This good news is not merely the truth of a doctrine of salvation but definitive only as the essential truth integrally embodied and enacted by Jesus' person whole-ly in relational-specific terms for relationship together in the whole of the Trinity's family. The who, what and how Jesus disclosed thereby is exclusively the essential truth and reality of the Trinity—disclosing the uncommon presence of the *person*-al Trinity and the whole relational involvement of the inter-*person*-al Trinity integrally within the spheres of physics and metaphysics. The *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity is the only good news that has significance in the human context and has relevance for the human condition, the condition of our persons and relationships. Salvific life and practice is the relational outcome of what Jesus saved us both from and to (the full soteriology), the experience of which is only in whole relationship together with the essential whole and uncommon Trinity. It is the qualitative relational significance of this ontological One and relational Whole disclosed in the Son, in which he enacted to constitute his followers together to be whole just as (*kathos*) the Trinity—as clearly illuminated and distinguished in his prayer. On this irreducible ontological basis and nonnegotiable functional base, the Son sends only the whole of his uncommon family to be whole, live whole and make whole in the world—along with his Spirit to complete the Trinity's uncommon whole in the common human context. Therefore, his family is not, and cannot be, sent on any mission in the surrounding context without function in their call to be whole; nor can their salvific life and practice make whole *into* (not merely *in*) that context without being uncommon in life and practice, thus distinctly sanctified from the common's influence and function. In other words, the whole and holy God composes persons and relationship in the church in the difference (uncommon) that makes the difference, and in the likeness (whole) that makes the difference. The integral relational basis and ongoing relational base of the whole-ly Trinity is incompatible with anything less and any substitutes; therefore, our trinitarian theology and practice must be composed by uncommon Trinitarianism integrally *person*-al and inter-*person*-al.

If *what* and *who* we "send out" for mission is anything less than whole and uncommon, then *how* we function essentially *mis*represents the gospel with our common function. Most importantly, to send out any substitute for the Trinity's uncommon whole vitally fragments and reduces these realities: the whole of the triune God, the ontological One, *what* and *whom* he sent, and *why* he sent the relational Whole *to be* enacted "into the world." For the Son's mission, and thus ours, any separation of his commission from his call fails to understand (and so fully receive) the uncommon whole of the Trinity's

thematic relational response to the human condition "to be apart" from the whole and uncommon God. This lack and gap result from conflating the Trinity's primary relational context with the human context, and thereby substituting the human shaping of the Trinity's relational process. This common process only fragments his church's purpose and function as the whole (not simply unity) of God's family in likeness of the Trinity, and therefore reduces the qualitative relational significance of the gospel—fragmenting it namely with an incomplete Christology and reducing it notably by a truncated soteriology. With a reduced ontology and function by the church, what can "the world believe" about "the God who sent" and what does this "let the world know" about "the God who loves for relationship together to be whole"? Whole relationship together and its primacy in trinitarian theology and practice is the defining relational outcome for which the Son asks his Father to embody his followers together in whole ontology and function, distinguished as their whole family in their uncommon likeness (Jn 17:20-23).

Their uncommon likeness is the righteousness of the whole who, what and how of God in relationship that Jesus earlier made the primacy of discipleship for his whole followers in God's kingdom-family, primary in order to distinguish them from any and all reductionism (Mt 6:33)—and the true righteousness that Paul made definitive for the new creation church family in likeness (Eph 4:24). Anything less and any substitutes for the church do not distinguish its persons and relationships from the human shaping of relationships together, and consequently cannot be counted on to be of significance both as the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity's family and for the human relational condition. Under this common influence, whatever likeness the church functions in will not make a difference. Simply stated for trinitarian theology and practice: Whatever likeness other than uncommon that the church functions in will not make the difference necessarily both significant in the human context and relevant for the human condition, our relational condition. Such common function, unequivocally, reflects a common Trinitarianism that neither understands nor accounts for the whole and uncommon Trinity's presence and involvement.

The only difference that makes the difference in theology and practice is the Trinity distinguished by the righteous whole of who, what and how the Trinity is *to be*. In anticipation of YHWH's salvation, the psalmist declared in relational terms, "righteousness and *wholeness* will kiss each other…. Righteousness will go before him, and will make an *uncommon intrusive* path for his *whole relational* steps" (Ps 85:10,13). That is, the integral whole of who, what and how *to be* defines the vulnerable presence and determines the relational involvement of the Trinity. The righteous whole of this Trinity is constituted integrally only by the *person*-al inter-*person*-al ontology and function of the uncommon Trinity, which in trinitarian discourse both past and present would compose uncommon Trinitarianism.

Within the reality of trinitarian theology and practice—yet likely not in its virtual and augmented reality—a common Trinity is unholy and a reduced Trinity is unwhole-ly. This ironic reality composes an unwhole-ly and unholy Trinity that is both incongruent and incompatible with the whole and uncommon (shortened as whole-ly) Trinity disclosed to us only in substantive relational-specific terms—disclosed further and deeper than YHWH the substantive relational verb. Therefore, the essential reality of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity's presence and involvement requires an uncommon orthodoxy in order to offer both the significance of good news in the human context and the

relevance for persons and relationships in the human condition. An orthodoxy of anything less and any substitutes is in actual reality essentially insignificant to the human context and irrelevant to the human condition—just as Jesus unmistakably indicated in his prayer, making it defining for his family to determine the difference necessary "so that the world may believe…may know" the essential reality of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity *to be* made whole in uncommon likeness.

Palatable Orthodoxy, Assimilated Sin and Theological Anthropology

In the theological task, there is a paradox (or inadvertent contradiction) to orthodoxy needing to be understood, which has occupied its efforts throughout history. This paradox of orthodoxy is that efforts to insure the certainty of orthodoxy and to safeguard it have resulted commonly in that orthodoxy becoming unorthodox. That is to say, according to the epistemic source of disclosing God's presence and involvement, this orthodoxy is no longer composed integrally by the qualitative relational depth of the uncommon Trinity who is distinguished only in whole ontology and function. Rather this source has been narrowed down for greater control over variable views, thereby fragmenting the whole Trinity to less than whole and reducing the uncommon Trinity to common terms in order to be palatable in the human context. The orthodoxy of the Trinity then becomes *not to be* the Trinity disclosed by the Word. This subtle unorthodox shift exists, if not prevails, in what composes common orthodoxy. Involved also in this commonizing process is fostering the unspoken rule for "theological correctness" (analogous to political correctness). The effects of common orthodoxy on trinitarian theology and practice have been immeasurable. Since a common Trinity is unholy and a reduced Trinity is unwhole-ly, this can only compose an unwhole-ly (*not to be* whole and uncommon) Trinity that is both incongruent and incompatible with the whole-ly Trinity.

Throughout the incarnation Jesus had to deal with the tension, resistance and denial created by who, what and how he was. The disclosures by Jesus were simply uncommon to existing theological frameworks and interpretive lenses. Judaism was greatly challenged by Jesus' presence, in spite of messianic hopes and expectations or because of their biased predispositions. Within the diversity of Second Temple Judaism, there still existed a common orthodoxy centered on the covenant, the Torah and the Temple that confronted the uncommon Jesus—notably by the constraining Pharisees and the assimilated Sadducees. Jesus' disclosures created dissonance with whatever form of common orthodoxy he faced. The Word was just too different and thus difficult to be palatable: "I am the living bread [—the primary over the secondary—] that came down from heaven…unless you *participate in the life* of the *uncommon* Son and *are relationally involved with* his *whole person*, you have no *qualitative* life in you (Jn 6:51,53).

Yet, the incarnation was not enacted to be palatable for what persons wanted, as the above interaction illuminates. The embodied Word was given for what persons need and therefore has only this relational purpose: "Those who *receive and partake of my whole person* abide in me, and I in them *in intimate relationship together*" (Jn 6:56, cf. 15:9). When those followers asked Jesus, "What must we do to perform the works [pl.] of God?" he responded decisively without equivocation, leaving no room for variation of his

relational terms: “This is the work [sing.] of God, that you believe *with relational trust and involvement* in *the whole person* whom he has sent” (6:28-29). The incarnation in relational terms composed the primacy of relationship together that persons need, which is difficult to embrace when that’s not what they want. The pursuit of what is palatable for human want over human need makes evident both the prevailing influence of sin as reductionism and its common human function in reduced theological anthropology.

This often subtle dynamic also encompasses an unorthodox shift to common orthodoxy. The whole and uncommon Trinity disclosed by Jesus’ whole person is difficult to accept completely into the belief systems of many Christians, past and present. The essential reality of the Trinity requires an irreplaceable uncommon orthodoxy that understandably conflicts with the limits and constraints of just what persons want—that is, subtly think they need to be doctrinally correct. As the above interaction also reveals, it is easier to compose a belief system with a theology and practice centered on “the works of God” rather than vulnerably involved as whole persons in “the work of God” composed by the primacy of intimate relationship together. Yet, even the singular work of God to “believe” is commonly interpreted as affirming a referential belief—the prevailing indicator of having faith—which is insufficient to define persons as subjects who believe in the Trinity with the necessary relational response composing the work of God. To believe in referential terms is always a substitute contrary to the relational terms disclosed by Jesus. Accordingly, having the right doctrine that fits either *what* one wants to believe (as in “many of his disciples,” Jn 6:66), or just *how* one wants to believe (as in “the twelve,” 6:67-69), invariably turns the theological task to an unorthodox shift in order to compose palatable beliefs in a common orthodoxy. That is, this process composes a palatable orthodoxy that is no longer straight/correct (*orthos*, cf. Heb 12:13) to distinguish the whole and uncommon Trinity with the necessary theology and practice involved in the primacy of intimate relationship together to know and understand the whole-ly Trinity (as the first disciples’ orthodoxy lacked, Jn 14:9).

The uncommon vulnerable presence and whole relational involvement of the Trinity are commonly difficult to receive in the trinitarian theological task, which reflects the problem of embracing their reality in trinitarian theology and practice. Stated simply, the Trinity is commonly viewed as too complex, demanding, troublesome or just inconvenient for two main reasons: (1) when reductionism is not accounted for in our theological task, and (2) when how persons are defined and relationships are determined in our theology and practice have been reduced or fragmented by our theological anthropology. These interrelated reasons exist when our view of sin is weak and our theological anthropology is not based on likeness of the Trinity’s whole ontology and function, which both make evident their assimilation into (or co-opted influence by) the common’s context. As emerged from the primordial garden (Gen 3:1-7, discussed previously), this influence ongoingly narrows down the epistemic process (limiting its field, distorting its source) jointly with the hermeneutic lens’ focus in the theological task in order to redefine the uncommon with the common, thereby shaping doctrine with a palatable orthodoxy (“good for *consumption*…desired to make one wise,” Gen 3:6). As unfolded in Jesus’ various interactions, this unorthodox shift of the theological task prevails until addressed at the heart of the persons and relationships involved.

The unorthodox shift of Paul (then Saul) was challenged face to face by the uncommon Jesus, which perplexed Paul but didn't cause him to retreat from this pivotal juncture in his theological task. When Paul directly asked Jesus "Who are you?" (Acts 9:5), he received a relational response beyond referential information about Jesus to have the relational epistemic connection to know Jesus. When Jesus unequivocally declared to the Father "I have made your name known" and "made your name known to them" (Jn 17:6,26), he was not referring to the transmission of information about the name but summarized his relational communication of the whole person to know only in relationship. As discussed previously, the name is indistinguishable from the person in relational language; yet in referential language the person is not always distinguished in the name. Jesus presented only the person, and Paul's experience of the whole person presented by Jesus was to define his Christology.

By engaging in the relational epistemic process with Jesus (and then with the Spirit), Paul's previous unorthodox shift composing his common orthodox monotheism was transposed by an uncommon shift. This new uncommon shift reconstructed his common orthodoxy into the uncommon orthodoxy now composing his *whole* monotheism. The God previously reduced and fragmented in Paul's theology and practice was made whole by Jesus' disclosures. In relational terms, this uncommon shift involved the relational dynamic of the disclosures essential to the whole of Jesus unfolding *into* Paul to constitute him whole, whereby Paul was able to compose whole theology and practice for Christ's church family.[2] What unfolds with Paul's whole theology and practice challenges any palatable orthodoxy, weak view of sin and a reduced theological anthropology.

The relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul is illuminated in Paul's theology. How clearly this synthesis is illuminated for us depends on our perceptual-interpretive lens of various issues. While the synthesis of Paul and Jesus perhaps suggests a systematic theology—a theological algorithm that, I emphasize, never concerned Paul—their synthesis involves a systemic framework that accounts for the relational dynamic of God's thematic action from (and prior to) creation in response to the human condition. This was Paul's integral concern and purpose to *pleroo* (make full, complete, whole, Col 1:25)[3] the word of God for the further embodying of the theology and hermeneutic of the whole gospel. And he engaged this function to illuminate for us whole knowledge and understanding of God (*synesis*, Col 2:2-4), which includes more than some integration of parts of Jesus and Paul and more deeply involves the relational outcome of their synthesis.

In Colossians, Paul apparently was responding to a theological crisis in the churches both in Colosse and Laodicea (Col 4:16, cf. Rev 3:14-18), in which their

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[2] A full discussion of the integration of Jesus and Paul is found in my study, *Jesus* into *Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online at http://www.4X12.org.

[3] In Pauline studies, scholars have concluded that the most undisputed letters in the Pauline corpus are limited to 1 & 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, Philippians and Philemon. The other six letters traditionally attributed to Paul have various points of dispute. Though disputed letters appear not to be congruent, for example, with Paul's writing style (the issue of dissimilarity), they still seem congruent with Paul's thought (the issue of similarity). I affirm all his letters in expanded discussion 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.

identity was affected by the influence of philosophical notions from mere human reasoning and construction (Col 2:4,8, cf. 20). This condition reduced the truth of the whole gospel and thus needed the theological and functional clarity for the churches there to be and live the whole of God's family—beyond the mere Christian ethics to which Colossians is often reduced. The extended length of Paul's opening remarks (1:1-2:5) was uncharacteristic of his undisputed letters, which raises the style issue of his authorship. Yet the situation and development there required a further and deeper response from Paul than he had usually expressed in his previous letters—though in those letters he always responded in part to the ongoing issue of the gospel revised by reductionism (e.g. Gal 1:6-7). This necessitated establishing this further framework (including Paul's most detailed cosmology, Col 1:15-20) and deeper context to address the issues in Colosse and Laodicea. In this process, Paul also had opportunity to clearly establish his further theological reflections and deeper theological development in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit for *synesis* of God's whole.

Paul did not engage in the *referentialization* of the Word, the process which narrows down the embodied Word to referential knowledge and information about what God does (e.g. delivers, miracles, teaches, serves) and has (e.g. attributes, truth, power and other resources). Moreover, this fragmenting process likely aggregates these parts of God in a narrowed unity for greater explanation and certainty of that information about God (e.g. in systematic theologies or explanatory theories)—operating under the false assumption that the sum of these parts equals the unified whole. In contrast and even conflict with this narrowed epistemic field and process, Paul was involved in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit to *pleroo* the communicative word from God, most vulnerably communicated by the *pleroma* of God (fullness of God, Col 1:19), to complete the communication of whole knowledge and understanding of God in relationship. This clearly distinguished Paul from many of his readers after him (cf. Peter's assessment of Paul, 2 Pet 3:16), including in Pauline scholarship today.

"The *pleroma* of God" was not a concept signifying some esoteric knowledge about or vague sphere of the mystery of God, as Valentinus misinterpreted from Paul to develop the Pleroma for Gnostics in the second century. Nor was "the *pleroma* of God" a conceptual-theological person, but rather "the whole fullness of *the Godhead*" embodied by Jesus' whole person (Col 2:9). This *pleroma* personally residing (*katoikeo*) in the embodied Jesus was the whole God person who functioned only to reconcile for relationship together in wholeness with God (Col 1:19-22; 2:10), whose presence and involvement distinguished the Trinity (as in Eph 2:18-22). Nothing less and no substitutes than the relational ontology of the whole-ly Trinity could constitute this *pleroma*. Nor could anything less and any substitute constitute Jesus as "the image of God" (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4) to disclose this relational function—which Marcion erred in doing by also misinterpreting Paul in the second century to support his docetic view that Jesus only appeared to be in bodily flesh. This was the One and Only who exegetes God (Jn 1:18) with his whole person in vulnerable face-to-face involvement in relationship: "God…who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). This was in continuity with God's disclosure "face to face" with Moses (Num 12:6-8), yet now with complete self-disclosure of the whole and uncommon Trinity vulnerably embodied in the face of Christ.

Colossians can be considered somewhat of a test case applying the functional clarity from Galatians and the theological clarity from Romans needed to expose, challenge and negate reductionism for the sake of the whole gospel—the precedent of which the church in Laodicea failed to take to heart, and thus whose heart Jesus pursued (Rev 3:19-20). Paul was entrusted with the administration (*oikonomia*) of "*pleroo* the word of God," that is, the management (*oikonomia* involves a household) of the whole of God's family (Col 1:25). This was the summary key Paul came to understand that defined decisively his purpose (*oikonomia*) and ministry (*diakonos*) of God's whole. Yet, as a Jew who became a follower of Christ, Paul engaged in more than defining the continuity of the NT word of God with the OT word of God for his readers. More important, as a person made whole from reductionism, Paul made conclusive the essential truth of the whole of God's thematic relational response of grace to make whole the human condition (Col 1:26-27; Eph 3:2-6). Therefore, Paul's *synesis* of God's relational disclosures constituted his development essentially of biblical theology, that is, theology which *pleroo* (to complete, make full or whole) the relational word from God, the gospel of peace (wholeness) from the God of uncommon wholeness to compose his uncommon orthodoxy of what essentially distinguished uncommon Trinitarianism.

This uncommon biblical theology was developed further in the general letter later entitled Ephesians (without personal greeting or specific situation and circumstance), extending the theological clarity of Romans. His further theological reflection in his general letter, likely also while in prison, defined the theological 'forest' and added aspects not included in Romans. The added theology developed in Ephesians notably involved the ecclesiology necessary to be whole—the theology of God's whole functioning in relationship together on God's relational terms, his *oikonomia* (administration, management oversight, Eph 3:2) of the Trinity's whole new creation family as the Trinity's uncommon temple (Eph 2:14-22).

Both Jesus and Paul ongoingly challenge our common theological and functional assumptions, just as the prophets did. Jesus challenges our assumptions of how we perceive and define his person, how we follow him, how we function in relationship with him, worship him, serve him and practice church—in other words, challenge our basic assumptions about the gospel. Paul extends these challenges and clearly illuminates *pleroma* theology, from which emerges the ecclesiology of the whole nonnegotiably based on the essential truth of the whole gospel irreducibly constituted by whole relationship together with the whole of Jesus, the *pleroma* of God, in order to integrally embody the *pleroma* of Christ (the church, Eph 1:22-23). What then unfolds from these challenges is the relational outcome of uncommon orthodoxy, whose whole composition is critically distinguished from general parts composing common orthodoxy. Thus, these challenges also expose the presence of common influence from the workings of reductionism, and then confront the reality of its assimilated sin and theological anthropology shaping the theological task.

In this sense, Paul's theology was polemic discourse composed out of necessity by him as the definitive apologist for the whole gospel, fighting conjointly *for* the integrity of this gospel and *against* all reductionism of its wholeness (e.g. Eph 6:15). To understand the whole in Paul's theology, therefore, is inseparable from understanding the integral witness of his whole person, not just as a Jew or a Christian. In Paul's journey, what must emerge, by the nature of his human person and being, are the whole *of* Paul's

person and his witness as well as the whole *in* Paul and his theology. This uncommon wholeness is the primary identity that defined who and what Paul was and that determined how he functioned—that is, his whole ontology and function, which is commonly unrecognized in Pauline studies. The relational dynamic of this process both illuminated Paul's essential truth of relationship with the whole and uncommon (yes) Trinity and challenges what is necessarily involved for any and all theological engagement in the uncommon shift from common orthodoxy to uncommon orthodoxy. It is critical for Paul's readers to pay attention to, and for theological and biblical studies not to ignore, this integral process Paul engaged theologically and functionally. Otherwise we are susceptible to an unorthodox shift that merely composes common orthodoxy, which neither redeems the sin of reductionism nor transforms reduced theological anthropology.

Colin Gunton's view was that Irenaeus is a model for all systematic theologians: "Irenaeus is less concerned with systematic consistency, more with the integrity of the faith in the face of attack…he thought systematically in a broad sense."[4] Perhaps Irenaeus learned the theological task from Paul, whose theological systemic framework to *pleroo* God's word continues to challenge both any fragmentary theological engagement and any incomplete theological assumptions—particularly in the referentialization of the Word. However we may approach theology today, it is imperative for us essentially not to merely defend the gospel—notably referentially in modernist terms and with mere systematic doctrines—but indeed to justify its good news relationally, the essential reality of which makes whole the human condition by resolving the human relational problem and fulfilling the human relational need. And claiming and proclaiming what is palatable will not complete this responsibility.

In the same sense as Paul, we are all apologists for the gospel, whether we accept the relational responsibility and engage in it or not—just as Jesus clarified the identity of his followers from the reductionists (Mt 5:13-16), extended this responsibility to them (Jn 15:16), and prayed for them to be whole together and thereby live and make whole in the world (Jn 17:21-23). Yet, unlike Paul, it would be insufficient to limit our fight just *for* the gospel. That is, we cannot fight for the whole gospel unless we conjointly fight *against* reductionism, both in the world and in our own persons (personally and collectively) and the function defining us in church and the academy. Reductionism was and continues to be the most formidable challenger we face in life as well as study. For Paul, reductionism's challenge is inescapable, though the fight against its influence can be ignored—with significant consequences both theologically and functionally. Therefore, in this study it is critical that we take to heart this integral rule of faith from Paul: "let the *wholeness* of Christ rule in your hearts" to define and determine our theology and practice (Col 3:15); and by embracing his uncommon wholeness, we engage the unavoidable conflict with reductionism—notably confronting palatable theology and practice, and the assimilated sin and theological anthropology underlying.

In distinct contrast to common orthodoxy and conflict with what's palatable, the whole gospel embodied by Jesus, the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19; 2:9)—who embodied its theology and hermeneutic—was further embodied *into* (*eis* denoting relational movement to) Paul, who extended the embodying of the gospel of wholeness (and its theology and

[4] Colin E. Gunton, 'Historical and Systematic Theology" in Colin E. Gunton, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 15.

hermeneutic) in the body of Christ, the *pleroma* of Christ, in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit. This relational dynamic emerges whole-ly in Jesus' story and converges integrally with Paul's story. From the beginning, Jesus is the theological, ontological, relational and functional keys to the whole and uncommon Trinity, and thereby constituted the integral pivot for the triune God's thematic salvific action in history throughout the unfolding words in the First Testament and Second Testament. Paul is a functional bridge between these inseparable Testaments to *pleroo* the communicative word from God. Therefore, he only illuminated what Jesus embodied in whole and never went beyond the *pleroma* of God to construct his own theology. Nor was he influenced by what would be palatable for the orthodoxy of the Word (e.g. 2 Cor 2:17; 4:2).

For Paul, nothing less and no substitutes for the whole and uncommon God was disclosed to compose his new uncommon orthodoxy; and anything less and any substitutes reduce God's revelation to his old common orthodoxy, which the whole of Paul fought rigorously against in order that the whole in his theology illuminated unmistakably the *new*—even by correcting the other disciples (Gal 2:11-21) and thus making whole the theology and practice of the church. Uncommon orthodoxy then requires an uncommon view of both sin and theological anthropology to keep from shifting into common orthodoxy (Gal 3:22-4:7).

Having said this about Paul, it should be understood that Paul's uncommon orthodoxy was not commonly trinitarian. In spite of his clear distinctions of the Son, the Spirit and the Father, Paul was certainly not a trinitarian in his theology in the traditional sense. Nevertheless, in his transformation from a common orthodoxy to the uncommon orthodoxy of his whole theology and practice, Paul provided the whole and uncommon basis for the essential reality necessary to compose uncommon Trinitarianism and its uncommon orthodoxy. Yet, traditional trinitarian theology in large part has gotten separated from Paul's whole and uncommon basis, and this has rendered its theology less significant for trinitarian practice than Paul's whole theology and practice. This gap in trinitarian theology is likely the reason for the notable absence of the Trinity in the everyday practice (as the primacy of "the work of God") of Christians personally and collectively as church—ironically making Paul more relevant for trinitarian theology and practice.

The whole in Paul's uncommon orthodoxy countered what is more palatable in common orthodoxy and its common Trinitarianism. In contrast, this commonness has neither redeemed sin as reductionism nor transformed a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function. Paul's uncommon orthodoxy requires this redemption and transformation in order to constitute whole theology and practice in uncommon likeness of the Trinity. And having this strong view of sin and whole view of theological anthropology have been lacking in Pauline studies in particular and biblical-theological studies in general, and thus continues to be problematic in the church's trinitarian theology and practice. The consequence has been and continues to be the prevailing reality in the theological task of composing God's presence and involvement in a common orthodoxy as a common Trinitarianism, whether perceived as more palatable or not. The ongoing results apparent in our theology and practice are a diversity of virtual-augmented realities composed by ontological simulations and functional illusions that basically shape God into a pseudonymous God, even if idealized. Can we claim and proclaim this *to be* the same God or Trinity disclosed by Jesus?

The Uncommon Intimate Whole of Uncommon Orthodoxy

Accounting for God's presence is one issue that is uncontested in orthodoxy—even as initially witnessed in Israel's experience, that is, at least in their covenant situation and circumstances if not in their covenant relationship (cf. Ps 114). The defining issue in the theological task, however, that distinguishes uncommon orthodoxy from common orthodoxy is the depth of God's involvement, which then distinguishes the uncommon whole of God's presence (as Paul experienced further than Israel). Trinitarian theology and practice must be able to distinguish the whole Trinity's uncommon presence and the uncommon Trinity's whole involvement in order to be integral for composing orthodoxy in the qualitative relational significance of the gospel of wholeness (as Paul made definitive, Eph 6:15)—the whole gospel that disclosed the whole and uncommon Trinity. Yet, moreover, distinguishing the whole-ly Trinity disclosed also requires a hermeneutic that is able to distinguish the Trinity's disclosures in uncommon relational language from common referential language; this necessitates a view both of sin as reductionism and of theological anthropology in whole ontology and function—as Paul further demonstrated in his theological task—in order to engage the relational epistemic process needed for the Trinity's disclosures.

Therefore, take in the full significance of the depth of the Trinity's involvement:

> The Father made it the relational imperative to listen to his Son, whom he loves; the Son unmistakably disclosed the Father whom he loves, and likewise distinguished the Spirit's person in relational terms, that is, the presence and involvement of the Spirit of truth as the relational replacement for the embodied Truth—neither as referential information nor as propositional truth but enacting the essential reality of their family love together.

In uncommon Trinitarianism, what distinguishes the persons of the Trinity most distinctly is not their various functions but their relationship together. Their relationship composed nothing less than and no substitutes for their uncommon intimate relationships of love. Traditional trinitarian theology highlighted the relationship to some extent but arguably not to the depth of the Trinity's involvement disclosed, even with *perichoresis*. To be sure, modalism never distinguished the Trinity because while modes of function could be related and interrelated, nevertheless modes don't have relationships notably in the intimate involvement of love. This depth of relationships is also uncommon and requires whole persons. Of course, this also raises the issue of tritheism, yet the Trinity's disclosure cannot be limited to the epistemic field of physics and its narrow methodology, or constrained to the philosophical thought of metaphysics and its common rationalizing. As Jesus disclosed unequivocally, the trinitarian persons together are the ontological One and the relational Whole, which goes beyond the realm of the common and thus must be either accepted on the basis of its uncommon nature or denied by some common measure.

What distinguishes these trinitarian persons is their inter-*person*-al intimate relational involvement of uncommon family love. What is uncommon about their family love is that it is not so much about unity but is distinguished by wholeness in ontology and function—an uncommon condition eluding the human context, namely the condition

of human persons and their relationships. The whole function of their family love is *intimacy*: defined as the hearts of their whole persons involved with each other to constitute their synergistic depth together as the relational Whole. Yet, their involvement of love goes beyond their function of love in intimacy, and this is vital to understand about the Trinity—not to mention for how we commonly describe God's love. The intimacy of love also constitutes the whole ontology of the Trinity. "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8,16), therefore the Trinity's uncommon being exists beyond the common realms of physics and metaphysics as the ontological One. Together in love the ontological One and relational Whole integrally compose the uncommon intimate whole essential to the reality of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity.

Moreover, the uncommon intimate whole of the Trinity cannot be fragmented by common trinitarian theology and practice that reduces the person of the Spirit to the love (as some dynamic or force) binding together the Father and the Son. The Trinity's family love is intimately constituted by the whole ontology of the *person*-al Trinity and the whole function of the inter-*person*-al Trinity. Anything less and any substitutes of the Spirit's person no longer composes the essential reality of uncommon Trinitarianism—though perhaps depicting the virtual-augmented reality of a fragmentary and common Trinity.

The Trinity's whole ontology and function in intimate family love also explains why God's "faithfulness and love meet together" (Ps 85:10), always go together and are inseparable from God's righteousness to determine who, what and how the Trinity is (Ps 85:13; 89:14). That is to say, the faithful God loves and the loving God is faithful, the disclosure of whom can be counted on to be reliable and thus valid because the faithful and loving God is righteous (the legal significance of *sedeq*). The righteous God discloses and enacts only what is true, correct, straight (*ortho*), that is, the orthodox who, what and how of the whole and uncommon Trinity. On this whole basis, the intimate whole of the Trinity's family love discloses the ontology and function uncommon to the common's human context. What this presents, on the one hand, is difficult for the common to accept, while on the other hand is what the common human condition of persons and relationships need to be made whole. Distinguishing this essential difference of the uncommon from the common is irreplaceable and thus indispensable for the trinitarian theological task to compose whole trinitarian theology and practice. Accordingly, we cannot validly talk about the faithful, righteous and loving God without the uncommon intimate whole of the Trinity, because this is the only God present and involved. Yet, such discourse pervades the theological task and prevails in common theology and practice.

In family love, Jesus disclosed the nature of this whole ontology and function in three relational-specific ways, not exhaustive but defining ways which are uncommon so they usually are ignored in theology and practice composed especially by an incomplete Christology:

> When Jesus grieved over Jerusalem because they didn't know or understand what would give them peace (*shalôm*, wholeness, Lk 19:41-42), he expressed the hard reality of his family love (as in Lk 13:34). **First**, he upset the good news of the incarnation and declared somewhat paradoxically, yet only because it was uncommon: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to earth; I have not come

> to bring peace, but a sword" (Mt 10:34), that is, "but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided…against *each other*" (Lk 12:51-53). Is this family love? **Secondly**, Jesus exercised his forceful hand to clean out the temple, causing division among God's people in order that 'My *family* house shall be called a *home* of *relational connection* for all the nations" (Mk 11:17)—constituting the intimate communion of relationship together as God's family. Is this the new way to define peace? **Third**, on the basis only of the relational significance of family identity—not a referential religious or sociocultural identity—Jesus clearly distinguished his uncommon family from the common: "Who is my *family*? …Here *is my family*! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my *family*" (Mt 12:48-50). Is this how to determine family?

And what is foremost in the will of the Father? "Listen to my Son" who enacts the Trinity's uncommon family in intimate relationship together in order for his followers *to be* in whole likeness of the Trinity—just as the Son made conclusive in his defining family prayer (Jn 17). In other words, the three relational-specific ways of family love, peace and family are all uncommon, and they expose the common ways these vital areas are defined and determined by reductionism and a reduced ontology and function. Therefore, these uncommon ways integrally disclose the whole ontology and function of the Trinity and distinguish the whole who, what and how composing the Trinity's church family in likeness.

In spite of their understandably discomforting or perhaps disbelieving effect, these three relational-specific ways disclose the significance of the Trinity's uncommon presence and involvement in whole ontology and function. They cannot be ignored and must be accounted for in the trinitarian theological task, if trinitarian theology and practice are to be distinguished uncommon and not rendered merely common. The likeness of the Trinity presented in common orthodoxy is not the uncommon Trinity disclosed by the Son, affirmed by the Father, and made conclusive by the Spirit in their intimate relational involvement together of family love. The relational dynamics unfolding with the Trinity's presence and involvement can be nothing other than uncommon if the whole Trinity is to emerge at all. This is the essential reality facing orthodoxy.

In the strategic shift of the Trinity's uncommon theological trajectory (discussed earlier in chap. 3), the Son made definitive that in the inner-out ontology of the Trinity ("God is spirit") the Father seeks also whole persons from inner out for the primary purpose of intimate relationship together (Jn 4:21-24). That is, "spirit" signifies the hearts of both the Trinity and human persons vulnerably involved with each other in the depth of intimacy. The Trinity's uncommon theological trajectory embodied by the Son was more vulnerably enacted in his intrusive relational path, the functional steps of which were uncommon to the human context and confronted the common's human condition not just at the surface but down to its roots. The whole relational terms disclosing the Trinity for this intimate relationship together also both discomforted persons and threatened the common relationships existing even among God's people, including his followers. For further clarity and correction in the trinitarian theological task, the Father made it the relational imperative for all Jesus' followers throughout history to listen to his Son, that is, respond on his irreducible and nonnegotiable relational terms. These are the

whole terms that Jesus made indispensable in an irreversible paradigm pivotal for the theological task and determinative for theology and practice (Mk 4:24-25).

In Jesus' irreversible paradigm, the "measure" (*metron*) we give or use and thus get or receive back involves our perceptual-interpretive framework that we use in the theological task. This then determines (measures, limits) the level of participation in the epistemic process for the Trinity's disclosures. When Jesus defined "the measure" used by his followers, he specifically identifies our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens, which determines what we will pay attention to and ignore, and thus what we see, hear and listen to. For example, how selective are we about listening to all of Jesus' words, and/or how seriously do we take what he says—most notable in the three ways expressed above? Accordingly, to respond to Jesus' imperative to listen carefully to all his words and to understand the depth of what he says, we need the following: (1) to understand the horizon (his relational context and process) of where Jesus is coming from, and in this process, (2) to account for the horizon (the common's surrounding context and process) of where we are coming from—which includes any defining and determining influence our common context may exert as it converges with Jesus' uncommon context. Without knowing our own horizon and accounting for its influence on the framework and lens we use, we cannot listen to Jesus speaking for himself on his own relational terms. This is pivotal for the trinitarian theological task, with irreversible results for trinitarian theology and practice.

What is unmistakable in this indispensable process and unavoidable in Jesus' nonnegotiable imperative emerges in this:

> The trinitarian relational context and process—which Jesus enacted for our involvement in the relational epistemic process to the whole and uncommon Trinity, for the Trinity's uncommon whole and our uncommon wholeness together—cannot be diminished or minimalized by common human construction (e.g. a narrowed-down quantitative framework) and shaping (e.g. generalized referential terms), that is, without the loss of whole knowledge and understanding (*syniemi, synesis*) of the Trinity, as well as what it means to be whole.

In his imperative for his followers, Jesus makes it clearly conclusive: our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens will define our reality and determine how we function in our life ("the measure you give"). On this basis alone, we should not expect to experience anything more or less ("the measure you get"), notably in relationship together. Implied further in his words, Jesus defined the outcome of a open-ended qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework and the consequence of a narrowed-down quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework, both of which are directly correlated to the epistemic process: "For to those who have *a qualitative framework and lens*, more will be given; from those who have nothing, *that is, no qualitative framework and lens*, even what they have *from a quantitative framework* will be taken away *or rendered insignificant*" (Mk 4:25). This outcome directly applies to uncommon orthodoxy and this consequence to common orthodoxy.

Jesus' defining statement "the measure you use will be the measure you get" (Mk 4:24, NIV) was not expressed as a propositional truth, though it should be paid attention to with that significance. More importantly, his relational language communicated this relational statement that is directly connected to his relational imperative "Pay attention to *the words* you hear *from me*"; this extends the Father's relational imperative "listen to him" (Mt 17:5)—the embodied Word from God. Later, while everyone was amazed at what Jesus did, he qualified these relational imperatives to listen to the Word with the use of *tithemi* (to set, put one's person, Lk 9:44, cf. "lay down one's life," Jn 15:13). In referential language *tithemi* would be about putting Jesus' words "into your ears" (NRSV) to complete the transmission of information. Yet, in this context his disciples did not understand his words (i.e. have a frame of reference, *aisthanomai*, 9:45, cf. Heb 5:14) even though Jesus said *tithemi*. Why? Because Jesus' words are in relational language that cannot be recognized, perceived, understood (*aisthanomai*) to distinguish his relational words without the interpretive framework of his relational language (cf. Jn 8:43). The disciples only heard general referential words to put in their ears, which had no deeper significance to them. They did not put their whole persons into the relational involvement necessary for the relational epistemic process to have the hermeneutic to understand Jesus' relational language; and their relational distance evidenced their lack of vulnerable involvement in *tithemi* with the Word ("they were afraid to ask him"). In other words, they lacked the relational connection that the Father made imperative in order for the intimate relationship together the Father seeks with all his followers.

This demonstrated some critical interrelated issues for those who "hear" the Word, notably in the academy, and proclaim the gospel:

> "The language you use will be the Word you get," and "the interpretive framework, lens and hermeneutic you use will be the knowledge and understanding of the Word you get"; thus, "the epistemic process you engage will be the theology and practice you get."

Therefore, in the trinitarian theological task, the measure most needed to use points to a theological framework and interpretive lens uncommon to common theology and practice both past and present. This raises the need for uncommon orthodoxy if we want (as in need) to go further and get deeper than the prevailing theology and practice of common orthodoxy. The irreducible truth and nonnegotiable reality are that the orthodoxy we use will be the Trinity we get; and the Trinity we use will be the gospel and its outcome that we get in our relational condition and thus the human context gets in its human condition.

Given how confronting the Son's intrusive relational path was and how discomforting and threatening the disclosure of the Trinity was, it would seem logical that the orthodoxy needed for trinitarian theology and practice would have to be radical. Uncommon orthodoxy indeed gets to the deepest root of theology and practice based on the whole and uncommon disclosed by the *person*-al and inter-*person*-al Trinity, and in that sense it would appear to be radical.[5] Yet, even if you didn't perceive uncommon

[5] The uncommon orthodoxy discussed in this study has some overlap with the framework of Radical Orthodoxy, but uncommon orthodoxy is not synonymous with Radical Orthodoxy. For its position, see James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

orthodoxy as radical, don't be surprised to experience discomfort or threat by it; this is the essential reality of the Trinity that the Father presents, the Son enacts and the Spirit discloses. Uncommon orthodoxy, however, is neither a radical orthodoxy nor a progressive orthodoxy, neither a Western orthodoxy nor even an Eastern orthodoxy, and in fact is distinguished from them in vital matters basic to all life. All these theological frameworks are rendered or have undergone some form of common shaping, notably in their underlying theological anthropology, which subtly yet commonly reduces the whole ontology and function of both God and human life in likeness. The consequence has not been given top priority, more likely ignored or just not understood by these frameworks and their lenses, and therefore has had the effect of reflecting, reinforcing or even sustaining the fragmentary human relational condition—no matter what their theology may profess and their gospel may proclaim.

Accounting for the Trinity's presence and involvement has been a struggle in the theological task, often elusive mainly because of an incomplete Christology. Uncommon orthodoxy has its essential basis and substantive base in the uncommon life and whole function of Jesus, who integrally composes the complete Christology that cannot be fragmented and still have an orthodox (straight, correct, true) theological framework and interpretive lens, much less uncommon orthodoxy. For example, Jesus' teachings cannot be applied apart from the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity; this is commonly practiced by Christians in general and in particular efforts (even movements) for social justice, peace and other Christian ethics—all of which should not expect such application to have the qualitative relational significance necessary to make whole the human (including our) relational condition. That relational outcome is inseparable from the Trinity embodied by Jesus' whole person. The significance of all Jesus's teachings disclosed what the Father taught him (Jn 2:28) and therefore is central to the whole and uncommon Trinity. To be selective of Jesus' words and not take seriously what he says both fragment Jesus' person and reduce his ontology and function from the whole of who, what and how he is. This fragmentation also occurs when the focus on Jesus is only on the cross; likewise, he is reduced when theology and practice are overly christocentric.

In the common orthodoxy of most theology and practice, Jesus is the key to the traditional gospel, which in narrowed-down terms is fragmentary and incomplete. In uncommon orthodoxy Jesus is the key to the Trinity, the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity who initiated the gospel long before the incarnation. What Jesus embodied in his whole person then unfolded uncommonly to enact the Trinity's relational-specific response of grace in the relational involvement o family love, in order to make whole our human relational condition. Uncommon orthodoxy is the theological framework and interpretive lens of the following dynamic that continues to unfold, yet should not be confused with process theology:

> The essential reality composed by the whole ontology and function of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity, whose uncommon vulnerable presence and whole relational involvement are disclosed in relational terms (*phaneroo* qualifying *apokalypto*) integrally by nothing less and no substitutes of the Son in triangulation with the Father and the Spirit, unfolds in the human context in order to constitute this

> essential reality's orthodox (straight, correct, true) needed response—though not always wanted in the human context—to complete the essential relational outcome of the gospel. Since the whole and uncommon YHWH's essential ontology and function as the triune God had been disclosed with the Spirit, Word and Father in the First Testament, and now fully disclosed in the Second Testament as the whole ontology and function of the Trinity, to claim this gospel is to claim the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity—which, of course, not even all of Jesus' followers wanted (Jn 6:60,66), and that his closest disciples didn't know and understand (Jn 14:9).

So, why wouldn't anyone want the gospel; and for those who claim it, why don't they know and understand the Trinity? This gospel integrally holds the Trinity accountable as well as the Son's followers accountable for reciprocal relationship together in the uncommon intimate whole of the Trinity's family, that is, only as Jesus made definitive in his family prayer. If we claim fully the gospel, we are embracing the uncommon presence and whole involvement of the Trinity; and if we whole-ly embrace the Trinity, we are embracing the uncommon intimate whole of the Trinity in intimate relationship together—both of which the twelve disciples lacked in their theological task. This puts the gospel in its complete context (in 3-D), and its uncommon nature and significance don't always appeal to what persons want (or at least pay attention to) even though it's what all persons and relationships need (notably in the church). Yet, the whole and uncommon Trinity offers nothing less and no substitutes, and this presents an insurmountable challenge for common Trinitarianism and its common orthodoxy.

The intimacy between the trinitarian persons centered only in the innermost of love at the heart of their persons, which is both irreducible and nonnegotiable and thus neither variable nor optional for the Trinity and its orthodoxy in likeness. This intimacy integrated their hearts in the relational involvement of love, which by necessity integrally (1) constructed the essential structure of the Trinity as the ontological One and (2) constituted the synergistic systemic process of the Trinity as the relational whole. Without this intimacy the Trinity in the human context reveals a fragmentary Trinity whose ontology and function are not distinguished whole. With the incarnation, however, this intimacy of love distinguished between the trinitarian persons emerged whole-ly in the human context with its essential reality enacted uncommonly by the Son. Void of idealized terms or variable purpose, Jesus' relationship-specific involvement of love embodied the Trinity's vulnerable presence *in* this intimate relationship together and *for* this intimate relationship together. Without the reality of *in* there is no relational outcome of *for*, whereby the gospel is rendered without qualitative relational significance for our human relational condition. In this uncommon relational process and for this uncommon relational purpose, Jesus' relational involvement with his disciples enacted this uncommon intimacy composed by only the whole Trinity, including the person of the Spirit.

The intimate relational involvement of the Trinity converges in Jesus' footwashing, which signified to Peter that to avoid involvement with Jesus was to reject the Trinity he embodied ("no share with *all of* me," Jn 13:8). The challenge of Jesus' intimate relational involvement demonstrated in his footwashing faces all of us, with the same implications Peter faced. To keep relational distance from, to avoid or reject how the Trinity is present and involved with family love for intimate relationship together, is

to deny who and what the Trinity is as disclosed vulnerably by Jesus, and therefore to disclaim (even inadvertently) who and what are essential to the gospel. This essential reality was the deep concern central to Paul's prayer (echoing Jesus' family prayer) for the church *to be* whole as the relational outcome of the intimate relational experience with the *pleroma* of God's uncommon involvement of love (Eph 3:16-19).

Even though Paul was no traditional trinitarian, his new uncommon orthodoxy of whole monotheism signified that the new creation church family was inconceivable apart from the uncommon triune God (Eph 4:24), and thus inseparable from the whole Trinity (2 Cor 3:18; Eph 2:22). Embodying this relational outcome of the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15) was integral to the relational dynamic of Jesus *into* Paul. The image of the whole of God in the face of Christ was innermost for the whole of Paul (2 Cor 4:4,6; Col 3:10) and integrated the whole in his theology (2 Cor 3:18). To be transformed to the qualitative image of the ontological One and to live in the relational likeness of the relational Whole defined the ontology and determined the function of the church for Paul. Therefore, churches must make the critical decision how their practice is *to be* or *not to be*: either shaped by a framework essentially with the temple curtain still between them and God and thus without intimate relationship together, or distinguished by the relational context and process in likeness of the Trinity's intimate relationship together with the veil removed. The church matures only in the difference of the holy God and the likeness of the whole-ly Trinity (Eph 4:13; Col 1:27-28).

The ontology and function of the church in likeness of the Trinity is neither a paradigm (though the trinitarian example does serve as that) nor a limited analogy, that is, if Jesus' defining family prayer is taken seriously, not to mention Paul in whole. But more significantly this reality-in-likeness is the relational outcome of directly experiencing the Trinity (including for Paul) in intimate relationship only on God's qualitative relational terms. This ongoing relational process is integral to the ongoing relational base of the Trinity's uncommon vulnerable presence and whole intimate involvement in the function of church as family, particularly as revealed vulnerably by Jesus in the relational progression of following him to the Father and in the reciprocal relational work of the Spirit illuminated by Paul (e.g. Eph 2:22). In trinitarian theology and practice, the church must both account for the face of the whole and uncommon Trinity and also be accountable to the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity in face-to-face relationship.

In the trinitarian theological task, we cannot adequately "observe" the Trinity without being relationally addressed by the Trinity at the same time. Keep in focus that God's self-revelation is *how* God engages relationship. How the Trinity is revealed, therefore, is how the Trinity relates to us, which is how the trinitarian persons engage relationship with each other (though in horizontal relational process discussed earlier). This involvement of family love in the primacy of relationship together may appear limited to the God of revelation, yet we cannot limit the righteousness of God only to revelation without righteousness becoming the totality of who, what and how the loving God is—though by definition righteousness defines for us the whole of who, what and how God is in relationship. The intimate loving God in righteousness and holiness is who is present and involved with us; and on this relational basis, Paul makes definitive the likeness that determines the new creation church family's likeness (Eph 4:24).

To account in the trinitarian theological task for the Trinity's presence and involvement signifies knowing and understanding the Trinity in relational terms (as Paul prayed, Eph 1:17; 3:19), not just having information about the Trinity (cf. 1 Jn 4:7). Boasting in knowing and understanding the Trinity is primary for the theological task, above and beyond anything else that can be boasted about (notably information about the Trinity, Jer 9:23-24). Yet initially, we cannot even epistemologically know and ontologically understand the Trinity without engaging the Trinity in how the trinitarian persons engage relationship in their context and are engaging relationship with us specifically in our context, yet still by their primary context. It is within their relational context and process that the Trinity's self-disclosure is vulnerably given in relational terms and needs to be received in likeness—and not narrowed down to referential terms and acknowledged indirectly—thereby directly experienced as an outcome of this relational connection. To narrow this down to referential terms disconnects what is revealed from the relational context and process of its Source. Thus, this consistency with the trinitarian relational context and compatibility with the trinitarian relational process cannot be engaged from the detached observation, for example, of a scientific paradigm, or with the measured involvement and relational distance of a quantitative-analytic framework (even exegetically rigorous). As Jesus made definitive, the measure we use for the Word will be the Trinity we get. Accordingly, the Trinity's whole context and process can only be engaged from the qualitative function of relationship—in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit as demonstrated by Paul (e.g. 1 Cor 2:10-13). Similarly, J. I. Packer defined the process of knowing God as a relationship with emotional involvement, and he challenged as invalid the assumption that the theological task can be engaged meaningfully with relational detachment.[6] Earlier, Helmut Thielicke made the critical distinction of no longer reading Scripture as a relational "word to me but only as the object of exegetical endeavors."[7]

This is the relational significance of the deeper epistemology that Jesus made a necessity for Philip, Thomas and all his disciples in order to truly know him and whereby also know the Father (Jn 14:1-9)—that is, relationally knowing the Trinity in intimate relationship without the veil, which is definitive of eternal life (Jn 17:3). This is the relationship-specific process that does not merely see (or observe) but rather is deeply focused on the Subject (as in *theaomai*, Jn 1:14); and that does not reduce the person merely to attributes and categories but rather puts the parts of revelation together to comprehend the whole and uncommon Trinity (as in *syniemi*, Mk 8:17, that the early disciples lacked, and *synesis*, Col 2:2, that Paul gained).

This relational epistemic process is the outworking of the Trinity's intimate loving relational involvement with us. Therefore, to come to know the triune God is neither possible by individual effort nor is the individual's relationship with God alone sufficient. This process involves the practice of reciprocal relationship in family love as composed by the Trinity that, when experienced, results in the relational outcome of uncommon intimate whole relationship together as the new creation family of God constituted in the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. Thus this integral relational process involves the integration of both the primacy of the qualitative (heart function in intimate

[6] As noted by Alister E. McGrath, "Evangelical Theological Method" in *Evangelical Futures*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 23.

[7] Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 33.

relationship with the Trinity) and the primacy of the relational (intimate involvement together in the family relationships of the Trinity)—together composing the uncommon intimate whole of uncommon orthodoxy. Whole knowledge and understanding of the Trinity as revealed (i.e. present and involved with us) is never merely for us to be informed about God but always directly intrudes on our whole person and relationships in the innermost, thereby transforming how we define our person, how we engage relationships and practice church to be whole in likeness (2 Cor 3:16-18; Col 3:10-11). Maturing goes deeper in this difference and likeness, just as Mary vulnerably demonstrated (e.g. Jn 12:3) and Paul made definitive for the church's whole ontology and function (Eph 4:11-16).

Consequently, the ontology and function of the Trinity cannot be understood in referential formulations of trinitarian theology nor experienced in church doctrine, as exist in the theology and practice of common orthodoxy. Along with reducing the whole Trinity to attributes and the trinitarian persons to categories or roles, these reflect how our understanding ("a reputation of being alive," Rev 3:1, NIV) and our practice ("have abandoned the love you had at first," Rev 2:4) become *decontextualized* or disconnected. That is, they are relationally detached or distant from the relational context and process of the uncommon Trinity, and they need both to be recontextualized in the whole relational nature of the Trinity and reconnected to the Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement—which likely may also require deconstruction, transformation and reconstruction in the theology and practice of our discipleship and churches.

The essential reality of uncommon Trinitarianism and its uncommon orthodoxy challenges the deepest roots of our theology and practice—also digging into the core of sin encompassing reductionism and getting down to the heart of theological anthropology's ontology and function. The whole and uncommon Trinity facing us will not go away or wear a palatable mask, but in love and faithful righteousness the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity continues to pursue us face to face—seeking answers to "Where are you?" and "What are you doing here?"—in order to "shine upon you and be gracious to you…and bring change and establish new relationship [*siym*] together in wholeness" (*shalôm*, Num 6:25-26). The whole profile of the face of YHWH's definitive blessing has been fulfilled by the essential reality of the Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement. Yet, the questions persist: Where are you in relationship with the whole and uncommon Trinity? and What are you doing here with the reality of the Trinity's presence and involvement? Jesus adds, "Don't you know my whole person even after all I have vulnerably disclosed to you in relationship together?" and Paul further adds, "Has Christ been divided, *fragmented, reduced to create diversity in the church*?" (1 Cor 1:13).

Performing "the works of God" are not enough to answer. Virtual and augmented realities are insufficient to respond. The essential reality of uncommon Trinitarianism and its uncommon orthodoxy provide the only sufficient basis to respond in reciprocal relationship both compatible with the *person*-al Trinity's uncommon presence and congruent with the inter-*person*-al Trinity's whole involvement. Perhaps in common orthodoxy, you would raise your own question in response to uncommon Trinitarianism and its uncommon orthodoxy: "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it—much less live in likeness?"

Chapter 8 The Likeness of Persons and Relationships

The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
2 Corinthians 4:4

The world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him.
He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.
John 1:10-11

The human person was created in the image of the triune God to be distinguished in all creation. Persons in relationship together emerged in creation in the likeness of the Trinity, created together in order not "to be apart" from the intimate whole constituted in the Trinity (Gen 2:18,25). What unfolded in creation was soon rendered indistinguishable (Gen 3:7-8), when persons and relationship together were challenged with the redefining proposal "you will be like God" (3:5) under the assumption "you will not *be reduced*" (3:4). Since this assumption was never challenged by those persons, it set into motion a critical condition for persons and relationships that commonly prevails, even among Christian persons and relationships. The subtle alternative "like God" creates an ambiguous distinction from 'the likeness of the Trinity' that both confuses how persons and relationships were created and no longer distinguishes those persons and relationships in creation, in the human context, and including in church.

This then raises the question of what distinguishes 'the likeness of the Trinity' clearly in contrast to "like God" so that persons and relationships are *to be* integrally compatible with the *person*-al Trinity's uncommon qualitative image and congruent with the inter-*person*-al Trinity's whole relational likeness?

Distinguishing the Likeness of the Trinity

In conflict with the alternative "like God," who, what and how persons and relationships are *to be* can be neither reduced nor negotiated (as witnessed in the primordial garden). This irreducible and nonnegotiable reality emerged distinguished at creation, yet their likeness was not fully defined until it unfolded unmistakably with the disclosure of the whole and uncommon Trinity. Only the Trinity's whole ontology and function determine human ontology and function, whereby persons and relationship can be in likeness. To understand, however, the likeness of persons and relationships requires first knowing who, what and how the Trinity is *like*.

The epistemic source distinguishing the *like* of the Trinity also is in conflict with the epistemic process composed with the hermeneutical assumption that "your eyes will be opened and you will be like God." *To be* '*like* the Trinity' is unattainable, and all such efforts to define and determine persons and relationships "like God" fall into reduced ontology and function, unable to be whole. It is indispensable, therefore, to understand

that the likeness of persons and relationships *like* the Trinity have both (1) ontological limits to who, what and how persons can be like, and yet (2) no functional limits to the depth persons can have in their relationships together in likeness. From the beginning, our default condition and mode are to reverse these limits, such that persons assume no limits to their self-determination ("be like God") while having constraints in their relationships. Whatever the efforts to reverse these limits all counter the likeness of the Trinity that has been distinguished unmistakably *like* the Trinity. This irreducible and nonnegotiable likeness of the Trinity constituted *like* the Trinity is integrally embodied, enacted and disclosed by the Son in uncommon intimate whole with the Father and the Spirit.

This good news was illuminated by Paul, who made definitive "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4). As the prototype "*eikon* of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), Jesus' glory disclosed the qualitative being, relational nature and vulnerable presence of the Trinity, whose image *like* the Trinity distinguished the trinitarian persons and their relationship together essential to the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. The face of Christ bearing the image of the whole ontology and function of the Trinity (2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:19; 2:9) also distinguished the ontology and function of persons and relationships in likeness (2 Cor 3:18; Col 2:10; 3:10)—which Jesus epitomized by vulnerably enacting his whole person in relationship with this followers whole-ly *like* the Trinity. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by Peter in relational terms distinct from his referential terms, despite the essential reality of the embodied Word emerging *like* the Trinity in the world of persons and relationships that he created in likeness, they "did not know him *either as like the Trinity or as their likeness in the Trinity*" (Jn 1:10). Moreover, even those identified as "his own people *in likeness* did not accept him" (Jn 1:11). As distinguished by the whole glory of who (qualitative being), what (relational nature) and how (vulnerable presence) in Jesus' face illuminating the image and likeness of the Trinity, this essential reality remains difficult to accept for our persons and relationships in likeness. This acceptance is compounded especially if we continue to be influenced by the subtle alternative "like God" and reverse the above limits.

How we define our persons and relationships integrally determines their function, which will either be the virtual result from our human comparative terms to measure up "like God" yet in reduced ontology and function, or be the essential outcome of God's relational terms *to be* in likeness of the Trinity constituted only in whole ontology and function. Therefore, what unavoidably converges in distinguishing the likeness of the Trinity from "like God (thus a reduced Trinity)" are the issues of knowing sin as reductionism and understanding theological anthropology in reduced ontology and function. Reductionism subtly influences the shift to reduced ontology and function, mainly by giving primacy to the outer in of persons and relationships. Within the scope of this subtle influence, theological anthropology must answer: (1) What does it mean to be the human person God created? and (2) What does God expect from this person and the relationships of persons together?—which are both implied in God's question "Where are you?"

To be able to answer these vital issues will require accounting for the influence of reductionism on persons and relationships that can transpose the likeness of the Trinity to the pervading alternative "like God-a Trinity." Jesus clarifies and corrects for us

integrally, first, who can be like the Trinity and, secondly, only who, what and how persons and relationships are *to be* in likeness of the Trinity. Jesus embodied and enacted nothing less and no substitutes, therefore what Jesus disclosed is irreducible and nonnegotiable. And only his distinguishing the likeness of the Trinity whole-ly counters the ongoing challenge of persons and relationships in the subtle reductionist alternative "like God-a Trinity."

The face of Jesus' integrated image *like* the Trinity and distinguishing the likeness of the Trinity unfolded in key ways that illuminate the function of his whole person as Subject in relationship together, not as merely an Object performing his duty. In theology and practice, these ways are commonly not associated with the image and likeness of the Trinity, and thus are not considered basic function for persons and relationships in likeness. One way involved his improbable trajectory to the cross and his intrusive relational path related to the cross. Apparent at Gethsemane is that Jesus didn't want to suffer the pain of the cross (Mt 26:36-39). This pain both reflects the vulnerable heart of the whole person (as subject, not object) in likeness of the Trinity as well as signifies his person essential in the uncommon intimate whole of the Trinity, both of which are inseparable in Jesus' whole person embodied in the human context. The fact that Jesus makes transparent the depth of his heart in vulnerable disclosure to his Father is simply the basic function of the whole person from inner out, whose whole function integrally involves the primacy of intimate relationship together. The face of Jesus seen here is not wearing a mask to put a veil on his heart; nor did Jesus present what would be a theologically-correct spin (as in politically correct) for his person and relationship with his Father—all of which Paul took to heart in his person and relationships, notably as he critiqued the church at Corinth (2 Cor 6:11-13). And *who* is distinguished here is composed only by the *what* of the Subject involved in relationship, the *like* and likeness of which is unmistakably distinct from a mere object.

Anything less and any substitutes from Jesus reduce his whole person, whereby relationship together is engaged with relational distance by a person from outer in. Such ontology and function is no longer whole and thus does not compose the person and relationship in likeness of the Trinity's whole ontology and function. Accordingly, Jesus as distinct subject had to disclose the pain in his heart and make transparent his contrary feelings about the cross in order *to be* vulnerable with his whole person in intimate relationship together with his Father. His whole function of his whole ontology is basic to the whole ontology and function of persons and relationships in likeness. And nothing less and no substitutes can define persons as subjects and determine relationships together in likeness of the Trinity, the whole and uncommon composition of which is absent in the human context and appears to lack even in the church. This full profile of the face of Christ is the essential relational basis for Paul to embrace Jesus at face-value in his heart (2 Cor 4:6) and for his person and relationships *to be* without the veil in likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity (2 Cor 3:18).

Jesus takes us deeper into his whole ontology and function, which further distinguishes what is essential for him *to be like* the Trinity and for us *to be* in likeness of the Trinity. This unfolded in another key way, which transpired on the cross. The pain of the cross reached its climax when Jesus experienced the ultimate yet inexplicable pain, and he cried out loudly "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46). His pain is inexplicable because we cannot understand what happened to the Trinity's

ontology. Yet, it is apparent that in a key way Jesus was separated from the Trinity's basic function in the uncommon intimate whole essential to the ontology of his person and the function of his relationship together. In that key moment the Son was "to be apart" from the Trinity's whole as family; this is the inescapable consequence of sin as reductionism that Jesus bore in his person and relationship in order for our persons and relationships to be made whole in ontology and function in likeness of the Trinity. The light of his glory Jesus illuminated, which we need to see on his face and understand, is not his sacrifice for our sin but his *whole* distinguished—that is, distinguishing not his ontology and function defined as an individual but his whole ontology and function determined by the primacy of intimate relationship together as family. This directly challenges any primacy given to the individual, notably holding accountable individualism in theology and practice.

The likeness distinguished in the Trinity that Jesus whole-ly embodied in his ontology and enacted in his function by necessity integrates persons inseparably into relationships together in order to constitute their ontology and function whole in likeness of the Trinity. As discussed, Jesus enacted this whole ontology and function at his footwashing for his followers to enact as persons in relationship together only in his likeness (*kathos*, Jn 13:15); that is, not as an expression of servanthood but as the vulnerable involvement of the whole person in intimate relationship together. Even as their Lord and Teacher, not to mention their Messiah, Jesus didn't define his person by those titles and roles, which certainly was uncommon in contrast to Peter's common theology and practice. As the irreducible subject-person, Jesus cannot be reduced to the mere object of his followers' faith but identified only as the vulnerable subject of our reciprocal response in intimate relationship together. This subject-object distinction is critical to make for the Trinity disclosed by Jesus. The *like* of the Trinity and the likeness of the Trinity integrated in Jesus' person unfolds vulnerably face to face to distinguish the likeness of persons in relationship together congruent with *like* the Trinity.

Paul further illuminated Christ's likeness for defining persons from inner out (Col 2:10; 3:10), and he fought against defining persons from outer in by what they do and have (Col 2:16-17). For Paul, outer-in persons are only "a shadow" (*skia*) composing a virtual reality, in contrast and conflict with inner-out persons in likeness of the essential reality (or substance, *soma*) belonging to Christ. In other words, if Jesus' person functioned as Lord and Teacher, that would have reduced his whole person from inner out to outer in and thereby would have done relationship with his followers in a stratified order with built-in relational distance (explicit or implicit). Such barriers (existing often subtly) would prevent intimate connection and thus reflect, reinforce or sustain the relational condition "to be apart" from the Trinity's whole family—the opposite in contradiction to Jesus' only relational purpose to disclose the Trinity's presence and involvement. This is the relational consequence that Paul makes definitive: "*The outer-in person* has lost *relational* connection with *Christ's whole person*, from whom the whole *church family*…grows *in intimate relationship together*" (Col 2:19, NIV).

The key ways by which Jesus distinguished the likeness of the Trinity confront the breadth of sin as reductionism (including its counter-relational workings) and dig down to the depth of theological anthropology. What is uncovered in relational terms for theology and practice—not in referential terms for doctrine and information—responds to

the following: (1) makes definitive what it means to be the human person God created and the Trinity recreated, and then (2) makes conclusive what the Trinity expects in likeness from this person as subject and the relationships of subject-persons together. This is why the Father made it imperative for his Son's followers to "Listen to him"—carefully, not only to his words but also the relational messages implicit in his relational language. That is, pay close attention not only to his relational communication but also his relationship-specific actions that distinguish the function of his whole person, which distinguishes his whole ontology as a trinitarian person in the uncommon intimate whole essential to the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. *Listen* closely because this is the whole ontology and function necessary for persons and relationships *to be* in likeness.

What Jesus distinguishes, therefore, for the likeness of persons and relationships is their need to be composed by the essential reality of **the trinitarian gospel** to make them whole, and then in reciprocal response to follow Jesus in the primacy of relationship that by its nature composes **trinitarian discipleship** to live whole as uncommon family together. Jesus embodied and enacted the whole and uncommon Trinity in family love that constituted the Trinity's uncommon intimate whole. And the primacy of this relationship together in family love is the basic function of persons in likeness, which unfolds in following Jesus in ongoing reciprocal relationship together with the Trinity—which, contrary to common theology and practice, does not unfold just in relation to Jesus. This basic function, however, can only be engaged by persons as subjects, whose identity is not merely associated with the Trinity but as subjects who are vulnerably involved reciprocally in relationship together with the subject-persons of the Trinity. Only these subject-persons in this primacy of relationship together in likeness constitute the Trinity's family (as Jesus prayed) and are the only persons and relationships having the qualitative relational significance expected from the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. Anything less and any substitutes of the trinitarian gospel and trinitarian discipleship are reductions of the essential ontology and function of the identity of God's presence, the action (creative and salvific) of God's involvement, and the relational outcome integrally of who, what and how we are and whose we are in likeness. That is to say, without equivocation, the trinitarian essential for God, the gospel, discipleship, the church and its persons and relationships is the whole ontology and function distinguished by the Trinity, with the trinitarian persons intimately involved in the primacy of relationship together as family. Any loss of this primacy for persons reflects the existing influence of reductionism's counter-relational workings.

This essential reality challenges (if not confronts) our trinitarian theological task and holds accountable our trinitarian theology and practice *to be* in likeness. If the whole of who, what and how distinguishing the Trinity is *not to be* in the trinitarian theological task and resulting theology and practice, then our persons and relationships in likeness will be neither whole in ontology nor whole in function. Based on Jesus' disclosures and the distinguishing significance of his presence and involvement, whole ontology and function emerge only from the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity—whose uncommon presence and whole involvement transform our ontology from inner out *to be* whole and conjointly makes uncommon (sanctifies) our function *to be* whole from inner out as whole persons in relationships together of wholeness only without the veil (as Paul made definitive, 2 Cor 3:16-18). This essential relational outcome constitutes our persons and relationships *to be* in likeness of the whole who, what and how the Trinity is *to be* in the

uncommon intimate whole essential to the ontology and function of the trinitarian persons and their relationship together.

As our persons and relationships are made whole in uncommon likeness of the Trinity, we can live whole together distinguished in uncommon likeness and thereby make whole with uncommon significance for the common world to come to trust in and know the whole and uncommon Trinity, just as Jesus prayed for his family. *To be* distinguished in uncommon likeness is essential for persons to have the significance needed for the human condition—the significance that is uncommon to the world.

Persons in Uncommon Likeness

Human persons certainly live within the context of physics and, for many, also subsist in the narrative of metaphysics. The realms of physics and metaphysics have also certainly imposed their limits and constraints to influence the shape of the person, just as the whole and uncommon God has had to endure shaping from the beginning. The human person in the beginning, however, was distinguished (*pala*) specific to only the epistemic field of the whole and uncommon God's relational context. This is no supplemental distinction for the human person—notably to evolutionary development—but the defining essential reality that the human person was designed and created *to be*, and subsequently chose *not to be*. This choice, contrary to any form of determinism, from the beginning has reduced the person to the limits of physics and/or the constraints of metaphysics.

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 essentially constituted by God, the Creator, the distinguishing nature (no less than *pala*) of which was beyond Job's knowledge and understanding (Job 42:3). God pointed Job back to the essential 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 is in the beginning: the whole ontology and function essentially constituted by God that distinguishes human persons beyond comparison in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and uncommon God (Gen 1:26-27)—constituted and distinguished only from inner out, which is problematic and indistinguishable from outer in.

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 without the essential from inner out. At the same time, we cannot dismiss this science and discount the quantitative outer person by either shifting to only the qualitative inner person (e.g. implied in spiritualizing matters) or fragmenting

the person into a dualism of the inner and the outer without their functional integration—the qualitative relational significance of which can be composed only in likeness of the whole and uncommon creator God distinguished beyond the realms of physics and metaphysics.

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 essential relational outcome integrated the whole person from inner out (the inseparably integrated qualitative and quantitative) distinguished irreducibly in the image and likeness of the Creator (Gen 1:26-27).

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

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 (as in Dt 30:6; Ps 119:9-11; Prov 4:23; 14:30, NIV; 27:19). The integrating function of the heart is indispensable for the integrity of the person's wholeness. 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

[1] Further discussion on supervenience is found in Dennis Bielfeldt, "The Peril and Promise of Supervenience for Scientific-Theological Discussion," and Niels Hendrik Gregersen, "God's Public Traffic: Holist versus Physicalist Supervenience," in Niels Henrik Gregersen, Willem B. Drees and Ulf Gorman, eds., *The Human Person in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 117-188.

12:2; Eze 11:19; 18:31; 33:31; Joel 2:12-13). Later in God's strategic shift, Jesus made unmistakable that the openness of the heart ("in spirit and truth") is what the Father requires and seeks in reciprocal relationship together (Jn 4:23-24).

The integrating function of the heart is irreplaceable. The mind may be able to provide quantitative unity (e.g. by identifying the association of parts) for the human person, as quantified in the brain by neuroscience. However, while this may be necessary and useful at times, it is never sufficient by itself to distinguish the whole person, nor adequate to experience the relationships necessary to be whole. Not even the higher level function of supervenience, as used by nonreductive physicalism, is sufficient to account for the qualitative whole needed to constitute persons in God's context.

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

From the beginning Adam and Eve made two critical assumptions in the primordial garden: (1) that their ontology was reducible to human shaping, and (2) that their function was negotiable to human terms (Gen 3:6-10). The first assumption opened the door of human ontological limits in likeness of the Trinity (discussed above) to unlimited shaping by self-determination; and the second assumption closed the door on human function to constrain persons and their relationships in likeness. In this intentional albeit often subtle process, their reductionism reflects a shift from the qualitative inner out ("whole-ly naked and vulnerable," Gen 2:25) to the quantitative outer in ("naked parts and covered up," Gen 3:7) without the integrating significance of the heart, thereby fragmenting the whole of human ontology down to one's parts. This is a pivotal qualitative and relational consequence for persons. Once the person becomes distant from, unaware of or detached from the heart, there is no qualitative relational means in function to integrate the whole person—leaving only fragmentary parts (however valuable or esteemed) that are unable to distinguish the person in God's context, though perhaps giving the person some distinction "like God-a Trinity."

The human heart is irreplaceable to define and determine the whole person from inner out. Without the qualitative function of the heart to integrate the whole person, the only alternatives for persons are ontological simulations and epistemological illusions shaped by reductionism, all of which are problematic because they have the seductive appeal of function "like God-a Trinity." This reduces persons from their essential reality in likeness of the *person*-al 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 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, pursues only the whole person for vulnerable involvement in integral reciprocal relationship together in the integrity of the person's created likeness (as in Jn 4:23-24; Eph 4:24). 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. *To be* distinguished, however, this person can only be in uncommon likeness of the Trinity's whole ontology and function.

Whole ontology and function for the human person have eluded persons from the beginning. The pivotal issue has been the critical shift of the person defined and determined from the inner out to the outer in, whereby the person's integrity and thus significance has been reduced to what they possess and do from outer in. The inescapable consequence and unavoidable results fragment the whole person to these parts—even if these parts are valued and the sum of these parts is assumed to make the person whole (or "like God" as assumed from the beginning). The shift away from the heart of the person signifying the whole person has been apparent (e.g. as in legalism), perhaps ambiguous (as common in discipleship) or simply lost in human fog (as on the Internet). As an extension of the critical assumptions by persons from the beginning, the human heart can be neither quantified nor spiritualized-idealized. For example, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio identifies qualitative feelings in function that is integral to the human brain in its evolutionary development.[2] Yet, since Damasio's epistemic field is limited to the quantitative, neuroscience's notion of the qualitative is determined by the limits of the quantitative. This is certainly an insufficient explanation of what is primary in integrating the complexity of persons in the innermost to be whole. Quantifying the heart by what a person has (a brain or other resources) and/or does (feels or other behaviors) simply does not distinguish the whole person but only defines a fragmentary person without the significance of being whole from inner out.

On the other hand, the human heart does not fulfill its integrating function by spiritualizing or idealizing it, notably with an ineffable soul. As discussed above, the soul may identify the qualitative uniqueness of all human persons but it does so by fragmenting the whole person in a dualism of body and soul (or a variation). What becomes primary then is the spiritual part of the person, making other parts secondary if not insignificant, whereby what is idealized about the person becomes composed in a comparative process of good or bad, better or less—just as from the beginning "to make one wise." This fragmentation both reduces the whole person in likeness of the *person*-al Trinity and relegates persons to a stratified order/structure/system unlike the inter-*person*-al Trinity. This condition would seem apparent enough, if it were not for epistemological illusions (such as "knowing good and evil") and ontological simulations (such as being "like God").

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

The condition of the human person struggles for its whole integrity under the constraints of reductionism and a common theological anthropology shaping persons in reduced ontology and function. What is at stake for the heart of the person is the integral ontology and function of the whole person that distinguishes the person whole-ly in likeness of the whole-ly Trinity. The heart of the person's ontology in likeness is irreducible to common terms in the human context, and the heart of the person's function in likeness is nonnegotiable to any human terms (even as Christians)—whether the source of those terms is from the realm of physics, metaphysics or simply the surrounding human context. In other words, the person's heart is basic to the ontology and function of the Trinity and essential *to be* in the whole ontology and function of the Trinity's likeness.

Ecclesiastes illuminates a simple reality of God's creative action that is easy to ignore not only to distinguish the human person but also God: "God has also *implanted* eternity in the hearts of persons" (Ecc 3:11, NIV). What is illuminated is the reality of being connected in ontology and function to something beyond our persons, which can be defined in whole knowledge and be satisfied in whole understanding solely by the whole of God, because that something is transcendent. Eternity (*'olam*) should not be seen as a referential term and thus here understood in cognitive terms (e.g. "a sense of past and future into their minds," NRSV), as part of human rationality and reasoning that traditionally is considered to compose the image of God. In this sense, *'olam* and any other connections thought to be made beyond the human person can also be considered mere epiphenomena (appearing to be related but not really), without clearly accounting for a distinction between them.[3] The reality of eternity consists in relational language and helps constitute the qualitative innermost of the person in the image of God only in relational terms. In other words, having eternity in their hearts connects persons to the transcendent God—not just to some cognitive part of God but to the whole and uncommon Trinity—in order to know the Trinity in relationship together, as Jesus made definitive in his prayer (Jn 17:3).

What unfolds for the person, or has the potential to unfold, is essential to the most basic of beliefs for Christian persons:

> God so loved the world that he sent his Son in the relational response of grace. The subjects who respond with direct involvement in the primacy of "the work [sing.] of God" and trust relationally in him will have eternal life because the Son will save them—that is, save them *to* the eternity of their persons from inner out in whole relationship together to intimately know the Trinity. Therefore, to believe in Jesus is the reciprocal relational response of subject-persons who believe in Jesus' whole person from inner out, whose subject-person enacted the Trinity's family love and thereby disclosed the whole-ly Trinity. To embrace Jesus' person—beyond the object of one's faith—in relationship together is to embrace the whole Trinity. To embrace the whole Trinity in relationship together is to know the Trinity in intimate eternal life from inner out. To know the Trinity from inner out is to experience in relationship the whole ontology and function of the Trinity. To experience the whole

[3] Consider neurosurgeon Eben Alexander's recent experience of connecting with God while his brain was not functioning, in *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2012).

> ontology and function of the Trinity changes persons *to be* the persons of whole ontology and function in likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity—the essential relational outcome of the eternity-heart of whole persons in uncommon likeness of the Son sent by the Father together with the Spirit, whose whole persons as subjects together *to be* the uncommon intimate whole of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity.

This is the person whole-ly involved as subject—not a mere object possessing faith—the Father pursues our persons *to be*; and why the Father makes it imperative to listen in relational terms (i.e. stop the referentializing) and pay close attention to the Son's whole person from inner out—the whole profile of the Subject who embodies, enacts and discloses integrally *like* the Trinity and the likeness of the Trinity for persons and relationships *to be*.

Therefore, the heart not only defines the whole person from inner out but also integrally determines the whole person in likeness of the essential (not virtual or augmented) ontology and function of the Trinity—as embodied, enacted and disclosed by Jesus with the Spirit, and illuminated definitively for the church by Paul. This irreversible connection and irreducible constitution in the eternity-heart of the person with the whole and uncommon Trinity is the essential reality of *'olam* distinguished in relational terms, which Christians need to cease trying to quantify in referential terms or spiritualize in idealized terms. Accordingly in theology (notably in theological anthropology) and in practice (as persons, relationships and together as church), we need to quit ignoring and pay attention to creator God's question "Where are you?" As initiated in the primordial garden (Gen 3:9), God was not seeking their quantitative location, which would be easily ignored if God were. Rather God accounts for the whole ontology and function of persons and their relationships created in likeness, and further holds persons and their relationship accountable for any critical shift from inner-out ontology and function ("both naked and were not ashamed") to outer in ("*observed* they were naked and *covered their innermost*"). This is vital for all persons to pay attention to, and consequential to ignore.

What emerged from this pivotal juncture of human development are human distinctions that increasingly define persons from outer in and determine relationships on that basis. Some would explain this emergence by evolutionary development that simply constructed persons and relationships according to those best fitted to survive. This simplistic theory can account for some of the human fragmentation based on power relations that goes into stratifying human relations, systems and structures; but it is inadequate to account for the existing breadth of function animating persons and relationships, and to get to the underlying depth at the heart of who, what and how persons and relationships are. Survival as persons to be the best (e.g. "be like God") engages more than a physical process from outer in but encompasses the heart of the person and where the person chooses to identify their likeness. This depth and breadth of human ontology and function must be accounted for in our theological anthropology to go beyond what's common.[4]

At the pivotal juncture of human development, persons shifting to observing the outer differences of their physical bodies instituted those persons' secondary differences

[4] I engage this discussion of theological anthropology more completely in my study *The Person in Complete Context: The Whole of Theological Anthropology Distinguished* (Theological Anthropology Study, 2014). Online at http://www.4X12.org.

to the primary human distinction of gender prevailing to present-day human ontology and function. Likewise, as discussed previously, the heart of the Father, Son and Spirit as whole persons from inner out cannot be defined by their roles and functions to love us in the human context; this would otherwise reduce their ontology and function and fragment the uncommon intimate whole essential to the Trinity. Nor can we use their roles and functions (to love us downward), in order to support human distinctions in persons and relationships. Such conflation distorts the Trinity and persons and relationships in likeness. Moreover, in terms of the gender distinction in theology and practice, this also inadvertently supports the evolution of the best fitted gender—which then includes other outer-in distinctions of those best fitted to serve and to lead our churches. The basic reality of such distinctions reduces the ontology and function of the whole and uncommon Trinity *to be*—which reduces the reality essential of the Trinity to a virtual or augmented reality, as commonly found in trinitarian theology—whereby persons and relationships in common likeness are also defined and determined by reduced ontology and function.

We need to understand this process of reductionism to recognize its impact on persons and thus relationships. A person in reduced ontology is being contracted in the innermost. That is, the heart of such a person is turning inward, which may appear to be positive, for example, for the practice of spiritual disciplines (cf. "to make one wise"). The function of this person's heart (including *nephesh* as soul), however, is inwardly contracting, and therefore this person's function is either not integrated with the person's outward function or disconnected from the person's outward function. The consequence is reduced function, yet this contracted heart not only diminishes the person from inner out but it also diminishes the person's relationships accordingly. In contrast to contracting, the integrating heart doesn't construct the subject-person as an *individual*, but rather integrates the whole person into one's inseparable relationships in order to compose the person's whole ontology and function from inner out. This clearly unfolds from Jesus' person-as-subject in Gethsemane. In conflict with the process of reducing a person's ontology and function, whole ontology and function requires whole persons in whole relationships together, which accounts for the immeasurable depth of Jesus' pain on the cross. There are no whole persons without whole relationships and, integrally in function, there are no whole relationships together without whole persons.

In other words, in one direction (process and measure) or the other the heart is the key that distinctly identifies the person. *To be* distinguished in his whole person, the psalmist understands the need to "enlarge my heart" (*râchab*, open wide as in being vulnerable) in order to "run *freely in function* in the *relational* way of your *whole terms for relationship together*" (Ps 119:32). The essential relational outcome of an enlarged heart is the person's whole ontology and function in relationships—the whole person whose uncommon likeness is neither contracted to an individual nor fragmented in relationships, just as the essential reality of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity is constituted in whole ontology and function. Enlarged hearts are what Paul illuminated to make definitive the persons and relationships of the new creation church family in unveiled likeness of the Trinity; their uncommon function is in conflict with persons functioning in a comparative process of human distinctions in their relationships inseparably functioning in likeness of a comparative system and structure (2 Cor 6:11-13, enacting 5:17-18 and 3:18, in contrast to 10:12).

Persons identified in the Trinity's relational context cannot negotiate either the qualitative condition of their ontology or the relational terms of their function. Theological anthropology discourse must be engaged accordingly, especially in the trinitarian theological task. For example, when discussing the social nature and character of human persons, it is insufficient for theological anthropology to talk about merely social relatedness and community to define and distinguish the human person; nor is this sufficient to define and distinguish the whole and uncommon Trinity. For theological anthropology not reduced to common terms, the person is created in the qualitative image of the uncommonly *person*-al Trinity to function in relational likeness to the whole-ly inter-*person*-al Trinity. Without renegotiating the terms, therefore, human persons are created in whole ontology and function for the primacy of relationship together solely in relational terms as follows:

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

When the Trinity's whole relational terms from inner out are shifted to fragmentary referential terms from outer in (even unintentionally or perhaps inadvertently), something less or some substitute replaces the above and renders the person and relationships to fragmentary-reduced ontology and function—relegated without the primacy of the qualitative (with the integrating function of the heart) and the relational (in intimate relationships of wholeness). This qualitative and relational consequence no longer distinguishes persons in the Trinity's relational context and process, only shapes them in the limits of the common's human context by the constraints of the human condition ("to be apart…naked and relationally distant").

The prominence of any and all outer-in distinctions as the prevailing measure for persons and their relationships—as Jesus made definitive in his paradigm for theology and practice (Mk 4:24)—has been consequential for the persons and relationships unfolding in human history (including church history). The measure for our person we use is the measure we get in our relationships. Conversely, the measure for our relationships we use is the measure we get in our persons. The ongoing and far-reaching consequence of this existing reality needs to be understood as composing the human condition (our human condition even as Christians). The persons and relationships we get from this prevailing measure (or any related reduced or fragmentary measure used) cannot and thus should not be expected to have any significance beyond that. Indeed, "Where are you?"

It is evident today that there is a critical gap in our understanding of the human condition, and perhaps a failure to take the human condition seriously. Directly interrelated, and most likely its determinant, a reduced theological anthropology not only fails to address the depth of the human condition but in reality obscures its depth, reinforces its breadth, or even conforms to this inescapable and unavoidable condition.

Such a reduced theological anthropology, thereby, composes our persons and relationships in this condition as our default condition and mode. The repercussions for us, of course, are that we do not account for our own practice of reductionism, and, interrelated, that we do not address our own function in the human condition; and this could subtly exist even if we are involved in changing the status quo. Our function manifests in three notable areas, which are three interrelated issues of ongoing major importance for ontology and function (implied throughout this study):

1. How we define the person from outer in based more on the quantitative parts of what we do and have, and thereby function in our own person.
2. On this basis, this is how our person engages in relationships with other persons, whom we define in the same outer-in terms, to reduce the depth level of involvement in relationship together.
3. These reduced persons in reduced relationships together then become the defining and determining basis for how we practice our beliefs and consequently how relationships together function as the church and in the related academy.

These ongoing issues are the three inescapable issues for our ontology and function needing accountability. As emerged from the primordial garden, the pivotal shift from "embodied whole from inner out and not confused, disappointed in relationship together" to "embodied parts from outer in and reduced to relational distance" has ongoing consequences; and their far-reaching implications directly challenge our theological anthropology and hold us accountable for its assumptions of ontology and function.

Persons and relationships must contend with the common influences—even from a Christian source like the church—shaping them in order for their ontology and function to rise above this shaping influence. Yet, in order for their ontology and function *to be* distinguished beyond the common, they must have an uncommon source *to be* the basis (or measure used) for the whole ontology and function essential to define their persons and determine their relationships in uncommon likeness. This uncommon source of whole ontology and function can only be the whole and uncommon Trinity; there is no other uncommon source existing in the realms of physics and metaphysics. The Trinity's *person*-al inter-*person*-al ontology and function integrally constitute the whole ontology and function of persons and relationships in uncommon likeness. Anything less and any substitutes for the ontology and function of the Trinity reduce and fragment the Trinity to the common, which relegates persons and relationships at best to mere common likeness. The unavoidable reality facing all persons and relationships is this:

> The ontology and function of the Trinity we have in our theology and thus use in our practice will be the persons and relationships we get in likeness—nothing more.

The complete profile of the face of the Trinity came face to face with persons only in whole ontology and function.

The persons and relationships Christians and the church get from a common source (and measure used) certainly don't compose good news for the human relational condition. That raises a further key question from the whole and uncommon God, who now pursues our persons and relationships together in the practice of our ontology and

function: “What are you doing here?” whatever our existing situation and circumstances, “What are you doing here?”

Persons are accountable *to be* in uncommon likeness of nothing less and no substitutes of the *person*-al Trinity, and therefore persons in uncommon likeness are responsible for their relationships *to be* in uncommon likeness of nothing less and no substitutes of the inter-*person*-al Trinity.

Relationships in Uncommon Likeness

We must not examine the person (both trinitarian and human) in isolation as if an individual entity and then expect to understand persons. We can observe objects in this manner but cannot examine subjects. Persons separated from their relationships don’t distinguish the whole person in the depth of their ontology and the breadth of their function—which also is problematic for distinguishing and understanding Jesus’ whole person in overly christocentric theology and practice. To understand the whole person from inner out requires the integral understanding of the subject-person’s relationships together with others. Persons and relationships are inseparable as created not “to be apart” from the whole of God’s likeness, and as further newly created (transformed from inner out) no longer “to be apart” from the likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity. Therefore, persons and relationships are inescapably interrelated in the above three issues of ongoing importance for ontology and function. Whole persons don’t exist apart from relationship together in wholeness, and whole relationships together don’t function apart from whole persons. Only this integrated, reciprocating, integral ontology and function distinguish subject-persons and relationships together as whole, both in the Trinity and those in likeness.

Accordingly, what composes whole persons in uncommon likeness is integral to the uncommon function of their relationships *to be* in likeness, so that their persons together in relationship are *to be* whole-ly distinguished ongoingly in nothing less than the uncommon likeness of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. Yet, I personally am convinced that trinitarian theology and practice have misinterpreted, misunderstood and misrepresented these relationships and their likeness, which to me exists even more so than in understanding their persons and likeness. What essentially then are these relationships in uncommon likeness that are inseparable from the ontology of persons in uncommon likeness, and that are also irreplaceable for persons’ function in uncommon likeness, and thus are unequivocally indispensable *to be* distinguished whole in no substitutes of this Trinity?

As always, of course, the trinitarian theological task depends on the epistemic field engaged for the Trinity and the hermeneutic lens used to interpret the who, what and how of the Trinity is disclosed. The trinitarian persons could be and have been defined apart for the primacy of their relationships, and their relationships could be and have been determined without the significance of their whole persons from inner out—both of which have reduced the Trinity’s ontology and function and have composed human persons and relationships in common likeness of a Trinity no longer whole and uncommon. What Trinity (and the measure used) and what likeness for persons and relationships (and the measure gotten) have certainly been critical issues in trinitarian

theology and practice. Even when this is recognized, they are problematic for persons, relationships and churches to distinguish their whole ontology and function beyond common likeness—and distinguished from virtual realities.

When Jesus wept over Jerusalem, he grieved that their persons, relationships, and their theology and practice didn't recognize what makes for peace, that is, wholeness in their ontology and function, because of the fog in their eyes created by a narrowed-down epistemic field and hermeneutic lens (Lk 19:41-42). Their relational condition in Second Temple Judaism while in the surrounding context of the Greco-Roman world—a relational condition reflecting, reinforcing and thus sustaining the human relational condition—exposed the absence or loss of the qualitative and relational in both the covenant relationship together with YHWH and their likeness of the whole and uncommon God. Their ontology and function emerged in the theology and practice of the temple as their defining identity marker. Yet, their primary distinction was later cleaned out of its reductionism to restore persons, relationships and God's house to whole ontology and function—which he made definitive on the cross by tearing open the temple curtain to remove the veil of persons and relationships together in order for them *to be* whole as family.

These are not just unique events in the life of Jesus that compose his narrative in referential terms. Rather they disclose the whole ontology and function of who, what and how Jesus is, and thereby distinguish the essential reality of the Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement—which can be either comforting or discomforting, encouraging or disappointing for persons and their relationships. What Jesus disclosed in his life unfolding directly involved the whole and uncommon Trinity and the whole of persons and relationships. Therefore, the qualitative relational significance of the who, what and how of the Trinity unfolding in the human context is essential for persons and relationships together *to be* in likeness of nothing less and no substitutes. Yet, Jesus still grieves palpably (with the Spirit, Eph 4:30), because what prevailed in Jerusalem and the temple continues to exist in common likeness among Christians (cf. Rev 2:4; 3:2).

The ontology and function of persons are inevitably integrated into their relationships. So, when persons define their person from the outer in (as existed in Jerusalem and early churches), they engage in relationships on this basis and define the other person(s) in the same terms (as existed in the temple and churches, cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12). In other words, the relationships unfolding from these persons are inseparably defined and determined in likeness by how these persons are. That makes this outer-in ontology and function the critical measure used for the relationships they get. And the relationships such persons (including Jesus' main disciples) got clearly evidenced to Jesus their lack of whole ontology and function, and not recognizing, knowing and understanding what and who would make them whole—"the *uncommon* peace of God, which surpasses all *common* understanding" (as Paul experienced and understood, Phil 4:7). What then distinguishes the whole relationships of whole persons together in uncommon likeness that are distinct from, contrary to and even in conflict with the prevailing common, all of which Jesus enacted and disclosed for the uncommon peace he brings to relationship together?

Jesus' person ongoingly contended with and confronted persons and relationships who used a common theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function, which composed the persons and relationships they got only from outer in. Apparent from the

beginning, the outer-in distinctions (even by gender) defining persons determined their relationships in likeness, and this changed the integrity of relationships. This revised integrity either is not apparent as such any longer or is simply ignored. Such theology and practice, however, always need to be challenged for their qualitative relational significance; and we cannot continue to make the sweeping assumption that "*your persons and relationships* will not be *reduced*." By embodying the whole ontology and function of the Trinity, Jesus was responsible for disclosing the whole-ly Trinity and accountable to unmistakably distinguish the uncommon intimate whole of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. What Jesus disclosed responsibly and distinguished accountably are irreplaceable for persons and relationships *to be* in the whole and uncommon Trinity's likeness.

Therefore, in complete Christology, Jesus was neither irenic nor tolerant with persons and relationships in any reduced or negotiated likeness that evolved in his presence and continues to develop as follows:

> The integrity of relationships was constituted not "to be apart" and thus *to be* from inner out in likeness of the qualitative heart and relational nature of God (signifying God's glory). When the ontology and function of persons and their relationships make the pivotal shift to outer in, this sets into motion a consequential relational process that functions "to be apart"—even subtly in the practice of common orthodoxy. "To be apart" in relationships is to function in anything less and any substitutes of relationships that don't have depth of relational connection from inner out between the persons participating. The pivotal shift from the primacy of relationships together with persons from inner out refocuses persons on their outer-in secondary parts, by which they make distinctions for their person to substitute for their hearts and to reconfigure relationships by those secondary distinctions. These persons, at best, can only be associated with each other at the level of their outer-in distinctions, whereby they can only be indirectly interrelated with each other's person without directly deeper connection—which precludes the involvement of persons as subjects. Far worse for outer-in distinctions—in terms of situations and circumstances, yet no different in ontology and function—are persons and relationships stratified in sociocultural, religious, economic and political institutions (including families and churches), structures and systems that relegate them to lower strata with no recourse for their relational condition "to be apart," thereby relegating them to objects manipulated by their contexts. At whatever level or extent of human distinctions, the existing reality for persons and relationships has evolved explicitly and subtly to further entrench and sustain the human relational condition "to be apart," and thus to further diminish, distort, even discount the integrity of relationships together *to be* in uncommon likeness of the Trinity. Such development, for example, in the current process of globalization only has magnified the loss of integrity for persons and relationships in wholeness—even with efforts of good intentions, yet still operating under the now global assumption "you will not be *reduced*."

Whether in economic and political globalization, in multiculturalism, on the Internet, and even in the global church, or at the local level and in personal contexts,

‘association in relationships’ is the prevailing mode that is commonly confused with direct relational connection. The common reality of such relational engagement, however, never composes and cannot constitute the integrity of relationships distinguished *to be* in likeness of the Trinity. This integrity only from inner out constitutes relationships both irreducibly and nonnegotiably with the following:

> (1) the heart of whole persons as subjects connecting together in **intimate** involvement, the intimacy of which necessitates by its qualitative relational nature
> (2) persons *to be* **equalized** from their comparative human distinctions of good-bad, better-less, so that their whole persons make direct relational connection at the intimate level of their heart—no longer kept apart by ontology and function in commonly measured value from outer in.

Whole persons integrated in relationships together integrally intimate and equalized are who, what and how the Trinity is disclosed *to be*, whereby the essential reality of the Trinity’s uncommon intimate whole is also distinguished. This provides the integral ontological basis and functional base for persons and their relationships together *to be* in uncommon likeness. Nothing less and no substitutes can constitute the integrity of relationships from inner out, and this presents a challenge to common Trinitarianism, a problem to common orthodoxy, and a conflict to common likeness.

Jesus clearly made it definitive that the peace he gives to his followers is uncommon to the world (Jn 14:27). Only his uncommon peace constitutes the wholeness for their persons and relationships from inner out, and thus distinguishes them in the common context *to be* in uncommon likeness to the whole ontology and function of the Trinity—which is the essential relational outcome Jesus made conclusive in his family prayer (Jn 17:21-23). This is the wholeness Jesus embodied vulnerably from inner out, enacted intimately only in relational terms, and yet grieves over until it is embraced by persons to make whole their relational condition—that is, make whole by the uncommon relationships together of his wholeness. Therefore, the wholeness of his followers’ relationships together unfolds in his uncommon likeness in contrast to and in conflict with the evolving of relationships in common likeness reduced or negotiated by human terms, the common likeness which is apparent notably with outer-in distinctions or with associations lacking qualitative relational significance.

The need for intimate relational connection is inherent in the human relational condition from the beginning. So-called human development has evolved in search for this intimacy; for example, this is evident in the pursuit of intimacy from outer in within the gender distinctions of sexual engagement, which is the prevailing mode confusing intimacy—with increasing gender-less distinctions still embedded in the outer in. Moreover, even neuroscience has discovered in the human brain the need for intimate connection, and the soothing peace created from the production of the hormone oxytocin (called the ‘love hormone’) when relational connections are made (as discussed previously). The need for intimate connection in human relationships has always existed in human history and exists explicitly from the point of any and all persons’ infancy; yet human development has confused the primacy of this need in its evolution. For example, recent research has been finding that infants sleeping in separate beds and/or rooms from their parents (as prevails in the Western world) have sleep issues and slower development

than those sleeping together with their parents (as prevails in most of the Majority World).[5] While this research does not make a distinction between intimate relational connection and relational association, infants still have the qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness to recognize the difference; thus they know when their relational need is met or not, even in their sleep. Unfortunately, as children develop, this qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness are decreased by training and conditioning from surrounding common practices of the human relational condition. Consequently, persons of all ages and relationships at all levels must recognize their inherent need for intimate relational connection from inner out, and make their persons vulnerable to their need, if their relational condition is no longer "to be apart" and changed *to be* whole in ontology and function in likeness of the uncommon intimate whole of the Trinity.

Jesus' whole person integrally disclosed the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity and thereby distinguished the whole ontology and function necessary for persons and relationships *to be* in uncommon likeness. Receiving Jesus in his uncommon wholeness gets us back to our theological anthropology and hermeneutic lens. As commonly exists, any exposing in our theological anthropology that reveals a person in the unlikeness of creator God or in common likeness of the Trinity should not be surprising. It should not surprise us at this stage, since it no doubt involves issues about relationship that are neither accounted for in relational terms nor held accountable in theology and practice beyond the informational level. This urgently centers our attention intently on God's reverberating question "What are you doing here?"

The essential reality of the Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement always reveals the Trinity engaging relationships according to only the Trinity's whole relational terms, which compose the trinitarian persons' communication in uncommon relational language rather than the common referential language of the human context. The basis on which the terms for relationship are defined needs to be understood as the measure used to determine what persons emerge and how relationships unfold; and this understanding helps us integrally recognize the human ontology and function composed from the measure used.

In the whole relational terms of the strategic shift of YHWH's uncommon theological trajectory, the embodied Word conclusively communicated in relational language that "the hour is *unfolding*, and is now here, when the true worshipers *as whole persons from inner out* will worship the Father in *intimate relationship together*, for the Father *only* seeks such *subject-persons for intimate connection in the primacy of relationship together*" (Jn 4:23-24). How is this intimate relationship together *to be* the essential reality when the common reality in worship is simply virtual? As illuminated in the face-to-face relational connection the Son's whole person had with the Samaritan woman, the Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement have been disclosed for only this whole relational purpose and uncommon relational outcome. In relational terms, this woman's whole person was touched by Jesus' intimate relational connection, and she appeared to understand the qualitative relational significance of having intimate relationship together without outer-in distinctions both for the whole and uncommon God and for her person (Jn 4:17-20, 25-26,29).

[5] Reported by human development researchers Robert LeVine and Sarah LeVine, "It's more than OK to sleep next to your infant," OP-ED, *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 2016.

As the Son disclosed for the Father, intimate relationship together with the Trinity is not optional but essential to who and what the heart of the *person*-al Trinity is and how the inter-*person*-al Trinity is involved in relationships both within the Trinity and with us—which distinguishes the integration of persons and relationships in uncommon likeness. Therefore, it should be unmistakable from all the Son's disclosures that this intimate relationship together in wholeness is uncommon, and thus irreducible or nonnegotiable to any common terms and shaping. The uncommon intimate whole of the Trinity is always primary for persons and relationships, and this primacy is irreplaceable by any secondary matter—even worshiping, serving, teaching, and so forth, with distinction.

Yet, what we also need to understand from the Samaritan woman's intimate relational connection with the embodied Trinity, and embrace for our persons and relationships, involves what is required for intimacy in relationships, that is, *to be* in uncommon likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity. For Jesus to come face to face with this particular Samaritan woman in a one-on-one situation magnifies a process of *equalization* in conjoint function with intimate involvement, in order to fulfill the intimacy needed for persons in relationship together *to be* in likeness of the Trinity's uncommon intimate whole. The process of equalization begins with the persons involved in relationship together and any outer-in distinctions defining their person, which obviously would create either horizontally distancing barriers or vertically stratifying barriers to their relationship together. Jesus addressed both barriers with the Samaritan woman. As a Jewish rabbi, not to mention Messiah, Jesus bore distinctions that set him both apart from others horizontally and above others vertically—which was how Peter tried to relate to Jesus. Such distinctions, however, neither define Jesus' person from inner out nor determine his person's involvement as subject in relationships with others—ask Peter about this reality. Accordingly, Jesus' person was equalized necessarily by the nature of what involved intimacy in relationship together, that is, free from the horizontal and vertical barriers to intimate relational connection.

Jesus equalizing his person from outer-in distinctions still was only half of the equalizing relational equation. The Samaritan woman also needed to be equalized for their intimate relational connection, with her gender as only one of the prominent distinctions defining her person from outer in. Her ethnicity as a Samaritan was despised by Jews and treated in Judaism not only as less but bad, unclean and to be avoided. Moreover, she herself was morally promiscuous, which left her at the well apart from the other women in apparent social ostracism by her own compatriots. Nevertheless, Jesus engaged her whole person without those outer-in distinctions and thereby equalized her without the barriers to intimate relational connection. Her response increasingly demonstrated shifting from outer in to inner out, in contrast to remaining merely an object to Jesus' engagement, whereby she made her person vulnerable to be equalized without her distinctions before Jesus' whole person. Thus, her whole person emerged as a distinct subject involved with him in intimate relationship together face to face, heart to heart—just as the Father seeks from all persons in relationship together *to be* whole in uncommon likeness of the Trinity.

Intimacy in relationships does not reach the depth of inner out to involve the heart of the whole person of those in relationship together, without those persons being equalized from their own outer-in distinctions and from how they defined the others in

their distinctions. Any defining presence of outer-in distinctions prevent whole persons from being distinguished and those persons from intimate relationship together essential to who, what and how they are in uncommon likeness to the Trinity. Therefore, intimacy defined by the nature of relationships in uncommon likeness constitutes the hearts of persons involved and connected together. The increasingly common appeal to *mindfulness* in this digital age may be helpful for persons to focus more qualitatively, but mindfulness is certainly insufficient to get to the heart of the whole person needed for intimate relationship and should not be a substitute for the heart. This intimate connection requires persons equalized at the heart of the person where there are no distinctions, just the whole person from inner out. This requires persons as subjects and relationships *to be* in uncommon likeness of the Trinity, not in common likeness.

Of course, uncommon likeness also requires the uncommon Trinity, who is not distinguished in common Trinitarianism. God's glory encompasses the heart of the Trinity's qualitative being functioning integrally by the glory of the Trinity's intimate relational nature. At the heart of the Trinity, the trinitarian persons' distinctions of roles and functions (enacted to love us downward) are indistinguishable—"whoever has seen *my whole person* has seen the Father," The Father and I are one *at the heart of our being*"—and thus they are not structured together by a system of distinctions, as is commonly perceived in trinitarian theology and practice. The substantive face of the Trinity vulnerably disclosed the heart of the Trinity to distinguish the ontological One of the *person*-al Trinity and the relational Whole of the inter-*person*-al Trinity.

Intimate and equalized relationships inseparably define and integrally determine the whole ontology and function of the Trinity. The uncommon intimate whole essential to the heart of the Trinity's ontology is constituted only by the function of whole trinitarian persons distinguished as subjects intimately involved in relationships together, which by their nature are equalized from the distinctions of their roles and functions and thus without the horizontal and vertical barriers to the uncommon wholeness essential for the Trinity *to be* together and *not to be* reduced or fragmented. Accordingly yet not simply, nothing less and no substitutes can integrally define our persons as subjects and determine our relationships *to be* in uncommon likeness to this Trinity—that is, unless we turn to common Trinitarianism to compose persons and shape relationships in common likeness. So, yes, the Trinity wants to know "What are you doing here?"

Making Whole the Likeness from Modern and Postmodern Narratives

Intimacy is not optional for the uncommon Trinity, nor can intimacy be optional for those in likeness. This means that equalized persons and relationships are also not optional, both for the whole Trinity and for those in likeness. Not having this option is problematic, for example, for churches seeking more intimacy in their contexts without addressing equalizing their persons and relationships. This is also problematic for Christians promoting social justice and working for social change by equalization without intimate connection. We can't have one relational condition without the other relational condition, because they are inseparably integrated to compose wholeness of persons and relationships in likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity. Yet, this whole likeness has undergone profound reductions in the framework of modernism, and the uncommon

likeness has experienced ongoing fragmentation in the scope of postmodern approaches. These surrounding influences urgently amplify the Trinity's questions and multiply the need to challenge the underlying assumptions of our theological anthropology and hermeneutic lens. In addition, the current condition of persons and relationships confronts our view of sin, the significance of our gospel, and what we are saved *to*. All of these compelling issues converge in the Trinity used in our theology and practice, since that defines the persons we get and determines the relationships we get. Based on the whole and uncommon disclosed by Jesus, only the whole who, what and how of the Trinity is essential to make whole current realities.

The most prominent realities shaping the human context and the majority of its persons and relationships—including the church context and its persons and relationships—have emerged from the narratives mostly of modernism and less so of postmodernism.

In selective summary of the modern narrative from the emergence of the Enlightenment to its unfolding in modern science, its related process of reasoning and the recent effort to quantify the heart of the human person in the brain have profoundly narrowed down the epistemic field and the perceptual-interpretive framework to the realm of physics. As a result, assumptions are made as to the validity of this epistemic process and its reliability for application to all of life, such that the theories composed generate a grand narrative for defining the universe in general and for determining persons and relationships in particular.

Based on its quantitative framework narrowing down its epistemic field and perceptual lens to the outer in, the modern narrative has irreversibly reduced human persons and relationships *not to be* in qualitative relational function having qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness. From the Industrial Revolution to the Internet world, the development of modern technology has indelibly entrenched and literally enslaved persons and relationships on a course of human development that has reduced the primacy of their wholeness with secondary substitutes. These more-valued substitutes can only simulate who, what and how they are in a virtual likeness—notably evident in the use of digital technology—that is, in a reality without qualitative relational significance and thus in no substantive reality.

The existing condition of persons and relationships in developed countries is no mystery and its development (or so-called progress) has been evident in the modern narrative. In these contexts in particular, the hope for changing this condition is confounding, and the recourse to make it whole is denied or at least ignored. As emerged from the beginning, the modern narrative's sweeping assumption has been that "you will not be *reduced*." And the Trinity grieves because the modern narrative also doesn't know what makes for wholeness, since this uncommon wholeness is beyond its perceptual lens to understand. Those persons and relationships who have subscribed to the modern narrative must live and function by the valid paradigm that reliably can be counted on for its results: the measure they use will be the measure they get—and what their reason thinks they have will evaporate from their grasp (Mk 4:24-25). Whether explicitly or inadvertently, those churches and its persons and relationships who use the modern framework and lens are subject to this paradigm because this is the existing reality that they have gotten in common likeness.

Another more recent narrative has emerged from postmodern thinking counter to the modernist narrative. The grand narrative of modernism is not accepted in postmodernism, at least not ostensibly. The variable thinking of postmodernists opts to define persons and relationships in the experience of their local contexts. Who, what and how persons and relationships are have their primacy in their particular settings, which cannot be generalized to all persons and relationships as in a grand narrative. In this sense, the epistemic field for postmodernists is narrowed down even more than modernism; yet, on the other hand, the postmodernist lens is broadened to behold a wide range of persons and relationships. Thus, what likeness of persons and relationships that emerge from the postmodern narrative is not a reduced likeness as in modernism, but it becomes a fragmented likeness of persons and relationships merely from the diversity of human contextualization. The postmodern likeness is considered reliable in itself yet not valid for general application. Given its basis and discounting of modernist assumptions, the postmodern epistemic field and hermeneutic lens are useful for diversifying (read fragmenting) global theologies and practices—particularly composed to counter Western dominance—but they are problematic for whole trinitarian theology and practice.[6]

While the postmodern narrative broadens, and perhaps deepens, its account of persons and relationships, any of its theories provide no basis for persons and relationships to be considered whole. Rather what is proposed is merely nothing more than distinctly fragmentary likeness—the balkanization of persons and relationships in likeness. Since it affirms no general narrative beyond local human context, even though its theories may make statements as if to generalize, the measure it uses can only yield the persons and relationships it gets—beyond whom it must remain silent, without knowledge and understanding of the whole needed for the human condition. And the balkanized likeness of persons and relationships remains in a condition "to be apart," as if the face of Jesus disclosed nothing relevant or significant for persons and relationships *to be* in likeness. The postmodern fragmentary-balkanized likeness is problematic for trinitarian theology and practice because there is no wholeness to the Trinity that applies to all persons and relationships. While postmodern thinking has rightly challenged the assumptions of modernism, its own sweeping assumption has rendered it to the default condition and mode of reductionism.

Unlike the modernist narrative limited to the realm of physics, the emergence of the Trinity integrates the realms of physics and metaphysics to disclose the essential reality beyond those realms. The essential reality of the whole and uncommon Trinity composes the metanarrative essential for all life—distinguished from the grand narrative of modernism—which encompasses all persons and relationships in uncommon likeness neither reduced nor fragmented. Apart from this essential metanarrative, there is no basis for wholeness either for the Trinity or for persons and relationships.

This is the epistemological and hermeneutical dilemma that a postmodern narrative faces, even apart from its counterpart modern narrative. The resolution of this dilemma will only take place—and not without difficulty—when its epistemic field and hermeneutic lens account for and therefore become accountable to the whole and

[6] David S. Cunningham considers postmodernism an asset for developing a postmodern trinitarian theology, which would focus on a number of concerns neglected by theologians influenced by modernity. See his discussion in "The Trinity" in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 186-202.

uncommon Trinity disclosed in the human context, yet not defined and determined by human contextualization as postmodernists depend on.

The reduced likeness of a modernist narrative may assume to be applicable to all persons and relationships, but that application can only reduce who, what and how persons and relationships are. The fragmentary-balkanized likeness of a postmodernist narrative is inapplicable to all persons and relationships and makes no explicit assumptions that it does. Yet, there appears to be an underlying assumption that the sum of all those fragments from local settings could apply to the whole of the human context. Perhaps balkanized likeness is considered analogous to diverse nations converging to form the United Nations. That sum, however, would still not equal the whole—which is greater than the sum of any parts or fragments—needed for all persons and relationships *to be* in essential likeness to the whole and uncommon Trinity.

We need to challenge our own assumptions and face the surrounding reality of reduced and fragmented likenesses; and we need to stop ignoring them or denying their influential reality in our midst, both of which keep us "to be apart" from our essential likeness. That essential likeness for human persons and relationships in life together is uncommon to all that is common whether in a modern narrative or a postmodern narrative.

Though idolized (as in modernism) or idealized (as in postmodernism), the likeness from such narratives can only compose persons and relationships in a virtual reality of the whole who, what and how essential *to be*. Even the likeness of a premodern narrative involved basically the same issues for persons and relationships. Christendom evolved in the fourth century, for example, to impose its common framework for all theology and practice to conform to a reduced ontology and function in common likeness. Similar in likeness, other efforts to ensure orthodoxy and to avoid fragmentation in the church established the primacy of doctrine over the primacy of relationships together involving the whole person, which thereby composed common orthodoxy in unlikeness to the whole and uncommon Trinity. The common shaping of persons and relationship also emerged in the earliest church. Paul fought against these "fine-sounding arguments, persuasive speech" (*pithanologia*, Col 2:4,8,16-19, notably from the early forms of gnosticism) in order that the interrelated likeness of persons, relationships and the church would be in uncommon wholeness—integrated together with the uncommon whole ontology and function of the Trinity disclosed by Christ (Col 2:9-10, as in Eph 4:13-16).

As emerged from the beginning, the ontology and function of persons and relationships have struggled to be whole in the essential likeness, which is only uncommon and therefore irreducible and nonnegotiable to the common. OK, so in the emerging post-Christian narrative of the twenty-first century, which not surprisingly is reinforced by the common likeness of Christians, "Where are you *in your theology and practice*?" and "What are you doing here *in your persons, relationships and churches*?" The Trinity waits for our response.

Chapter 9 The Church of Likeness

There are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit…different kinds of service but the same Lord…different kinds of working but the same *Trinity* works all of them in all *persons and relationships of the church*.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6, NIV

…so that they may be *whole together, in congruent likeness as* we are *whole together*.

John 17:22

As you have sent me *in uncommon wholeness* into the world, *in uncommon likeness* I have sent *our church family* into the world.

John 17:18

The global church has emerged with its majority composed now in the global South. While its numbers have shifted to the Majority World, what composes the identity of the church, both in the global South and North, remains unclear. Certainly, the shape of the church in likeness of the West is challenged to reflect its diversity, with a post-colonial lens no longer assuming the superiority of Western theology and practice. In the midst of this transition, however, the identity of the church remains in doubt as to its likeness, because the integrity of the church is largely uncertain throughout the theology and practice of its global presence.[1]

Explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, churches struggle to establish their identity both in the global community as well as within the global church. This struggle continues as long as the integrity of who, what and how the church *is* is not composed in the ontology and function that distinguish its likeness beyond a common likeness of its surrounding context (locally, regionally, globally). The church's likeness emerges directly from the likeness of its persons and relationships, whose likeness unfolds from their theological anthropology. The church *in* likeness then unfolds together according to the theology and practice of its Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology and eschatology to establish churches *of* likeness. After twenty centuries, does the existing identity of the church provoke this question from Jesus for the church in the twenty-first century: "Don't you know *my whole person* even after all *these years, creeds and liturgies in my name*?"

The church represents the most comprehensive witness of God's presence and involvement in the human context, and thus the church arguably is the most tangible resource for knowing and understanding God—the witness and resource illuminated by Jesus to distinguish his church family (Jn 17:21,23). How valid the church as this resource is depends on the validity of the church's likeness to the whole and uncommon

[1] I discuss the global church at greater length in *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.

God, not to mere parts of a common God. Therefore, the church of likeness in the human context is challenged to distinguish integrally the validity of God's uncommon presence in its midst and the reliability of God's whole involvement with its persons and relationships, and indeed is accountable *to be* congruent just as Jesus prayed definitively to compose his church family.

The Church in Likeness of the Temple

YHWH directed Moses to have a sanctuary made "so that I may dwell among them" (Ex 25:8). This consecrated place (*miqdas*)—designated as both the house of the LORD and the tabernacle (also "tabernacle of the covenant," Ex 38:21, and "the tent of meeting," Ex 40:34), and later the temple—was definitively the uncommon relational context ("the holy place" and "the most holy place," Ex 26:33) for YHWH's presence and involvement. The tabernacle-temple also distinguished the uncommon relational process necessary for covenant relationship with the uncommon YHWH. The Most Holy Place was separated by the curtain to distinguish the uncommon vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of YHWH (Ex 26:31-33). The curtain was critical to maintain the integrity of uncommon YHWH, who is irreducible and nonnegotiable to any common shaping or terms.

Covenant relationship together with YHWH was composed *to be* whole (*tāmiym*, Gen 17:1) for the persons engaging in this reciprocal relationship. In spite of the uncommon relational context and process distinguished by the tabernacle-temple, God's people frequently signified the covenant, their persons and relationship together in common terms. Namely their pivotal shift from inner out to outer in rendered God, persons and relationships together converging in the tabernacle-temple to common shaping. The temple became constructed accordingly, which rendered ambiguous the presence of God and elusive the involvement of God. So, what does the temple have to do with the church and how is it significant for the church's witness and resource?

The creator of the church constituted his church family based on the uncommon relational context and process of the temple. The Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement dwelled intimately together distinguished in the church's trinitarian relational context by its trinitarian relational process—which Jesus illuminated in relational terms for his trinitarian church family (Jn 14:23) and Paul made definitive for the church (Eph 2:21-22; 1 Cor 3:16-17). Yet, in spite of the essential terms of the temple distinguished for the church, the issue continues for the church to understand what temple it is in likeness of.

The relational context and process of the temple on which Jesus based the church family are integrally constituted and reconstituted in two irreplaceable ways. First, since the covenant was composed for all persons *to be* whole in reciprocal relationship together with the whole of God, Jesus had to reconstitute the existing temple in order to restore the relational context and process of the Lord's house *to be* "a house of *relational connection with God* for all *persons, peoples and* the nations" (Mk 11:15-17). Moreover, not any kind of relational connection is sufficient, because the whole and uncommon God is integrally embodied *to be* present and involved for reciprocal relationship together in the new covenant that is composed further and deeper than the initial covenant. Secondly,

then, in order for this further and deeper relational connection *to be*, Jesus further reconstituted the temple by tearing open the curtain to have direct access to the Most Holy Place of God's dwelling. The uncommon relational context and process of the whole of God was now fully vulnerable without the veil of any relational barriers to the ongoing relational connection and essential relational outcome of intimate relationship together 'face to face' with the whole and uncommon Trinity.

Removal of both the temple curtain and the veil to intimate relational connection are irreversible conditions integral for the reconstituted temple's uncommon relational context and process, which unmistakably distinguish the Trinity's uncommon vulnerable presence and whole relational involvement in the new covenant relationship of family together to constitute the trinitarian church as the Trinity's uncommon temple. Therefore, Jesus reconstituted the temple and constituted the trinitarian church family based only on persons, peoples and nations equalized in intimate relationship together with the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity; the church emerges in uncommon wholeness only in likeness of this reconstituted temple, and this church is constituted together with its persons and relationships *to be* whole in ontology and function in the uncommon likeness of the Trinity, integrally whole and uncommon.

Here again is the reality that the Trinity and the Trinity's temple home used by the church *is* the church and its persons and relationships they get.

The Reciprocal Likeness of Covenant Relationship

The covenant (both initial and new) must not be seen as a mere reference point (or identity marker) for our faith, because the covenant is only known as a relationship by God and by its nature can only be understood in relational terms by us. The ontological footprints and functional steps of the full profile of God's face, which discloses the Trinity, converge in 'the tabernacle-church of the covenant' and 'the tent-church of meeting' for the only purpose of covenant relationship together. In other words, the only way we can account for the essential reality (not virtual or augmented) of the whole-ly Trinity's presence and involvement is in relationship together, and this can only be a relational reality in reciprocal relationship and not unilateral relations. Reciprocal relationship, however, has no essential reality when the relationship is either referentialized (as if in front of the curtain) or just observed (with relational distance behind a veil). This critical issue is an ongoing problem for the integrity of the temple-church's relational context and process—a relational condition needing to be reconstituted (not simply reconstructed but transformed) to restore the reciprocal relationship together of the covenant. Therefore, the church and its persons and relationships need to understand in what likeness of the covenant they function, and thus of what likeness they are composed: uncommon or common.

In the reciprocal nature of the covenant relationship, the essential outcome of the relational terms of the covenant is nothing less and no substitutes for the following: "The LORD's portion *or inheritance in the relationship* is his people" (Dt 32:9), and the portion for God's people in the relationship is not about land, nation building or any related blessing but the whole of God (Ps 119:57; Jer 51:19; Lam 3:24). Even inheriting eternal life is to know the Trinity in intimate relationship together, as Jesus made definitive (Jn

17:3). The tabernacle-church of the covenant and the tent-church of meeting provide the integrated relational context and process for the primacy of this relational outcome; and Jesus reconstituted the temple and constituted the church for this primary function in reciprocal likeness. Accordingly, the reciprocal portions in covenant relationship are integrally accounted for and accountable in reciprocal likeness. Unmistakably, therefore, the covenant is composed of whole persons from inner out only involved in reciprocal relationship together in wholeness—not engaged in conforming from the outer in to a covenant code of stipulations—in which this inner-out primacy constitutes the essential relational outcome for the temple-church *to be* in uncommon likeness of the face of the Trinity in complete profile.

In further contrast to the referentialization of God's Word and God's definitive blessing in the relational terms of covenant relationship (Num 6:24-26), the face of YHWH has turned to his portion and unfolded to *siym* and *shalôm*, that is, to bring change for a new relationship together in wholeness. The relational outcome 'already' is the new covenant relationship composed with the curtain torn open and the veil removed in order to raise up the new creation church family in reciprocal likeness of the Trinity (as defined in Heb 9:15; 10:19-22; 2 Cor 3:16-18). 'Already' means today, in which the church is responsible for its persons and relationships *to be* in reciprocal likeness.

Reciprocal likeness is not a referential likeness to the major events in Jesus' life. What Jesus did with the temple, he enacted with his whole person to disclose the *person*-al Trinity's uncommon presence and the inter-*person*-al Trinity's whole involvement, thereby distinguishing the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love for the church and all its persons and relationships *to be* in reciprocal likeness. Nothing less and no substitutes can constitute the church in likeness of the temple Jesus reconstituted. However, once again, the temple and covenant used will determine what church emerges; and, of course, the principal determinant in this process is the Trinity used. The church can function in likeness of a temple still constructed in common referential terms, in which case the curtain and veil have not been removed in church practice if not also in church theology. Certainly this relational condition is critical for the church's persons and relationships, needing urgent care for their well-being.

One relevant example of a church in this condition was clarified and corrected by Jesus in post-ascension with the Spirit. Regardless of this church's exemplary practice and maintaining correct doctrine in rigorous ways, the church in Ephesus was held accountable for "forsaking your first love" (*aphiemi*, Rev 2:1-4). They essentially sent away, let go from themselves, or kept relational distance from their portion in covenant relationship—the Trinity who first loved them and loves them as the reciprocal portion in intimate relationship together without the veil of relational distance and separation in front of the curtain. This primacy of relationship together was let go or lost in their preoccupation with what was secondary in church practice, even though important but still secondary to reciprocal relationship together. The consequence of such church practice, which is common today, is the unavoidable condition of the church's persons and relationships gathered as relational orphans (*aphiemi*), contrary to how Jesus constitutes his church family (Jn 14:18).

The likeness of persons and relationships in the church either exists still in front of the curtain with the veil in place for outer-in engagement, or their likeness emerges behind the torn-open curtain with the veil removed from their faces to be involved from inner out in face-to-face intimate relationship together. The former likeness is limited and constrained to common terms and shaping, which may appear correct in common orthodoxy and with common Trinitarianism. This condition reduces persons to their outer-in distinctions in comparative process, whereby their relationships are fragmented to a stratified order, which reconstructs the relational context and process of the church in likeness of the temple before it was reconstituted by Jesus. The most evident indicators of this likeness are the lack of intimate and equalized relationships, which explicitly or subtly gathers persons in measured engagement in a relational order vertically structured either to minimize deeper involvement or for the convenience to simply gather. Such practice makes the significance of belonging ambiguous or elusive, and excludes persons on the periphery to be marginalized; and responding to this relational condition was the relational purpose for Jesus to reconstitute the temple.

The primacy of intimate and equalized relationships unfolds in the church only in reciprocal likeness of Jesus going behind the curtain to remove the veil for the intimate new covenant together in reciprocal relationship of wholeness. The relational outcome 'already' of what Jesus enacted conclusively is irreversible, and it is not subject to negotiation but essential for the church and its persons and relationships together *to be* whole. Thus, this primacy of the church in reciprocal likeness also integrally constitutes the church in the uncommon likeness essential to the whole of who, what and how the Trinity is. In this sense, we can say ironically that the likeness of the church used will determine the Trinity the church gets in its theology and practice. The church of common likeness composes common Trinitarianism, which is unable to distinguish the Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement in the primacy of relationship together with family love, which then does not compose church practice with the sensitivity and awareness to know when it has forsaken its first love (the common likeness of the church in Ephesus).

Therefore, the temple (either before or after being reconstituted) is inseparable from the church, and the covenant used (explicitly or implicitly) for composing the church becomes inevitably the persons and relationships it gets. Their interrelated context and process are defining for the church's witness of the triune God's presence and involvement, and are determinative for the church's resource to know and understand the whole-ly Trinity. The reality of the embodied Truth facing the church is that the likeness of the temple the church uses will be the church it gets in likeness. With who and what are at stake here, the church urgently needs to be accountable for what temple it is in likeness of and in what covenant its likeness is composed. The temple and covenant interdependently are unavoidable issues for the church and its persons and relationships to face—either behind the curtain vulnerably from inner out, or in front of the curtain guarded from outer in, either without the veil in open hearts or with the veil in measured function.

The Trinitarian Likeness in Uncommon Wholeness

Before Jesus reconstituted the temple to restore its relational context and process for all persons, peoples and nations to have relational connection with the whole and uncommon God, he lamented over Jerusalem: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you *in the relational condition 'to be apart'* " ("left" like orphans, *aphiemi*, Lk 13:34-35, cf. 19:41-42). The relational consequence of not willing to be vulnerable to Jesus' relational terms was *aphiemi*, the default condition that reduced their persons and fragmented their relationships 'to be apart' without the means to be whole. In contrast, those willingly vulnerable in response to Jesus' relational terms are "not *aphiemi* as orphans *who don't belong in my family by our essential relationship together*" (Jn 14:18,23). Yet, the essential reality of this relational outcome is commonly rendered virtual in many churches and prevails subtly in most churches as a gathering of relational orphans (like the church in Ephesus)—a relational condition still lacking intimate and equalized relationships together in the wholeness of their persons from inner out. And such gatherings of relational orphans are always lamented by Jesus: "If *churches* only recognized on this day the *essentials* that make for *wholeness*," and this relational condition will continue as long as "they are hidden from *the churches' lens*" (Lk 19:42).

Paul had the church family responsibility (*oikonomia*, Col 1:25) to help the church understand what makes it whole and to recognize when its persons are reduced and its relationships are fragmented. So, for example, when Paul critiqued the church in Corinth, he exposed their fragmented condition ("Has Christ been divided?" 1 Cor 1:10-13) that shaped the church in negotiated human terms "beyond what is written" (including beyond the oral tradition of the Scriptures and the Jesus tradition, 1 Cor 4:6). He wanted this church to recognize its reduced state and the fragmented relational condition of its persons and relationships. Their persons functioned in a comparative process of human distinctions (notably in the church's roles and titles), which determined their engagement in relationships inseparably functioning in likeness of a comparative system and structure composing a stratified relational order (1 Cor 3:1-5; 4:7; 2 Cor 10:12). Paul wants this church (and others in likeness) to understand what makes the church and its persons and relationships whole, therefore he holds them accountable *to be* the following: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you, *your persons together*? If anyone *reduces the state of* [*phtheiro*] God's temple, God will *relegate* that person *to a worse state*. For God's temple is *uncommon*, and *your persons and relationships together as church* are that temple *in uncommon likeness*" (1 Cor 3:16-17, see also Eph 2:21-22).

Paul was not pontificating here to get the churches and their persons and relationships to conform to a metanarrative of orthodoxy, the referential terms of which have neither significance for the church's theology nor relevance for the practice of the church's persons and relationships. Rather Paul made clear that his urgent response to the church signified the vulnerable involvement of his "heart is wide open to you"—that is, his whole person from inner out involved in family love with "no restriction in our affections" (2 Cor 6:11-12), in reciprocal likeness of the new covenant relationship together composing the church family in unveiled likeness of the Trinity (2 Cor 3:16-18).

In the uncommon likeness of the church as God's uncommon temple, Paul also holds accountable the church and its persons *to be* reciprocally involved in relationship together: "open wide your hearts also" (6:13) without the restrictions, relational distance and barriers of "the veil," so that the church with all its persons and relationships together are whole—neither fragmented in the church's relational order nor reduced in the church's function (as Paul later made definitive, Eph 2:14-22; 4:12-16).

Yet, churches must understand that the peace of Christ (composing "the gospel of peace," Eph 6:15) made definitive by Paul as the only determinant for the church (Col 3:15) is still the uncommon wholeness Jesus constituted for his family (Jn 14:27; 16:33). It is this uncommon wholeness, "which surpasses all understanding" (Phil 4:7), that Paul makes imperative as the sole determinant of our whole persons from inner out to "rule in your hearts since as members of one body you were called to wholeness" in uncommon likeness of the Trinity (Col 3:15, NIV). Uncommon wholeness constitutes God's uncommon temple, the function of which is distinguished by and thus has significance in only trinitarian likeness. The church emerges as the new creation church family only in uncommon likeness of the Trinity, and the church unfolds in uncommon wholeness only in trinitarian likeness. That is to say, the church is whole in ontology and function when its persons are in likeness of the *person*-al Trinity and its relationships together are in likeness of the inter-*person*-al Trinity—the whole nature of which is uncommon and therefore never subject to anything common, though always subjected to the common human context and its prevailing human condition in reductionism with its counter-relational workings.

When churches lack the wholeness of Christ as their sole determinant, they are commonly shaped by the human context. This is demonstrated by another church clarified and corrected by Jesus in post-ascension with the Spirit. The church in Sardis had an esteemed reputation in the surrounding community for being full of life, such that their popularity must have generated a lot of excitement, perhaps augmented by innovative practices that enhanced their ministries—analogous to megachurches and some emergent churches today. Yet, not surprisingly, Jesus sends them a "Wake up!" call because he finds them reduced, essentially useless (*nekros*, Rev 3:1-2), and consequently their so-called church life was not complete (*pleroo*, full, whole) according to the whole relational terms essential to the Trinity. In other words, this church assumed their church life and practice wasn't reduced but elevated to a higher level (sound familiar from the beginning?) as their reputation indicated, only to be exposed in common likeness of the human context rather than being in the uncommon wholeness distinguishing the church's uncommon likeness of the Trinity. Hence, the clarifying and correcting questions, "Where are you?" and "What are you doing here?"

Churches shaped by the common in human contextualization is an ongoing issue for the church and its persons and relationships, which is compounded because the likeness of the church is also composed in correlation directly from the likeness of its persons and relationships shaped by a common theological anthropology influenced by the human context. The main problem for persons and relationships influenced by the human context is the common focus on the outer in (such as observable differences) and the related human distinction-making emerging inevitably from this lens, and how those distinctions define persons and determine relationships and thereby shape the church in likeness, notably in its practice even if not in its theology. In the church, from its

leadership down through its membership, such differences exist in summary as follows: "There are different kinds of gifts…different kinds of service…different kinds of working…" (1 Cor 12:4-6, NIV). Difference (*diairesis*) is the reality *in* the church. Whether it is the essential reality *of* the church is contingent on how difference is perceived and on what basis difference exists *in* the church and determines the function *of* the church.

How difference is perceived by persons certainly is commonly different, and how difference exists and functions in relationships certainly differs among persons, peoples and nations. In its history the church has established the above differences in a formal or informal structure conforming to a uniform function of those differences in uniform roles and titles. On the one hand, Paul first established distinct roles and titles for church function (Eph 4:11). However, on the other hand, Paul never intended for such differences to be used as the basis for distinctions *in* the church to determine the essential function *of* the church—"For who sees anything different in *your persons and* makes you different from anyone else?" (1 Cor 4:7)—since Paul fought against such reductionism in the church in order for the new creation church and its persons and relationships to emerge whole (as he defined, 1 Cor 12:22-25). Thus, for Paul there was an insurmountable gap between difference and distinctions to understand and ongoingly maintain that is essential for the church *to be* distinguished as the whole of God's uncommon temple, in which and whom the Trinity dwells together in the reciprocal relationship of the new covenant. And the key to the critical issue of distinguishing difference from distinctions is only the trinitarian key freeing the church from being defined and determined by distinctions and thereby living whole together in any differences granted explicitly or implicitly allowed by the Trinity.

Even though Paul was no traditional trinitarian in theology, he clearly made definitive for the church this trinitarian likeness: "There are different…but the same Spirit…but the same Lord *Jesus*…but it is the same God *the Father*"; in addition, "There is one body and one Spirit…one hope…one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph 4:4-5), and differences granted to the church are based on each person "given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift" (4:7) and "given the *presence and involvement* of the Spirit for the *uncommon wholeness of the church*…just as the body is one and has many members…are one *ontological whole in likeness of the trinitarian persons*…all *our persons* baptized into *equalized relationships together without distinctions*" (1 Cor 12:7-13). The whole of Paul and the whole in his theology for the church can only be understood in this trinitarian likeness, which transforms persons from inner out in their relationships without the veil to constitute the uncommon wholeness of the church in uncommon likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity (as Paul made definitive in 2 Cor 3:14-18).

The persons of the church in uncommon likeness are defined from inner out in contrast (and thus in conflict) to outer in. For the inner-out person, the inner is primary and essential to constitute the heart of the whole person over any outer differences the person may have. Whereas, for the outer-in person, the outer is primary, and thus a person defined by the outer differences, distinctions and any other parts primarily over the heart of the whole person. The inner-out person is or can be whole while the outer-in person is fragmented and cannot be whole from outer in. As Paul illuminated (Eph 2:14-22), the peace of Christ transformed persons from inner out, free of their differences and

distinctions, and reconciled their whole persons in the relationship together of wholeness both with the Trinity and with each other. This relational outcome of "the bond of wholeness," composed in trinitarian likeness (Eph 4:3-6), is both irreplaceable for the uncommon wholeness of the church to emerge, develop and mature, and is indispensable for all the church's persons to function whole together (4:12-16). Any appearance of common peace-wholeness from outer in cannot fulfill this relational outcome in the church—the reality that the church in Sardis didn't assume to have to face in the midst of all their success.

Churches need to understand, however, that the bond of wholeness is not simply a bond of love but is relationship-specific to whole persons in two vital nonnegotiable ways:

1. Only whole persons can be involved at the heart level for the bond of intimate relationships that is necessary for wholeness in trinitarian likeness; yet, this is only uncommon wholeness and not common peace (passing for wholeness), so the bond of intimate relationships is not a virtual reality that could be simulated, but is irreplaceably the essential reality of the hearts of whole persons (without the veil of differences and distinctions) bonding together.
2. This intimate bond requires then unavoidably that these persons be equalized unmistakably in any and all differences and distinctions, such that the involvement of their whole persons is not compromised and the integrity of this intimate bond is not redefined outer in and thereby become a bond of common peace—a bond which would neither be whole nor be in trinitarian likeness.

When Paul earlier held the church accountable to "open wide your hearts" in reciprocal likeness (2 Cor 6:11-13), it was this bond of wholeness in intimate and equalized relationships together in which he challenged their whole persons *to be* uncommon in trinitarian likeness. Nothing less and no substitutes for the church and its persons and relationships can be whole, just as is essential for the Trinity.

Trinitarian likeness was not a theological construct for Paul. It signified the reality of his face-to-face involvement with the trinitarian persons, which composed the trinitarian relational process "with unveiled faces…being transformed into *Jesus'* likeness…who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). This essential relational outcome was the whole and uncommon basis for the whole of Paul's person and the whole in his theology and practice, which most notably composed the uncommon wholeness of the church and its persons and relationships in trinitarian likeness. In other words, since the Damascus road this monotheistic Jew vulnerably experienced the relational response of the trinitarian persons and their ongoing relational involvement in family love, so that his whole person was *to be* distinguished in trinitarian likeness (see also Col 3:10-11; Gal 5:6; 6:15).

As discussed previously, the trinitarian persons occupied different roles and functions in order to extend family love downward to the human context—the uncommon Trinity vulnerably present and relationally involved to love us in all our commonness. The different roles and functions, however, do not define their whole persons. To limit their persons to their roles and functions reduces their whole persons and fragments the *person*-al Trinity; and this becomes the basis for perceiving the Trinity in modalism. At

the heart of their persons, they are one without those distinctions (*heis eimi*, the ontological One) to constitute the *person*-al Trinity. Furthermore in wholeness, even to constrain the trinitarian persons to their titles imposes a distinction to their differences that reduces their whole relationship together (*en eimi*, the relational Whole) and thereby fragments the inter-*person*-al Trinity. When you see one trinitarian person (Son, Father or Spirit), you also see the other trinitarian persons (even for Paul, 2 Cor 3:17-18). How so? Because, to the extent disclosed to us, they are integrally bonded together in uncommon wholeness (*en eimi*) by intimate and equalized relationships to constitute the inter-*person*-al Trinity. The *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity is whole and uncommon, therefore no fragmentary knowledge and common understanding can account for the Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement. Nor can they account for the uncommon likeness of the Trinity or the Trinity's uncommon wholeness, both by which the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity constitute the church and its persons and relationships together.

The church in Ephesus used fragmentary doctrinal knowledge and common orthodox understanding to get a church of exemplary practice in unlikeness of the Trinity who loved them first. The church of likeness requires by its nature the whole and uncommon Trinity *to be* distinguished (*pala*) unmistakably beyond any other likeness. The church of likeness needs, even if it may not want, the *person*-al Trinity's uncommon presence and the inter-*person*-al Trinity's whole involvement in order *to be* in uncommon wholeness. Therefore, the church of likeness has *to be* in uncommon likeness of this Trinity *to be* in the uncommon wholeness constituted by only the whole and uncommon Trinity, not by a partial and common Trinity. Accordingly, it is always essential that the church in likeness of the Trinity is *to be person*-al and inter-*person*-al, uncommonly composed with whole subject-persons from inner out without distinctions who function vulnerably in the primacy of relationships together in wholeness without the veil. And the church and *all* its persons and relationships must (by their nature, not out of duty) function in uncommon wholeness distinguished in uncommon likeness in order *to be* essential beyond the common and thus *to be* significant for the common condition of all persons and relationships. This is the church of likeness that Jesus made definitive in his prayer for the trinitarian church family *to be*, and that the Spirit is present and involved to unfold and bring to relational conclusion.

The Church in Uncommon Likeness

The church may not want, even though it needs, the presence and involvement of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. The primary issue is because *to be* in uncommon likeness, the church and its persons and relationships have to be more vulnerable than they may want or find convenient—even though that is essential to what they need, which makes the want-need issue unavoidable. As Paul illuminated, wide-open hearts are uncommon and churches have consistently existed on a common path, contrary to Jesus' intrusive relational path. Yet, to follow Jesus is neither optional nor open to negotiation for the church, despite the reality that discipleship has been presented as such by churches. Such church practice reflects a church's Christology and soteriology, and evidences a theological anthropology of its persons and relationships in an ontology and

function struggling (knowingly or not) to establish its identity both in the global community and within the global church—perhaps with a reputation like that of the church in Sardis, or with a track-record like that of the church in Ephesus.

The identity a church wants to establish may not be compatible or congruent with the identity the church needs to compose in likeness of the Trinity. As long as the integrity of who, what and how the church is (the whole of its righteousness) is not composed in the ontology and function that distinguishes its likeness beyond a common likeness of its surrounding context (locally, regionally and globally), that church has a major problem. That church's presence and involvement are in a critical condition that compromises the validity of its witness to the whole of God and its resource to know more than a common God. Churches in this likeness need to be transformed to uncommon wholeness *to be* in uncommon likeness, and that's the pivotal reason why the church may not want the presence and involvement of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity.

Can you imagine going into a church and unilaterally turning it upside down in order to restore the relational context and process of God's uncommon temple for all persons without distinctions? Can you also imagine tearing down a church's tradition and exposing the barriers of its practice in order to open wide relationships of intimacy and equality to compose God's uncommon temple? Paul more than imagined these because Jesus embodied and enacted this intrusive relational path to constitute his church family in uncommon wholeness ("not as the *common* gives") in uncommon likeness ("just as I do not belong to the *common*") of the Trinity whole and uncommon, *person*-al and inter-*person*-al.

What jumps out in front of our face from Jesus and Paul about the church as God's temple is the incompatibility between the uncommon and common, and that they are incongruent for any attempt to integrate them in a hybrid, not to mention irreconcilable in function and antithetical in ontology. What is 'holy and sanctified' has been perceived by churches throughout history with a common lens. That is, the uncommon constituting the church by Jesus and composed for the church by Paul has been shaped by terms lacking congruence with the qualitative relational significance integral to their definition and application of uncommon. The most prominent issue-conflict involves the underlying theological anthropology defining persons and determining relationships in the church on the basis of what amounts to a common ontology and function. This church theology and practice further expose an incomplete Christology of Jesus' whole person disclosing the whole and uncommon Trinity, as well as expose a truncated soteriology not encompassing being both saved *from* sin as reductionism and saved *to* wholeness of persons in relationship together as the Trinity's new creation family. This essential reality and relational outcome have been pervasively commonized, such that at best they are simulated with only illusions of the uncommon.

The issue-conflict of defining persons and determining relationships in the church by a common ontology and function may not be apparent in the church's theology, doctrinal statements and decrees of faith. But its operating presence emerges in the church's practice of its persons lack of heart-level involvement in the depth of relationships together integrally intimate and equalized in their differences and from their distinctions. Wide-open hearts in intimate reciprocal relationships is simply too uncommon and thus threatening for the church to advance for its persons—a threat also

for keeping their numbers in the church—plus too difficult for the church to cultivate in its relationships without having to address all the relational issues that emerge as persons become more deeply involved. Palatable relationships are certainly much easier for persons (especially leadership) to face, just ask Jesus and Paul about their experiences related to the temple-church. The reason palatable relationships are easier to face is the fact that they don't bring persons together in face-to-face relationships—which is the seduction of social media and the use of technology in the church. At most, palatable relationships are an association between persons in the church, gathering together essentially as relational orphans still 'to be apart' from the transformed relationships together both intimate and equalized in the new creation family composing the Trinity's uncommon temple, that is, with the curtain torn away and the veil removed.

The relational context and process of the church as the Trinity's uncommon temple have been reconstituted for the primacy of all its persons to have intimate relational connection and ongoing involvement with the Trinity and with each other face to face. For the church's persons to have intimate relationships with the Trinity necessitates, by the nature of trinitarian relationship, the heart of the whole person, who by necessity has *to be* equalized from distinctions *to be* whole from inner out for the person's involvement in intimate reciprocal relationship together—just ask the Samaritan woman, on the one side of this relational equation, and Peter at his footwashing on the other side. The church of uncommon likeness has no available option for palatable relationships, because the intimate and equalized relationships of the Trinity's uncommon temple are not optional but essential for the church *to be* in uncommon ontology and function to distinguish it and its persons and relationships together in uncommon likeness of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity.

Therefore, the church in uncommon likeness grows all its persons *to be* whole in the primary from the inner—neither shifted to nor substituted by the outer—and cultivates their intimate involvement in the primacy of equalized relationships both in their differences and without their distinctions. That is to say, contrary to what many may want, the church in uncommon likeness is distinguished in its ontology and function *to be* **the intimate equalizer** in the whole relational response of trinitarian family love to what all persons, peoples, nations and their relationships need—regardless of what they may desire and seek.

There are understandable concerns about the emphasis on equality and equalizing, which may raise questions and concerns whether this makes being equal the top priority for the church and the highest purpose for the gospel. My short response is yes and no. No, it doesn't if we are talking about 'common equality', which emerges from common peace and thus from efforts of social justice without the integrity of righteousness so that both don't account for sin as reductionism and an underlying theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function. Yes, it does because we are only focused on uncommon equality, which unmistakably and undeniably emerges from the uncommon peace of Christ and his justice with righteousness—"He has abolished *the inequitable practice of* the law with its commandments and ordinances" (Eph 2:15ff)—in order to save us from sin as reductionism and save us to his family composed by transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate, so that persons and relationships are distinguished in their primacy of whole ontology and function and thereby belonging to the new

relational order of the Trinity's whole and uncommon family. Yes, the church in uncommon equality fulfills the relational significance of its ontology (who and whose it is), and the intimate equalizer church fulfills the relational purpose of its function (what and how it is)—fulfills by its uncommon peace of whole ontology and function in uncommon likeness of the Trinity embodied and enacted by Jesus to compose "the gospel of uncommon wholeness" (Eph 6:15).

Given the uncommon temple Jesus reconstituted and the uncommon church he constituted, do you have a better gospel and a greater function for the church than as the intimate equalizer?

The Priorities of the Intimate Equalizer

In open congruence with the church of uncommon likeness, the church as the intimate equalizer is a distinct minority in the common context—"just as I am not of the *common*." As the minority of minorities, the intimate equalizer church is ongoingly subjected to influences and challenges to commonize the integrity of who, what and how it is in uncommon likeness to the essential relational reality of the Trinity's uncommon vulnerable presence and whole intimate involvement. Therefore, the intimate equalizer can only respond in love to what is needed (even if not wanted), when it is nothing less and no more than the Trinity it is in likeness *to be*—"*congruent* as we are *together Father*."

The church is in uncommon likeness to Jesus who intimately equalized persons in his whole relational response of family love to what others needed in their human relational condition—whose strategic shift converged with the Samaritan woman to intimately equalize her whole person. Accordingly, the intimate equalizer church follows Jesus on his intrusive relational path in relationship together to the Father, in triangulation with the Spirit, to compose the trinitarian church family as the Trinity's uncommon temple. This is the intimate equalizer church's only relational purpose, and thus its foremost priority is to grow the trinitarian church family in intimate equalized relationships of likeness—of course, uncommon likeness since the Trinity is nothing less than whole and no substitutes for uncommon. These intimate equalized relationships must (by nature, *dei*, not obligation, *opheilo*) encompass the whole of the church's practice from its worship through its fellowship down to its ministry and mission. In this inclusive relational process, the uncommon wholeness of its witness must illuminate the essential reality of the Trinity's presence and involvement, and thereby provide the resource in uncommon likeness to know the Trinity in intimate relationship together.

Yet, and this is vital to understand to distinguish the church in likeness, the intimate equalizer's uncommon wholeness in uncommon likeness is not contained only within the relational context of the church for the relational process limited to its persons and relationships. As Jesus embodied, enacted and prayed, the trinitarian church family is in uncommon likeness of the Trinity who constitutes the new creation church as the essential relational outcome of the Trinity's relational response of family love to the entire human condition. Congruently, the intimate equalizer of the trinitarian church family extends *inner out* to the context of the common in likeness of the Trinity's relational response, in order that all persons, peoples and nations can experience the

Trinity's relational response of family love to their human condition, whereby they have the opportunity to respond back to claim what they need (Jn 17:21,23).

What unfolds from the relational context of the trinitarian church family's intimate and equalized relationships together, and is embodied and enacted in its relational process of family love, is the uncommon wholeness needed to make whole the human condition. Without these intimate equalized relationships in likeness of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity, the church has no qualitative relational significance to be of relevance for what the human condition needs—though what such a church does offer may be what some may want, at least temporarily. Thus, the foremost priority of the intimate equalizer is always to grow the trinitarian church family for the Trinity's uncommon temple. But it cannot remain contained within the church or else it turns into common likeness that lacks the uncommon wholeness of the Trinity, which becomes contrary to and in conflict with the wholeness Jesus gives (Jn 14:27). This self-contained church follows a different path without the qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness to recognize its own condition (sustaining Jesus' weeping, Lk 19:41-42) much less to help the surrounding human condition. The natural inner-out growth (not obligated or otherwise forced) of the trinitarian church family *to be* whole in intimate equalized relationships is to be vulnerable in uncommon wholeness to the common's human condition, in order to share the trinitarian relational response of family love just as the church's persons have been loved in their relational condition. In other definitive words, "By this *relational response of love in reciprocal likeness* everyone will know you are my *followers in intimate equalized relationships together*" (Jn 13:35).

In this essential trinitarian relational process, the foremost priority of the intimate equalizer is not within the church, but *to be* the church in uncommon likeness of the Trinity's presence and involvement in the common context and thereby *to be* the church in uncommon wholeness that all in the common context need to be made whole also. Therefore, the only priority for the intimate equalizer church is *to be* in the uncommon wholeness of the trinitarian church family and its natural inner-out growth in uncommon likeness to the ongoing presence and involvement of the Trinity. Moreover, this inclusive priority of the intimate equalizer church precludes the distinction between evangelism (gospel of salvation) and social action (social gospel), and dissolves its false dichotomy, the presence of which are often misguided by social trinitarianism.

So, where does this bring the church in uncommon likeness and how does it grow as the intimate equalizer?

The Scope of the Intimate Equalizer

Persons are the central focus of the *person*-al Trinity and relationships are the primary focus of the inter-*person*-al Trinity. As the church in uncommon likeness, the scope of intimate equalizer's relational response of family love is centered on all persons in the primacy of all relationships, anywhere and everywhere, at the personal level to the institutional, structural and systemic levels of the global community. Moreover, Paul illuminated that "*all* creation waits with eager longing for the *unveiling of the Trinity's uncommon family in intimate equalized relationships together*…in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to *reductionism* and will obtain the freedom of the *uncommon wholeness* of the *persons and relationships together composing the trinitarian*

church family" (Rom 8:19-21). To state it simply and essentially, the scope of the intimate equalizer in uncommon likeness has no common boundaries to limit or constrain its own persons and relationships in the relational response of family love.

This scope and its priority have confounded, conflicted and prominently fragmented the church throughout its history, with the relational consequence of rendering the church in common likeness while composed at best with simulations and illusions not beyond common "wholeness." Accordingly, the church operating without the scope and priority of the intimate equalizer then occupies a different relational path than Jesus embodied and enacted to constitute his church family as the Trinity's uncommon temple. Such a church occupies a different path by being preoccupied with persons and relationships from the outer in, thereby limiting its scope and constraining its priority by common terms whereby the church and its persons and relationships are shaped in common likeness—perhaps in likeness of a Trinity but only in common Trinitarianism. Jesus grieves over the commonized churches and the commonization of its persons and relationships, because they are *not to be* in the uncommon wholeness only he gives, in the uncommon likeness of the Trinity he embodied and enacted in the trinitarian relational process of family love in response to them in their condition and to the entire human condition.

There is a present reality that the church and its persons and relationships need to understand and thus recognize. Along with life in the Internet, all life from outer in lives in, what by essential terms amounts to, a virtual composition of life—a virtual reality no matter how much it is augmented. This present reality, pervasive even in the church, is not a recent development since it is the existing condition from the beginning 'to be apart' from the essential reality constituted in whole and uncommon likeness of the Trinity. It is the present reality of this existing condition both in the church and the human context that defines the scope and determines the priority of the intimate equalizer church.

The Depth of the Intimate Equalizer

"*The Trinity*, who knows the heart *of the whole person*…has made no distinctions between *all persons*" (Acts 15:8-9). This was the essential reality facing the earliest church council that held the church accountable for its theology and practice *to be* in likeness as the intimate equalizer. Of course, Peter first had to have his own theology clarified and corrected by Jesus (Acts 10:9ff), because he didn't listen to Jesus face to face earlier and pay attention to Jesus intimately equalizing persons (notably Peter's own person) without distinctions. Correct theology, however, by itself is insufficient *to be* in uncommon likeness; consequently Peter's practice also had to be clarified and corrected by Paul of his continued distinction-making of persons in his relationship with them, which occupied Peter on a contrary relational path of the gospel Jesus embodied and enacted (Gal 2:11-14). The function of Peter's person should not be confused as a doctrinal issue (corrected by Jesus earlier), because it involved his person from outer in putting on a mask-veil to perform his role—his *hypokrisis* that Paul exposed, in likeness of the masks of ancient Greek theatre. Likewise, it is important for the modern church to understand and account for this in its practice. Wearing a mask-veil signified Peter's practice to perform his major role in its distinctions from outer in—as he functioned with

Jesus at his footwashing. How can this happen so consistently for Peter, even when his theology has been corrected? Making distinctions of persons and relationships in our practice is our default condition (discussed further below) that always emerges when we are not congruent from inner out in the uncommon wholeness of who, what and how we are *to be* in uncommon likeness of the whole-ly Trinity.

In his recurring practice, what Peter demonstrated unknowingly—which churches thereafter also demonstrate—is a commonized theological anthropology of persons and relationships defined and determined from the outer in. This demonstrates a common ontology and function that fails to center on the heart of the whole person, contrary to the likeness of the Trinity who centers on the heart of persons in the primacy of relationships together. What Peter's theology and practice also exposed—which is underlying a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function—is a weak view of sin that doesn't encompass reductionism and the breadth of reductionism's counter-relational workings, the scope of which composes the human relational condition in general and the church's relational condition in particular. This is the default condition that prevails as long as reductionism is not accounted for and addressed accordingly. Without the comprehensive sin of reductionism, whatever sin the church and its persons and relationships are saved *from* is never complete "in cleansing their hearts" (Acts 15:9) to make whole the persons and relationships in the church before even considering in the world—just as the first church council had to account for in order *to be* accountable in uncommon likeness of the Trinity.

The depth of the intimate equalizer is not complicated, though it is complex. The heart of the whole person is central to the *person*-al Trinity and this intimate involvement in equalized relationships together is primary to the inter-*person*-al Trinity. Yet, church theology and practice has either confused this depth or substituted it with a subtle shift to outer in, both of which are composed by a common theological anthropology and weak view of sin. This is evident when the heart is idealized in our theology and yet has no functional significance in our practice—does this reflect in Peter also?—or evident when the heart is spiritualized in our practice but without its depth of relational significance. In *un*likeness both outward and inward of the integrating function of the heart for the whole person, the idealized and spiritualized hearts fragment the person, and thus do not and cannot constitute the depth necessary for persons *to be* involved in intimate equalized relationships.

Therefore, what this makes definitive for the intimate equalizer is not a partial or measured depth of persons in measured involvement of relationships. Rather what is unmistakable are the depth of wide-open hearts vulnerably involved without the veil of distinctions or any other barriers, whereby the primary inner of the whole person is free (redeemed) *to be* in transformed relationships integrally intimate and equalized—in likeness just as Jesus embodied and enacted to constitute the new creation church family as the Trinity's uncommon temple, which all of creation is longing for today. Without this immeasurable depth, complex as it is, the church cannot function as the intimate equalizer with uncommon wholeness of its persons and relationships in uncommon likeness; such a church only operates in some common likeness, at best with a common peace—as found in the churches in Ephesus and Sardis.

The depth issue raises the validity issue of both the church's witness of the Trinity's presence and involvement and the church's resource to intimately know the Trinity in relationship together. Just as the first church council had to account for its depth and be accountable for this depth in uncommon likeness of the Trinity in order *to be* the intimate equalizer church, the church today is even more widely challenged in its depth by the scope of the human condition expanding globally as the church moves toward an eschatological conclusion. Underlying this scope is the breadth of reductionism and its counter-relational workings that influence the church to reflect, reinforce and even sustain the scope of the human condition. One example, unexpected perhaps, is the church's use of and engagement with modern technology to enhance the church context and process, which renders its relational context and process more virtual than essential and thus in need to be reconstituted as Jesus enacted for the temple. Of course, many in the church (likely millennials more so) rely on such virtual experiences to meet their desires, the reality of which is assumed not to reduce them (sound familiar?).

This often-times subtle condition can only be an existing reality if the relational condition of the church and its persons and relationships are *not to be* in the uncommon wholeness of intimate equalized relationships together in uncommon likeness of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. For this critical purpose, the inclusive priority of the intimate equalizer must initially (but not permanently) and ongoingly (but not exclusively) compose the church and its own persons and relationships in the depth of uncommon wholeness. And the relational outcome will grow in scope with the reciprocal likeness of the trinitarian relational response of family love in further depth of involvement to embrace all persons, peoples, nations and their relationships *to be* whole together (including all creation)—in reciprocal likeness of "Christ's *relational* purpose to create in *his wholeness* one new *humanity* out of *their fragmentation*, thus making *uncommon wholeness for all in family together*" (Eph 2:14ff).

Nothing less and no substitutes for both the Trinity and the church integrally constitute the trinitarian church family in uncommon wholeness, so that the church and all its persons and relationships are *to be* in uncommon likeness of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. Only this distinguishes the essential reality composing the church *of* likeness clearly uncommon to churches of any other likeness. It should not be surprising, therefore, for Jesus to grieve until we in likeness also turn our churches upside down to restore the trinitarian relational context and process of the Trinity's uncommon temple for all persons without distinctions. And Jesus grieves until we also tear down our traditions and tear open the veil of relational distance and barriers to have intimate relationship with the Trinity, who centers on our hearts and makes no distinctions between us for us *to be* equalized together in uncommon wholeness.

Further Distinguishing the Church's Uncommon Wholeness

Many in the church today use Micah 6:8 to answer "what does the LORD require of you?" The emphasis to "do justice" is typically associated with peace, both of which the psalmist emphatically integrates with righteousness (Ps 85:10; 89:14). However, when the model of Micah 6:8 is used by the church based on a reduced theological anthropology, the church becomes composed by the righteousness of who, what and how

its persons and relationships are in the terms of common peace. True righteousness is being the whole of who, what and how one is *to be* in uncommon wholeness. Common peace is not the wholeness that Paul made imperative to solely determine the church from inner out (Col 3:15) in uncommon likeness of the whole righteousness of the Trinity (Eph 4:24). Only the uncommon wholeness of Christ distinguishes Jesus' church family (Jn 14:27, cf. 16:33) as the Trinity's uncommon temple (Eph 2:14-22), and thereby composes the church family to be differentiated acutely from common peace (clean-cut by Christ's sword, Mt 10:34-38). Moreover, his uncommon wholeness exposes the simulation and illusion basic to common peace, and thus causes its division for its real fragmentary condition of persons and relationships to be revealed in its existing reality (Lk 12:51-53). Contrary to common peace, uncommon wholeness 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—which, for example, is in strong contrast to any irenic practice of common peace. As enacted by Christ, this conjoint fight is for the primacy of persons and relationships in their wholeness of ontology and function and against their fragmentation (often subtle to recognize) to anything less and any substitutes in reduced ontology and function. The influence of reductionism becomes more evident when discipleship in the church is practiced, that is, assuming it is practiced.

The primary motivation underlying the discipleship of many is the pursuit of self-determination (even unknowingly or inadvertently); and this implicit condition is difficult to recognize since it is constructed by epistemological illusion (e.g. in Bible study, Jn 5:39) and ontological simulation (e.g. in worship, Mt 15:8-9, in serving others, prayer and spiritual disciplines, Mt 6:1-16). Moreover, the self-orientation of such practice is an existing reality even in collective-oriented contexts, the condition of which should not be considered to exist only in the Western world. Basic human function in self-oriented autonomy, determination and justification are what Jesus confronted in his definitive discourse on discipleship (the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5-7).

Therefore, self-determination is engaged by all persons, peoples and nations, and underlies the discipleship of many Christians, notably as engaged both in church and academy. What we need to understand in its function and recognize in our practice is that self-determination is consequential for human ontology and function in two primary, and unavoidable, ways:

1. It demands a reduction of the person from inner out to outer in that fragments one's ontology and function to be defined by the parts of what one does and has primarily from outer in, measured by those distinctions; this fragmentation is necessary because such determination is unable to be composed from inner out merely by one's unembellished person without any of these outer-in distinctions. Jesus exposed the reductionism in self-determination conclusively in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6).
2. Self-determination also demands a comparative process of persons in their distinctions in order to determine one's value, worth or standing (better or less) always measured in relation to others (likely with a deficit model) and never in isolation with oneself, thereby rendering those relations to implicit, or even

> explicit, competitive relationships that also define others from outer in measured by their distinctions, even with implied competition in church and the academy. Once again, this kind of engagement in relationships is necessary, even if knowingly dissatisfying or even hurtful, because such comparative-competitive engagement in self-determination is unable to engage others in deeper relationship without becoming vulnerable to the inner out that would expose their person without distinctions and likely preclude their competitive standing in this comparative scale (cf. disciples' relationships with each other, Lk 9:46; 22:24). Paul exposed these competitive and fragmenting relationships that reduced the ontology and function of the church and its persons and relationships together at Corinth (1 Cor 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12).

For any success in self-determination for the person and the church, the need to control the results is critical. This control necessitates a shift to the secondary and away from the primacy of reciprocal relational involvement in family love, the vulnerableness of which goes deeper than what one can control. This focus on the secondary makes the person and the church susceptible to reductionism, rendering their results to the shape of common ontology and function from human context. In his struggles, Peter eventually shifted from the secondary to the primary for the whole ontology and function of the church (cf. 1 Pet 1:22-23; 2:9-10). Similarly, the church has struggled with the secondary throughout church history in its attempts to establish its ontology and function, consequently forming merely ecclesial or missional identities rather than its essential ontological identity *to be* distinguished the whole and uncommon church in the common fragmented world—the ontological identity in uncommon wholeness made conclusive for the church by Jesus in his family prayer.

In further discourse in relational language about the trinitarian relational process of family love in reciprocal relationship for the person and persons together as his family, Jesus used the metaphor of the vine and the branches (Jn 15:1-8). The metaphor neither signifies a static state nor describes merely an organic condition, but only the relational context and process of the Trinity's *agape* involvement as family together. "To abide or remain" (*meno*, 15:4-7) involves the dynamic process of reciprocal relationship together, with its reciprocating contextualization and triangulation to be whole, live whole and make whole in the human context (not be shaped by it)—the fruit of discipleship. This metaphor does not define an ontological union with the Trinity, or this union would be the deification of persons in an ontology and function that goes beyond the image and likeness of the Trinity to encompass the ontology and function distinguishing the Trinity exclusively. Nor should this metaphor be considered the structural arrangement for the Trinity's family; this structure would shift the church family to a more unilateral relationship in contrast and conflict with the relational imperative requiring the primacy of reciprocal relationship together in *agape* family involvement—the reciprocal response to the Trinity's relational terms that Jesus further defines in this context (15:9-11). The lenses of both the ontological union and the structural arrangement (or variations) of Jesus' metaphor narrow down his relational language to secondary interpretations that do not determine church ontology and function in the primacy of the primary. Even with good intentions, the results emerging from such lenses are limited to a church's self-determination over the relational outcome unfolding from this reciprocating trinitarian

relational process of family love: the Father's *agape* relational involvement with the Son, who extends this *agape* family involvement with us *to be* the Trinity's whole and uncommon family, who extend *agape* family involvement with each other and the world. This essential relational outcome constitutes the trinitarian church family in uncommon wholeness with its persons whole together in intimate equalized relationships

Further distinguishing what the psalmist illuminated (Ps 85:10), only uncommon wholeness kisses righteousness in order for who, what and how the church and its persons and relationships are *to be* from inner out in their primacy of wholeness, and thus to *live* their primacy integrally with justice by the faithful relational involvement of family love (Ps 89:14)—singing with the psalmist and dancing with Jesus and Paul. Therefore, the trinitarian church family of the Son, the Father and the Spirit emerges and unfolds only *in* the qualitative relational significance of uncommon wholeness in uncommon likeness, *with* its uncommon relational process of family love extended *by* its whole relational purpose *for* its uncommon relational outcome distinguishing persons and relationships together in wholeness as the whole-ly Trinity's church family.

In Paul's conjoint fight of Christ's uncommon wholeness, he illuminated the relational significance of uncommon wholeness 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. For Paul, this uncommon wholeness is imperative as the church's only determinant from inner out (Col 3:15), and therefore needs to compose the church's theology and practice today both in the fight for this primacy of persons and relationships and against their reduction in any way—the subtle reductions of which have eluded our understanding and fogged our perception, thus sustaining Jesus' weeping. Without uncommon wholeness, the essential truth and reality of the trinitarian church family does not emerge and unfold, even though simulations of the church body of Christ may exist today or have in the past.

As Paul made imperative for the church, uncommon wholeness is clearly distinguished for the church to understand and account for in its theology and practice. The Trinity used by the church must by its nature be constituted in uncommon wholeness, in order that the church and its persons and relationships it gets are in essential likeness integrally to (1) the whole of the *person*-al Trinity (not fragmented in a tritheism), and to (2) the uncommon of the inter-*person*-al Trinity (not reduced to modalism commonly performing the function of their roles and titles).

Comparative Relations, Power Relations, or Whole-ly Relationships

As noted already, Jesus' own disciples argued among themselves about "which of them would be the greatest" (Lk 9:46, NIV). "Be" is expressed in the Greek optative mood that expresses only a possibility or a wish rather than a probability, and comes with a high degree of uncertainty or contingency. The contingency becomes apparent as the disciples continued to debate about "which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest" (Lk 22:24). To be considered (*dokeo*) the greatest—or at least better than the others—is not a self-ascribed label but what emerges from a comparative process that measures persons on a common scale based on the parts of what persons do and have. The achievements and resources a disciple has, then, will determine one's position on the

scale, and only the disciple in the highest position will meet the contingency to be regarded as the greatest (or at least better than the others) in this comparative system.

The unavoidable comparative relations demonstrated by the disciples are composed from a reduced theological anthropology that defines persons by the outer-in parts of what they do and have; and such relations commonly are competitive, implicitly if not explicitly. The fragmentation into parts signifies persons in reduced ontology and function, which underlies the basis for comparative relations and its composition—under which lies the critical determination our theological anthropology has. From the beginning, persons in reduced ontology and function were engaged in comparative relations: "you will be like God, knowing good and evil," and they compared each other "and they knew that they were naked" and thus different from outer in. When persons are relegated to their parts for their ontology and function, *distinctions* are made about them and the comparison of those distinctions both defines those persons as better or less and determines the relations between them. The relations between them based on their distinctions, regarded as better or less, require comparable distinctions; that is, this means that stratified relations (formalized into systems of inequality) have to be constructed to be compatible with the comparative process of those distinctions. This evolves only from human construction because God "made no distinctions," (*diakrino*, to separate, treat differently and thus to discriminate, Acts 15:9). This composes the default condition of all persons and relationships, which is an existing condition even among the followers of Jesus.

The deficit condition and its mode are critical for the church and its persons and relationships to understand and account for in their practice. When our person and relationships are skewed to the outer in, we become self-conscious of our 'self' mainly in our distinctions. Self-consciousness makes us very susceptible to our default condition and mode to determine our self within the limits and constraints of self-determinism and by its relational consequences. Certainly self-consciousness is a reality of life and the default condition is a fact of life, but whether we fall into our default mode depends on remaining skewed to the secondary outer in or making the essential shift to the primary inner out.

Jesus understood the dynamics of the comparative process engaged by the disciples and the relational consequences of comparative relations; note also the comparative relations of the temple leaders and the relational consequence on those they considered less, and how Jesus responded to them (Mt 21:15-16). So, his first response to his disciples was to interject a little child for their comparison—who surely couldn't measure up to the stature of the disciples—and then on this incompatible basis he decomposed comparative relations: "Whoever welcomes [*dechomai*, receives and accepts with respect] this *little person* in my *terms* welcomes, *receives and accepts* me *on the same basis*…for the least among all of you *in comparative terms* is the greatest *in whole relational terms*" (Lk 9:47-48). The relational significance of Jesus' response is clear:

> The comparative process is incongruent with the uncommon wholeness constituting the trinitarian church family in uncommon likeness of the Trinity, and human distinctions have no standing of better or less for the persons belonging to the church family, nor do such distinctions differentiate some persons to be higher in the church and others lower to not be distinguished; therefore, comparative relations (however

stratified) are incompatible for the church's relationships composed by persons in their primacy of wholeness, the primacy of which is incongruent with any narrowing down of their ontology and function.

The reality Jesus illuminates for his followers is that anything less and any substitutes narrow down the church and its persons and relationships from their primacy of wholeness to a fragmented condition from outer in of reduced ontology and function—all of which emerge from a reduced theological anthropology (as the disciples had) that has been shaped by the limits and constraints common to the human context, composing the human condition.

Persons, peoples and nations create human distinctions, not God, and they construct the stratified relations and systems necessary to maintain those distinctions in their comparative inequality—not an inherent inequality, though some make that assumption to justify discrimination. Like the disciples, the church and its persons and relationships have intentionally or inadvertently reflected, reinforced and sustained the comparative relations prevailing in all human contexts. This existing reality has not been understood by the church as the unalterable norm of human contextualization, and thus the church has shaped the gospel increasingly according to the limits and constraints of that particular contextualization. The shaping reality for all human persons and relationships is that to be regarded as 'better' (or best, greatest) is enviable but to be considered as 'less' is a burden. Those 'less' must bear the limits and constraints of being measured by a "higher" template of standards for conformity imposed by those 'better', and this explicit or implicit template composes a deficit model that subjects those 'less' to a deficit condition unable to regain 'more', much less to be cancelled.

A deficit model is an inescapable burden for those *different*, for example, when the standard of measurement is based on the color white or the gender male. How do persons, peoples and nations of color change their distinction and overcome their deficit condition in comparative relations with whites? How do females, even among those persons, peoples and nations of color, change their humanly perceived distinction and overcome their deficit condition in comparative relations with males? Moreover, it is crucial to understand that the condition of those who employ a deficit model are also rendered to a deficit condition, since this comparative process is engaged and enacted by those in reduced ontology and function—a deficit not merely from outer in (intrinsic to a deficit model) but in the critical condition of inner out, the prevailing deficit condition for all humanity.

The disciples didn't learn from Jesus' first response to them. So, they continued to engage the comparative process in their relations, notably imposing a deficit model on Mary (Martha's sister) when she responded to Jesus' whole person in the depth of intimate relational involvement by the primary inner out of his person (Mt 26:6-13). Since the disciples still operated primarily from the secondary outer in without the primacy of persons and relationships, they considered Mary's action insignificant on their comparative scale and thereby *less*. Whether gender influenced their distinction of Mary is not apparent but their fragmentation of persons (including Jesus) into secondary parts (even engaging justice for the poor) over the primacy of persons and relationships in wholeness is unmistakable. And they lacked the qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness to recognize their practice and to distinguish Mary's. On this fragmentary

basis, they also reduced the whole gospel of its qualitative relational significance, which, in contrast, Jesus said that Mary highlights "wherever this gospel *of wholeness* is proclaimed in the whole world." Thus, Jesus not only affirmed Mary's person without distinctions, he also confirmed the qualitative relational significance of the gospel in the uncommon peace of wholeness and justice only with the whole of righteousness to distinguish unequivocally his family with the primacy of persons and relationships in whole ontology and function.

If bearing a deficit condition cannot be overcome with self-determination in the process of comparative and competitive relations, it will either have to be changed or redeemed. One common recourse for changing this condition is to shift to power relations. Power relations, however, is also the means used by those in upper positions on the comparative scale to maintain a superior distinction over those considered inferior. Colonialism, for example, unfolded with power relations in order to impose a deficit model on persons, peoples and nations of different distinction to relegate them to less and keep them in a deficit condition. Those less could use power relations to change their position or to even reverse positions with those regarded as superior, as witnessed in South Africa. Yet, what is common to both sides using power relations is that they incorporate a conflict model with the deficit model, therefore which doesn't change comparative relations but only changes its stratified arrangement under that sweeping assumption (assumed from the beginning) they are not reduced. A conflict model assumes a dialectic that theorizes a synthesis for ideal equalized relations, but this has not materialized in its use. Power relations could be used to facilitate the conflict needed for change—which should not be confused with Jesus' sword and his redeeming process—but the resulting change at best can only bring a common peace lacking wholeness, which then at most only rearranges comparative relations with distinctions in a deficit condition still existing. In other words, inequality remains, although the form may have changed.

This has been a common consequence of the conflicts from communist power relations in the global South or with the expansion of the Soviet Union and subsequent Balkanization, and that emerged from the conflicts by the power relations of postcolonial nations such as India. The conflict from the power relations of American exceptionalism in building empire has consistently imposed a deficit model of democracy on global contexts for their conformity to American superiority; and similar power relations are used within its homeland borders to maintain its stratified system with a deficit condition for many of its own citizens in this presumed democracy. Race relations, for example, in the U.S. have grown in conflict during this recent period, reflecting a deficit condition of inequality still existing in spite of the civil rights movement—even though many still have the assumption they are not reduced. The growing conflict could be and is engaged increasingly with power relations, since historically justice without righteousness and common peace without wholeness have not had the relational significance to bring the depth of change necessary for the relational outcome of the primacy of persons with equality without being relegated to secondary distinctions. Moreover, gender inequality has been further surfacing in business and academic contexts in the U.S., notably in terms of opportunity, income and stature. This still-existing inequality reflects the unyielding stratification and power of its comparative relations, in spite of the feminist movement that has yet to render gender distinction secondary—which ironically, yet not

surprisingly, remains an existing distinction also among African Americans in the civil rights movement.

What emerges from all this is the fact that power relations have not resulted in the change needed to remove the primacy given to human distinctions and for overcoming deficit conditions in comparative relations. The use of a conflict model has been a false hope and its related theory has been a false outcome that lacks the primacy of persons and relationships in wholeness, that is, uncommon wholeness. The shift to power relations only exacerbates comparative relations and further embeds persons in a reduced ontology and relations in fragmented function, yet power relations remain as the prevailing means for change—or to prevent change and enforce conformity. This prevailing reality exposes the default condition and mode of all persons, peoples and nations and their common efforts to determine themselves, which pervade the church also. Clearly, Jesus understood these dynamics and their consequences for his disciples and such practice in his family. And he saw this pattern developing in his disciples and anticipated this emerging in the church and its persons and relationships, notably starting with church leaders.

When Jesus responded to his disciples' continued debate of having the greatest distinction, he added to his first response the use of power relations (Lk 22:25-30). Jesus highlighted leaders who "lord it over them; and those in authority *and power* over them are called benefactors." Power relations are obvious when they "lord it over" persons but subtle when exercised as benefaction because of its implied quid pro quo; and this becomes even subtler when paternalism is used, for example, to help others. Jesus was critical of Greco-Roman benefactors who used their resources to gain power over (*exousiazo*) persons, presumably under the guise to do good (the common good without wholeness). In whatever way power relations are exercised and commonly exist, Jesus made it unequivocal that they are contrary to the uncommon relational nature of his kingdom-family, and are in conflict with the uncommon relational significance of how he functions without the distinctions warranted for his superior position—the pivotal issue between him and Peter that emerged at his footwashing.

Ironically, in a significant way that may seem unorthodox yet is uncommon, Jesus' whole person from inner out without his outer-in distinctions is more apparent in his footwashing than on the cross. That is, the common perception of Jesus on the cross focuses on the distinctions of what he did in sacrifice as the Savior, Redeemer and Messiah, and less on his whole person embodied and enacted in intimate relationship together in wholeness with the Father—and his immeasurable pain of the mystery for them 'to be apart'. Jesus, the Teacher and Master, would not allow Peter to see him in his superior distinctions or to reduce him to an act of service, but only his whole person vulnerably involved in intimate equalized relationship together. And those who follow him on his whole relational terms composing trinitarian discipleship must be vulnerably involved without such distinctions "so that you may *participate in and partake of* my *uncommon family* and *function with congruence just as I function to be relationally involved in justice with whole righteousness—not from relational distance on a throne—for the uncommon wholeness of the Trinity's whole and uncommon family*" (Lk 22:30).

Jesus' response anticipated what would compose the church today. He directed his response in particular to church leaders, their discipleship and their theological anthropology underlying their theology and practice, in order for their ontology and function to be whole. The uncommon wholeness of his church family in uncommon

likeness of the Trinity cannot be composed with comparative relations or subtly by power relations. The pattern of such common relations must be paid attention to by the contemporary church and its persons and relationships in order to reciprocally respond to Jesus congruent in reciprocal likeness for the irreducible and nonnegotiable primacy of persons and relationships in the wholeness of their ontology and function as the trinitarian church family of the Trinity's uncommon temple, without the fragmentation of persons and barriers of relationships in distinctions. Only uncommon relations in whole relational terms can address what underlies human distinctions and their deficit condition. The issue is less about change and more importantly requires redemption. Human relations, including in the church, need to be redeemed from the ontology and function fragmented by distinctions imposed on them, so that they can emerge with the following: ontology and function that have been transformed from inner out for the transformed relationships together both vulnerably intimate without the veil of distinctions and thus equalized without the barriers of 'better or less', thus without stratified relationships and free from a deficit condition. Therefore, only these whole-ly, noncomparative and unstratified, relationships differentiate the trinitarian church family *to be* distinguished in the uncommon wholeness of all its persons in all its relationships together with their primacy in wholeness. This uncommon relational outcome emerges only from the trinitarian gospel of wholeness to distinguish the church family unfolding in trinitarian discipleship.

Just as Jesus used his sword of uncommon wholeness and also cleaned out his house of commonization, the uncommon wholeness of his church family redeems persons and relationships from their fragmentation in reduced ontology and function to the uncommon wholeness of the whole-ly Trinity. And nothing less and no substitutes for whole-ly (i.e. whole plus holy) relationships have the qualitative relational significance to be involved in the uncommon trinitarian relational process of family love necessary to compose the uncommon relationships together that have the whole and uncommon relational outcome distinguished only by the new-order church family of the whole-ly Trinity—none of which and whom can be narrowed down to common terms, no matter how correct the doctrinal orthodoxy. It is imperative, then, for the church to be cleaned out and redeemed from its distinctions, comparative and power relations, because these reduce its persons and fragment its relationships and subject them to the binding limits and enslaving constraints of reduced ontology and function. This redemptive change is required for the uncommon wholeness of Christ to be the only determinant for the heart of the church—the primacy of its persons and relationships together in wholeness (as Paul keeps making imperative for the church, Col 3:15).

The whole-ly relationships of uncommon wholeness are not an ideal to hope for in the future 'not yet'. Nor are they an unrealistic goal too impractical to work for today 'already'. The essential reality inescapably facing all of us is that the only solution significant for the comparative relations of human distinctions, and inevitable power relations and deficit condition, is their redemption. Without the essential reality of redemptive change, neither the *old* dies nor the *new* rises, and thus we remain in the status quo of our default condition and mode (cf. Rom 12:2). The essential truth undeniably facing all of us in the global church is that only the church distinguished by the whole-ly relationships of uncommon wholeness has the qualitative relational significance *to be* the redeeming good news for all persons and relationships fragmented

in reduced ontology and function. Until the church embodies this essential truth in its own persons and relationships, the church has no substantive basis to be of qualitative relational significance to enact this essential reality in the human condition needing redemption—regardless if its service and resources are the greatest.

In anticipation of the church needing first and foremost to clean out its own house so that it will unfold in the whole-ly relationships of uncommon wholeness for all persons, peoples and nations, Jesus established this priority for his family:

> Before "you *address* the *fragmentation* in *others*" you need to "*address* the *fragmentation* in your own *theology and practice.* How can you say to *others*, 'Let me *help you* out of your *reductionism*,' while *reductionism continues* in your own *life*? *Don't be a role-player* [*hypokrites*], first *redeem* your own life *from reductionism*, and then you will *be* clearly *distinguished* to *help redeem others' lives from reductionism*" (Mt 7:3-5).

The need for redemptive change in the church is essential *to be* new, whole and uncommon; and there is no substitute for redemptive change that the church can use to get this relational outcome—which Jesus also made definitive in anticipation of our latitude in theology and practice.

The Unlikely New, Uncommon, Whole Relational Order of the Church

As the church is redeemed from its own reductionism, its persons and relationships conjointly are reconciled in transformed relationships together that by their uncommon nature are integrally equalized and intimate. The transformed church unfolds in uncommon wholeness with its persons and relationships reconciled in uncommon likeness of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity in order to constitute the *new* essential for the whole of life (as Paul illuminated for the church, 2 Cor 5:16-20; Eph 2:14-18).

In unlikely terms, then, the essential relational outcome unfolding unavoidably from the intimate equalizer church is the new relational order composing this church with its persons and relationships. This new relational order is certainly uncommon, so a clarifying note would be helpful to understand the depth distinguishing this whole relational order. As the new-order trinitarian church family, 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 remains vital (1 Cor 12:12-31), just as synergism is essential to the inter-*person*-al Trinity. 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 in what persons do and the resources they have are basic to the body of Christ, yet what value is ascribed to that diversity could be consequential. 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 functional diversity in the church is important for the church's interdependent synergism, but each difference is secondary from outer in and must be integrated into the primary of the whole church

from inner out, that is, the vulnerable intimate church in uncommon wholeness and uncommon equality (Eph 4:11-13,16, cf. Col 2:19). When differences become the primary focus, even inadvertently, they subtly are seen with distinctions that set into motion the comparative process with its relational consequences, which persons and relationships with those distinctions have to bear—the consequences Jesus saw in the temple before he reconstituted it.

The defining line between diversity and distinctions has disappeared in most church theology and practice today (including the academy's), 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 whole-ly distinguished Trinity. As Paul made definitive Jesus' salvific work for the church (as in Eph 2:11-22), Jesus enacted the good news in order to compose the uncommon equality of his church family at the heart of its persons and relationships in whole ontology and function, and therefore unequivocally transformed them (1) to be redeemed from human distinctions and their deficit condition and (2) to be reconciled to the new relational order in uncommon transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate in their innermost, and thereby congruent in uncommon likeness with the wholeness of the Trinity. *Redemptive* re*conciliation* is not optional but essential to the uncommon wholeness 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, which is nonnegotiable for the gospel to compose this essential relational outcome.

In June, 2015, nine African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, were murdered at church during their weekly Bible study together by a white young adult proclaiming racial superiority. This macroaggression shocked many Christians and churches in the U.S. and evoked renewed calls for racial justice. Mark Labberton, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, responded in part: "Until our lives [including at Fuller] reflect a gospel powerful enough to eradicate roots of racism and violence, the faith we proclaim will be a marginalized impertinence."[2]

Indeed, the essential truth of the whole gospel must first be the essential reality of the church and its persons and relationships, including the academy and other Christian organizations. Yet, the issues of justice and reconciliation intrinsic to the gospel must go beyond ethical-moral terms and reach deep into the heart of persons and relationships in their ontology and function. This necessitates unavoidably getting past the secondary into this primacy and requires the redemptive change of our theological anthropology. If we want justice with whole righteousness, then the gospel of the uncommon wholeness of Christ and integrally its uncommon equality also require this essential reality in the church: the new, uncommon and whole relational order for the church *to be* distinguished as the new creation family not just of Christ but the Trinity, whereby its gospel will have the qualitative relational significance for all persons, peoples, nations and their relationships to be made whole in their innermost—that is, in their primacy inner out

[2] Quoted from "Out of Anguish, We Commit to Change," posted 6/22/2015, http://fuller.edu/offices/President/From-the-President/2015-Posts.

without the veil of distinctions and the barriers to intimate equalized relationships together.

Yet, we have to understand the often subtle reality that human distinctions are substitutes for the innermost of humanity, substitutes which fragment human life at the heart of persons and relationships in their ontology and function. This is the default condition and mode for all humanity, which Christians also engage when not in whole ontology and function. These substitutes also serve as subtle simulations and illusions of ontology and function assumed to be in their primary condition, when in fact and essential reality they only compose in secondary terms the reduced ontology and function for persons and relationships. Race-ethnic relations, for example, cannot be expected to be resolved beyond a simulation or illusion from common peace, as long as those distinctions are maintained preventing getting to the heart of the problem. The most that emerges amounts to virtual reality. The consequences of human distinctions, as discussed above, emerge along the spectrum of the human condition in its common ontology and function, with inequality the defining consequence for all persons in relationships 'to be apart'—whether individual, collective, institutional, structural or systemic. Inequality in race-ethnic relations exists because of these distinctions, thus equality cannot be achieved with these distinctions. The solution is not to be colorblind but to address what such distinctions signify, define and determine for human life.

What underlies all human distinctions and their consequences of inequality at all levels, which they all have in common in the innermost, is the inescapable fragmentary condition of reduced ontology and function. There is no substitute, simulation or illusion that can alter this condition and therefore resolve the existing inequality of persons, peoples, nations and their relationships. Accordingly, and thus not surprisingly, we have been recently witnessing, if not experiencing, the increasing relational consequences of inequality around the globe (mainly from macroaggressions), and notably in recent days between U.S. college students (primarily with microaggressions) and in U.S. cities between the minority population and law enforcement. Yet, the global church must not be misled in its understanding and misguided in its response. What precipitates conflict relations is comparative relations stratified by human distinctions. Whether these distinctions are self-imposed or imposed on others, or both, a deficit condition results, which may require power relations to maintain conformity or to try to change. At the center of all this fragmentation of persons and relationships is the defining practice of human distinctions; and at the heart of human distinctions are fragmented persons and relationships in reduced ontology and function needing redemptive reconciliation for transformed relationships together—the relationships composed only by both persons being equalized without distinctions and thus vulnerably involved intimately from the heart of the whole person. We must no longer be misguided to work for equality while distinctions are still used, which at best can only result in a common equality that lacks wholeness at the heart of persons and relationships. The distinctions of persons we use will be the equality in their relationships we get.

The gospel of wholeness that Jesus vulnerably enacted only in whole relational terms centered on the innermost of the child-person, who differentiated the heart of the person from inner out and, thus, who lived neither by the bias of human distinctions nor by a naïve lack of discernment. Jesus declared with excitement that the key to receiving and understanding God's revelation is the vulnerable openness of the child-person, who

is not predisposed by the limits and constraints of the epistemic bias (or trained incapacity) of those regarded as "wise and learned" (Lk 10:21). Also, Jesus disclosed in these relational terms that those who compose his family are distinguished child-persons, who have been redeemed from distinctions and thus humbly live at the heart of who, what and how they are without embellishment (Mt 18:1-4), thereby distinguishing their wholeness that can be counted on *to be* in relationships together. Jesus further differentiated that the heart of those child-persons compose the heart of worship and its qualitative relational significance, about which others with distinctions regarded themselves in comparison as having better practice and knowledgeable resources (Mt 21:15-16). Then, Jesus addressed his disciples' concern for distinctions "as the greatest" and their need for redemptive change as church leaders—leadership differentiated clearly from the greatest distinctions only by the child-person signified "like the youngest" (new, *neos*, Lk 22:24-26).

By centering on the child-person, however, Jesus did not reverse the relational order of his church family, which servant discipleship and leadership commonly imply in narrow referential terms of what to do (e.g. misinterpreting Jesus' footwashing). In reality, Jesus composed the new (*neos*) relational order for his church family of those new persons redeemed from distinctions and re-*new*ed (*anakainoo*) to the wholeness of Christ (Col 3:10-11). The new persons in wholeness are the only church leaders who can "equip [*katartizo*, restore, put in new order and make complete] *the persons and relationships of the church in its essential relational purpose and function*, for building up the *family* of Christ, until all of us come to the *whole relationship together* of our faith *distinguished by the whole Word*, to full maturity *on the basis of the only* measure of the fullness, *completeness, wholeness* [*pleroma*] of Christ" (Eph 4:12-13). This uncommon relational process and outcome in whole relational terms cannot emerge and unfold with, from and by distinctions, notably the greatest of Jesus' followers in the church.

Paul is clear about "those who commend themselves *by the comparative process*. But when they measure themselves *by their distinctions*, and compare themselves with one another *based on their distinctions*, they do not understand" (*syniemi*, 2 Cor 10:12). That is, those who use, reinforce and sustain distinctions do not put together all of the relational words of the Word to have the whole understanding (*synesis* from the process and outcome of *syniemi*) of the whole gospel and its essential relational outcome of uncommon wholeness for persons and relationships together from their innermost to their outermost. The *syniemi* that Paul helps us to have involves the unbridgeable gap between conforming to distinctions from outer in and being transformed from distinctions in the innermost to the outermost.

Child-persons re-*new*ed without distinctions at the heart of their ontology and function, and their transformed relationships together in which they are integrally involved with both equality and intimacy, are who and what the new, uncommon, whole relational order of the church involves, and how it functions. By the essential reality of this relational order of its persons and relationships, the church is distinguished as transformed in its innermost with the uncommon wholeness of the intimate equalizer. Therefore, on only this uncommon relational basis and essential reality, the church has the qualitative relational significance to proclaim the gospel of uncommon wholeness with uncommon equality for the fragmentation and inequality of all persons, peoples, nations and their relationships in the pluralistic, globalizing world, and to call for justice

with whole righteousness and work for the uncommon good with nothing less than wholeness. This is the essential that composes the model of Micah 6:8 in the full significance required by the Trinity. Moreover, this uncommon relational process of the distinguished relational order of uncommon relationships together is not the naïve ideal of a child but rather the essential reality of child-persons—who are not defined and determined by the human context's commonization and thus in virtual reality—vulnerably living from the primary inner out of their heart the essential truth of Christ's gospel of uncommon wholeness in the good news of uncommon equality.

The life of Jesus before the cross embodied and enacted the uncommon wholeness of 'Jesus as the intimate equalizer'. In his death and resurrection, Jesus embodies and enacts with the palpable Word the new creation of persons and relationships from inner out in order to embody and enact the uncommon wholeness of 'the church as intimate equalizer' for all the ages of persons, the diversity of all peoples and the differences of all nations—enacting congruently in uncommon likeness "just as I am and have been sent." Along with Paul, the palpable Word inquires, "Where are you in your ontology and function—in whose likeness?" and "What are you doing here *to be* the church in uncommon wholeness as intimate equalizer?"—or do you have a better gospel and a greater purpose and function to distinguish the church of likeness?

The Church Called and Sent *to be* Uncommon

All that Jesus has enacted and has been saying (including from Paul) is "difficult teaching, who can accept it?" One way to handle what is difficult is to make it more convenient. Humans have long-desired convenience, and we have progressed in determining this especially with technological development. Let's face it, convenience requires less work and frees us for other pursuits. It also requires less involvement by our person, resulting progressively in less face-to-face relational connection and thus less difficult involvement. In this common way, convenience has become a subtle substitute for our persons and relationships that simply makes what's difficult easier. This common process also reduces persons and relationships from the wholeness God created, and reduces their church from the wholeness of the Trinity. This should not surprise us because all that Jesus enacted and said is less about being difficult but is at the heart of being unequivocally *uncommon*.

With the improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path, the face of the Trinity emerges in full profile *to be* in uncommon presence and whole involvement. The uncommon Son, who "does not belong to the *common*," called the trinitarian church family *to be* uncommon (Jn 17:14-17), and only on this essential basis "I have sent *our trinitarian church family* into the world *to be uncommon*"—"*in the uncommon wholeness* just as [*kathos*, in full congruence] you, Father, have sent me into the world" (17:18). This is the integral calling and commission for the church of likeness (congruence) that Jesus made definitive for the trinitarian church family—the relational terms of which composing his prayer are irreducible and nonnegotiable. And congruence in this call and commission has been problematic for the church and its persons and relationships, largely because it is perceived (if at all) as difficult or ignored perhaps as inconvenient to what they want.

Peter confessed "you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:69) contrary to those followers who decided "*Your* teaching is *uncommon*; who can accept it?" (6:60). Yet, ironically Peter's confession was compatible with the confession of a man with an unclean spirit who cried out in the synagogue "I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (Mk 1:24). "Holy and awesome is his name" (Ps 111:9) "for the LORD our God is holy" (Ps 99:9)—that is to say, is uncommon. And in contrast and conflict with those who have commonized their theology and practice (Isa 29:13; Mk 7:5-9), those uncommon "will *keep uncommon* my name; they will *distinguish uncommon* the Holy One" (Isa 29:23). The uncommon ones (churches, persons, relationships) are those who have entered the Most Uncommon Place with the Uncommon One (as in Heb 10:19-25) to reconstitute the church as the Trinity's uncommon temple and tear away the veil of their persons and relationships *to be* in uncommon wholeness in full congruence with the uncommon likeness of the whole-ly Trinity. These are the uncommon ones who fulfill the call and commission by the Uncommon One *to be* the whole of the uncommon trinitarian church family—fulfill with nothing less difficult and no substitutes of convenience from the common.

Therefore, the essential reality is that the church and all its persons and relationships are uncommon, distinguished from the common composing the world—in full congruence just as the Son was sent by the Father to embody and enact, and in uncommon likeness to call and send forth their church family in uncommon wholeness. The new creation church family, composed in reciprocal likeness of the new covenant with its persons and relationships together, are true (in righteousness) to the whole of who, what and how they are when they are *to be* in uncommon likeness of the Trinity. This is 'the church of full congruence' that Paul made conclusive in contrast and conflict with any common likeness (Eph 4:20-24). Nothing less and no substitutes can constitute or distinguish the uncommon whole of who, what and how they are because anything less and any substitutes are categorically common in unlikeness of the Holy Trinity integrally *person*-al and inter-*person*-al.

The Son longs to gather together the trinitarian church family with its persons and relationships in wholeness, but churches and their persons and relationships have to be willing *to be* uncommon just as he embodied and enacted in family love (Lk 13:34). This is the whole and uncommon who, what and how the Son prayed to the Father to constitute their church family *to be* the Trinity's uncommon dwelling. Churches with their persons and relationships may not perceive themselves to be incompatible with the Son and the Father; but the essential issue is *to be congruent* as the church of likeness with the whole and uncommon Trinity—hereby distinguishing **the church of full congruence** both from all the common of the world and for the common human condition in the world also *to be* in uncommon wholeness. Like the question essential about the Trinity, the dilemma appears to pervade the church in its theology and practice: *to be* or *not to be*.

Indeed, *to be* in the present of the already and the future of the not yet, this highlight unfolds: "Uncommon, uncommon, uncommon is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (Rev 4:8, NIV); and already and not yet, "I saw the

Uncommon City, the new Jerusalem…the dwelling of *the Trinity* is with *the uncommon in uncommon likeness together*…I did not see a temple in the city because *the Trinity and the trinitarian family* are its *uncommon* temple" (Rev 21:2-3,22, NIV). Amen, so *be* the church and its persons and relationships!

Chapter 10 The Trinitarian Key for the Whole of Life

Therefore, consider carefully how you listen.
Luke 8:18, NIV

Pay attention *closely* to what you hear *from me*.
Mark 4:24

The church in Sardis must have been shocked when challenged to "Wake up!" because their highly-regarded life was found not *to be* "whole [complete, *pleroo*] in the *perceptual-interpretive framework and lens* of *the Trinity*" (Rev 3:1-2). Their condition should not surprise us since it commonly exists today in church theology and practice—leaving its persons and relationships needing, searching and struggling for wholeness.

The search for wholeness in life and what the whole of life is continues to be an elusive pursuit in the entire human context, as well as in theology and practice. The fragmentary results of this diversely engaged process (even in science) have evaded a definitive answer to the question of Goethe's Faust: "What holds together the universe in the innermost?" With the sum of knowledge (even theological) accumulated at this stage of life, one would reasonably assume that the *whole* would emerge or at least be apparent by now. Perhaps Albert Einstein clarifies and corrects the pursuit of the whole of life, notably in theology and practice, by the simplicity and thus genius of his approach "to regard old questions from a new angle."

A new angle indeed, but the problem in searching for wholeness is complicated by what Jesus made clearly evident:

> One half of the problem is "what would bring you *wholeness*…is hidden from your eyes" (Lk 19:42, NIV); the other half of the problem revealed, as Jesus longed for persons and relationships to have their need *to be* whole fulfilled together, is that fact that "you were not willing *to experience this outcome—not what you really wanted*" (Lk 13:34).

In other words, the limits and bias of this problem not only complicate but prevent knowing what the whole of life is and understanding wholeness in life.

Various conversations have taken place in the church and academy about wholeness and being whole. Yet, with the knowledge accumulated and collated, I am not aware of deeper understanding in theology and practice emerging in essential reality from this conversation. Perhaps this calls for a new angle, but one that is not constrained by the problem of our common limits and bias.

Distinguishing the Issue

Bob Dylan, the 2016 Nobel Prize laureate in literature, described in his early poetry the deteriorating human condition in "The Time They Are A-Changin'" and asked how long will it take for persons and peoples to recognize this in "Blowin' in the Wind." He didn't have essential answers at that stage of his life, until later when in a pivotal juncture he decided "Gonna Change My Way of Thinking." His new way of thinking helped him understand the primary issue for all of us: "When You Gonna Wake Up"—"when we gonna wake up, when we gonna make a change." Of course, Dylan's new perspective and lens will continue to change (i.e. deepen) as his new life unfolds further and deeper in wholeness.

Discovering the essential (not virtual) whole of the new creation necessitates by its nature an epistemic field and hermeneutic lens that go beyond what are commonly used—even beyond Einstein's "new angle" to the more that Dylan implies in "Gonna Change My Way of Thinking." This is the distinguishing issue of John 3:3-12 in our theology and the new wine in our practice (Lk 5:33-39). Both of these interactions by Jesus center on the need in our theology and practice to make the fundamental change from the secondary of the quantitative from outer in to the primary of the qualitative from inner out; they thus involve the penetrating issue of the integral change from the fragmentary knowledge in referential terms to the whole understanding of the relational terms composing the new creation. This defining change to the primary inner out of the qualitative and relational expands our epistemic field and opens our hermeneutic lens to behold the whole of life and the wholeness of persons and relationships in the new creation, and thereby *to be* in its essential reality.

The psalmist asked for "discernment [*biyn*] that I may understand" (Ps 119:125, NIV). Accordingly, how we discern will determine our understanding. The psalmist's concern is about right or wrong, true or false (v. 128). This discernment has been commonly distorted by the seductive challenge in self-determination from the beginning to have discernment for "knowing good and evil" (*ra'*, bad, of inferior quality, the opposite of good, Gen 3:5). The distortion of good or bad, true or false, right or wrong—which also happens by narrowing them down to mere ethics in referential terms—occurs when the real issue essential to their understanding is not the basis for defining and determining each of these basic terms in matters of life. The essential difference for each of these sets of terms is based on the difference between 'whole and reduced'. Good, true and right are determined by what is whole, or else they are not essentially good, true and right—only reductions of them, however virtually good, true and right they may seem. Discerning whole or reduced requires understanding wholeness and reductionism, which is neither understood nor recognized under the sweeping yet subtle assumption that our *biyn* has not been reduced—the assumption generated from the beginning.

The inherent issue of good (*tob*) was addressed by the Creator for persons and their relationship "not *to be* apart" from wholeness but *to be* whole in the Creator's likeness (Gen 2:18). When those persons and their relationship together were whole, their *biyn* discerned their wholeness from the primary inner out so that "they were both naked and they felt no shame" (2:25). When their persons and relationship were reduced—in spite of the assumption to the contrary—their *biyn* could only observe from outer in the secondary of their distinction as naked and *not to be* whole (3:6). This difference is

simply indispensable to distinguish the issue at stake here. *Biyn* includes to observe, perceive, pay attention to, heed, all of which we basically depend on our senses to provide. Thus, the *biyn* we use will determine the understanding we get. Human senses, including the function of the brain, are problematic both for what is discerned or perceived and for understanding the whole of these perceptions or observations. Understanding the whole emerges from the process of putting together all the correct pieces in a puzzle in order to understand the whole (the process of *syniemi*), whereby one can claim having whole understanding (*synesis*, as Paul did, Col 2:2).

The limits, and also constraints, of human senses are what Jesus exposed (Mt 13:13-15). By speaking in parables, Jesus essentially is illuminating the new angle and way of thinking needed to regard the old questions of human wholeness. This new angle and thinking integrally provides not partial understanding, skewed by human assumptions and biases, but opens up the perceptual lens (*biyn*) to discern the epistemic field and process needed to integrate what is revealed to understand the whole (*syniemi*) for the whole understanding (*synesis*) of the wholeness of both God and all human life. Even the first disciples were found lacking this *syniemi* because of the limits of their epistemic field and constraints of their hermeneutic lens (or *biyn*, Mk 8:17); and the *syniemi* they didn't engage commonly continues to be lacking today among the followers of Jesus.

One unspoken explanation for this lack implied in the thinking of many Christians today is that the embodied Word is no longer with us; so we are at a disadvantage compared to the opportunities the first disciples had—a comparison implying a deficit condition that limits what we can know and understand without the embodied Word. That would be true in quantitative terms, but then that would narrow down our theology and practice to the realm of physics, which in effect many Christians do. However, and this is the essential reality that our *biyn* has to understand, though the embodied Word is not present, the palpable Word is both vulnerably present and relationally involved to provide the trinitarian key in the *syniemi* necessary for the *synesis* of uncommon wholeness. In essential reality, what unfolded before Jesus' ascension unfolds much further and deeper in post-ascension, despite the facts of the church's life commonly not supporting this reality.

So, at this stage of life for the church and its persons and relationships, does Jesus weep also for his followers who don't know what gives them wholeness? And Bob Dylan also wonders "when we gonna wake up, when we gonna make a change," because we can't discern our condition with understanding "Blowin' in the Wind."

The Trinitarian Key to Wholeness Emerges

The psalmist further understood that "The unfolding of your *relational* words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple" (Ps 119:130). That is, this en*light*ed understanding (in contrast to enlightenment, and contrary to the Enlightenment) is the discernment of child-persons, who are neither limited nor constrained by the assumptions and biases of "the wise and learned," as Jesus highlighted (Lk 10:21). This keeps pointing to the key that apparently often also eludes our learning.

We learn (or at least observe) from the beginning that in human discernment many things (even important ones) engage persons from the outer in—amplified to the present by the technological age. We can also understand (or at least have knowledge of) from the beginning that only one essential *involves* the whole person: when connection is integrally experienced from the inner-out depth of one's person and thereby made with another person(s) on this level of relational connection—which even triggers positive electrical activity in the brain. The whole person connected in relationship together in the wholeness of the participating persons composes what is essential for persons and relationships *to be* in wholeness together. Yet, this wholeness is uncommon to human development from the beginning, in spite of the evolutionary process, or more likely because of the survival of the fittest. Even the valuable advances in neuroscience to understand the human brain do not get to the core, the innermost central to connect the person with one's whole in the primary inner out, and thus is insufficient to connect persons and relationships in wholeness together—no matter how much oxytocin (the so-called love hormone) is triggered by the brain.

The pivotal issue in all this is the use of a common wholeness that does not discern and cannot distinguish the uncommon wholeness essential to God. The use of common wholeness fails to understand what the psalmist illuminated in "righteousness and peace *as wholeness* kiss each other" (Ps 85:10). They kiss because righteousness and wholeness are integral to the whole and uncommon God. God's righteousness is the relational expression that can be counted on in relationship (even legally, *sedaqah*) *to be* the whole of who, what and how God is—constituting the wholeness of the Trinity. The wholeness of the Trinity is the immutable uncommon wholeness that Jesus gives in contrary distinction to variable common wholeness (Jn 14:27). It is nonnegotiable then that uncommon wholeness is what needs to distinguish the church and its persons and relationships in order *to be* whole in uncommon likeness of the Trinity. Only uncommon wholeness integrally involves persons and their relationships in their primary inner out, so *to be* congruent in the essential ontology and function in likeness of the wholeness of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity.

Therefore, the irreplaceable key to any discussion, composition, construction and development of wholeness in all of life (both in the church and in the world) is Trinitarian, only distinguished integrally whole and uncommon. And distinguishing the trinitarian key in relationship-specific terms, who is present and involved to unfold this wholeness to essential relational conclusion, is the person of the Spirit.

The Spirit is associated with God's power and salvific activities, but the primary significance often minimalized is the presence and involvement of the Trinity in relationship together. This primacy involves not only the economy of the Trinity but necessarily includes the Trinity's immanence, the ontology of whom includes the Holy Spirit. How the Spirit is identified and understood defines and determines who and what God is (cf. Num 11:17,25-29; Isa 63:11-14). This is the identity of the triune God who is whole-ly revealed in the incarnation. Yet, the question may be raised, is the function of YHWH's Spirit distinguished more than a function in the Second Testament to define the profile of the Spirit's subject-person? Isaiah 63:10 reveals that the Holy Spirit "grieved" just as Paul made definitive the relational involvement of the Spirit for the wholeness of the church and its persons and relationships (Eph 4:20-30). This affective relational involvement distinguishes the subject-person of the Holy Spirit as well as constitutes the

ontology of the Trinity in the person of the Spirit—the relational ontology of the whole-ly Trinity. Therefore, *who* and *what* is the God present and involved depend on *how* God is. *How* is distinguished in the First Testament yet whole-ly revealed in the Second Testament; and it is the Spirit who determines how the whole-ly Trinity continues *to be* present and involved.

Post-Ascension Wholeness in Trinitarian Theology and Practice

The righteousness expressing the whole who, what and how of the Trinity's presence and involvement post-ascension is constituted mainly by the Spirit, though not solely, as if to fragment the Trinity's wholeness. This is the relational purpose for the relational outcome of wholeness to unfold 'already' and its relational conclusion 'not yet' that Jesus disclosed whole-ly in relational terms. Just prior to his ascension Jesus told his church family "you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5), which was synonymous with being baptized by Jesus (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33). The full, complete significance of this baptism commonly has been lost, ignored or narrowed down. For example, Pentecostals and charismatics narrow down the baptism of the Spirit to limited functions, which they tend to use as distinctions for identifying "better" Christians—making evident Jesus' paradigm, the Spirit you use will be the Christians you get.

For the full significance of the baptism of the Spirit, we have to go back to Jesus, the *pleroma* (fullness, wholeness) of God who sent the Spirit. The full significance of this baptism first emerged when Jesus shook-up the status quo in his exchange with Nicodemus (Jn 3:3-8). To be baptized by the Spirit is *to be* born anew by the Spirit, and this all converges with being baptized into Christ for the old to die and the new to rise up *to be* whole in ontology and function (Rom 6:3-4). Therefore, the Spirit is present and involved for nothing less and no substitutes but to constitute the wholeness of persons and relationships, that is, the uncommon wholeness for the whole of life.

The uncommon, however, is often not clearly distinguished by the church, in spite of many references to the term 'holy' existing in the church. As the holy God—the Holy One, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity—the essential reality of the who, what and how presented in the human context to disclose the face of the Trinity can only be uncommon. Anything less of the uncommon and any substitutes from the common no longer compose the essential reality of the whole and uncommon Trinity, the whole-ly Trinity. The face of the Trinity is uncommon to the realms of physics and metaphysics, and thus uncommon to the entire common human context. It is not surprising, therefore, that the essential reality of the Trinity's face is commonly considered virtual and/or presented in virtual terms; this exists with the exception of the face of Jesus Christ—in whose face happens *to be* the essential reality of the presence and involvement of the *pleroma* of God, the glory of the Trinity (2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:19). Nevertheless, many of Jesus' followers today still don't know the whole of his person, just as his first disciples didn't know the embodied Word (Jn 14:9). In post-ascension the full 3-D profile of the Trinity's face is commonly fragmented by misguided practices that reduce the uncommon person of the Spirit (cf. Jn 14:17), who has been rendered in virtual terms and augmented realities at the expense of the wholeness essential for all life, both the Trinity's and ours.

The pivotal juncture distinguishing the Trinity's presence and involvement certainly came with the Son embodying, enacting and disclosing the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. In post-ascension the most palpable presence and involvement of the whole and uncommon Trinity unfolds with the Spirit distinguished only as subject-person, who further enacts and discloses the Trinity's presence and involvement as Jesus' relational replacement (Jn 16:5-7, 13-15). The Spirit's person will be involved in reciprocal relationship (not unilateral) with us just as Jesus' person was with his followers. Moreover, since the Spirit enacts the whole Trinity, the Son is also present whereby the palpable Word in the Spirit continues *to be* present and involved. As the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17), the Spirit further extends the embodied Truth in post-ascension as the Spirit of *Truth* (Jn 15:26; 16:13-15). The Spirit of Truth and the Word of Truth are inseparable subject-persons together as the ontological One (the *person*-al Trinity) and the relational Whole (the inter-*person*-al Trinity), so that, as Paul made definitive, "the Lord is the Spirit" and the relational outcome of the Trinity's involvement "comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:16,18)—inseparable just as the Son disclosed between him and the Father. Therefore, in post-ascension the Word is always palpable in the Spirit, and the palpable Word's presence and involvement always include the palpable presence and involvement of the Father, who together in uncommon wholeness distinguish the palpable presence and involvement of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. The Spirit indeed is the post-ascension key to the Trinity's wholeness and also for our wholeness.

In the relationship-specific purpose and function of the Spirit, the Spirit's relational involvement with us converges with Jesus' baptism in order for us *to be* transformed to whole ontology and function in uncommon likeness of the Trinity (Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 3:18). Then the Spirit's involvement with us centers on our wholeness together (1 Cor 12:7,12-13) to unfold the essential relational outcome of whole relationship together as the Trinity's new creation family, which is also the Trinity's uncommon temple (Rom 8:15-16; Eph 2:14-22).

The wholeness of this transformation requires ongoing sanctification, which is composed not virtually in referential terms but essentially in whole relational terms only by **trinitarian sanctification**: the essential and thus indispensable relational process and irreplaceable relational outcome initiated by Jesus in the *ek-eis* reciprocating contextualization (Jn 17:15-17), in ongoing triangulation with the Spirit (Jn 15:26-27; 16:13) who brings the process of redemptive change from commonness to uncommonness to complete the wholeness of persons (Jn 16:7-11; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 3:17; Rom 8:5-14), and who constitutes the relational outcome of redemptive reconciliation for the wholeness of their relationships together in the trinitarian church family composing the Trinity's uncommon temple (Eph 2:18,21-22; 1 Cor 3:16)—just as Jesus enacted and Paul clarified theologically for the church and all its persons and relationships to function in uncommon wholeness. Therefore, in post-ascension, trinitarian sanctification is the only ongoing means for the church and its persons and relationships *to be* distinguished from common wholeness, and also to grow and mature in uncommon wholeness; and the Spirit is the trinitarian key to this indispensable relational process and irreplaceable relational outcome (as in Paul's challenge, Eph 4:3-4).

The Genius of the Spirit

When the psalmist established "The unfolding of your *relational* word gives light" (Ps 119:130), this challenges any lack of relational clarity and significance in our theology and practice, perhaps encompassed by a fog of referential forms and shaping. The Word's relational clarity and significance unfolded embodied by the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the Word and is now further enacted by the Spirit to unfold the primacy of the essential relational outcome of wholeness and bring it to completion. The Spirit, inseparably with the palatable Word, is *simply* the trinitarian key to wholeness of all life.

Given the Spirit's uncommon intimate presence and whole relational involvement, we need to understand neither to ascribe more to the Spirit than warranted nor to underestimate the Spirit. Both complicate the Spirit's function with a distorted perception, which is analogous to a common lens that "cannot receive *the Spirit* because it neither sees *his whole person* nor knows him *in wholeness*" (as Jesus disclosed, Jn 14:17). Similar to how Einstein approached science with the simplicity of a new angle, the Spirit needs to be seen, known and embraced in the simplicity of the Spirit's function—the simplicity of function that also should be neither idealized nor idolized. Accordingly, the Spirit we use will be the wholeness of the Trinity and of our churches with its persons and relationships we get, including for all life—as even "the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of *their wholeness together*" (Rom 8:19).

The genius of the Spirit is not about the amount of knowledge (truth) he brings to the human context—as a know-it-all informational truth—whom Jesus said "will guide [lead, explain, instruct, *hodegeo*] you into all truth" (Jn 16:13). The Spirit's genius involves his see-the-whole relational truth as the Spirit of Truth who functions in the simplicity of the following:

> **(1)** to witness to (confirm) the essential reality of the embodied Truth (Jn 15:26) in whom was life (*zoe* not just *bios*) and the source of light for humanity (Jn 1:4, cf. Jn 3:19-21); and as the Truth's relational replacement, **(2)** to further illuminate the wholeness essential of the trinitarian Truth (Jn 16:13-15, cf. 1 Cor 2:9-10), and in reciprocal relationship **(3)** to complete the transformation process with us that involves both the person's mindset (interpretive lens, *phroneō*, Rom 8:5) and its basis, the persons' perceptual-interpretive framework or worldview (*phronēma*, 8:6), in order to transform an outer-in quantitative mindset and a reduced *phronēma* fragmented by the secondary integrally by constituting the person with the qualitative interpretive lens (*phroneō*) in its whole interpretive framework (*phronēma*), which are both essential *to be* in "life [*zoe*] and peace [wholeness]" (cf. 1 Thes 5:19,23; 2 Thes 2:13)—that is, the qualitative *zoe* from inner out that integrates all the aspects of quantitative *bios* from outer in *to be* in wholeness; and in ongoing reciprocal relationship together, **(4)** to illuminate what is not commonly seen and light the process necessary for us to use our new qualitative interpretive lens and whole interpretive framework in order to put together the essential parts composing *zoe*-life in wholeness—the process of *syniemi* (as in Mk 8:17; Eph 5:17-18) resulting in the whole understanding (*synesis*, Eph 3:4) to constitute persons and

relationships together as church family in whole ontology and function in likeness of the whole and uncommon Trinity (Col 1:9; 2:2, cf. 2 Tim 2:7).

The relational outcome of *synesis* from *syniemi* in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit's genius also makes our qualitative *phroneō* and whole *phronēma* function in the genius of the Spirit, discerning (*biyn*) the whole of relational truth essential for both the Trinity and all life in uncommon likeness. This is the genius of the simple (Ps 119:130), the child-persons in contrast to "the wise and learned" who are unable to discern the whole (Lk 10:21).

The Face of the Whole-ly Trinity *Person*-al and Inter-*person*-al

In the beginning the triune God created all life, and the Word was with God *to be* the whole of God who later emerged from the uncommon to embody the face of the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity in and beyond the realms of physics and metaphysics, thereby constituting the Trinity's face in full profile as "Uncommon, uncommon, uncommon is the *whole Trinity*, who was, and is, and is to come" (Rev 4:8, NIV). In this improbable theological trajectory and on this intrusive relational path, the whole-ly (irreducibly whole and nonnegotiably uncommon) Trinity enacted the Trinity's uncommon wholeness essential for all life *to be* whole in the Trinity's likeness—as created in the beginning and by necessity newly created by the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity. This is the gospel of wholeness that emerged and unfolded in the common context.

The gospel obviously has been proclaimed in various manners, forms and places. Certainly many who claim the gospel assume to know its essential composition and to understand its essential outcome. Yet, the truth of the whole gospel is known by less than this majority, just as Jesus lamented about his closest followers (Jn 14:9). Furthermore, the truth of the gospel of wholeness is understood in its essential relational outcome by a surprising fewer than many would expect, just as Paul exposed Peter in his performing a role (*hypokrisis*) with the truth of this gospel (Gal 2:11-14). It has been problematic, to say the least, in theology and practice to assume knowing the gospel; and it has been consequential to assume (as from the beginning) that the understanding of the gospel's relational outcome has not been reduced of what is essential. From the beginning the referentialization of the Word from God ("Did God say…") has been a pivotal problem distorting good-news words from God.

The reality is that the gospel we use is the relational outcome we get. Any gospel heard and received in referential language can only have a referential outcome. This was not the theological trajectory and relational path of the gospel that the Samaritan woman improbably experienced at the well with Jesus disclosing the Trinity's strategic shift. This was, however, the outcome with which Peter struggled until his gospel became congruent with Jesus' improbable theological trajectory and intrusive relational path, in order to determine his vulnerable involvement in reciprocal relationship together necessary to be whole. Since Paul experienced the gospel directly in relational language and terms ("Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*…*I am* Jesus, whom you are…" (Acts 9:4-5), his gospel was and had entirely the relational outcome of the whole gospel: the dynamic of

‘nothing less and no substitutes’ making vulnerable the whole of the Trinity’s ontology and function in relational response to our condition to make whole our ontology and function in reciprocal relationship together in the Trinity’s new creation family. Many of Paul’s readers do not clearly understand Paul’s gospel—some even making a distinction between his and Jesus’ gospel—because their interpretive lens focuses on referential language in his theology for a referential outcome in his practice, consequently not understanding Paul’s relational language extending directly from Jesus’ relational language. And Jesus disclosed in relational terms the good news of the presence and involvement of the whole and uncommon Trinity, who is defined implicitly in Paul’s theology and determined explicitly his practice.

For Paul, this essential relational outcome was “the gospel of *wholeness*” (Eph 6:15), and anything less or any substitute was “a different gospel which is really no gospel at all” (Gal 1:6-7). On this relational basis and in response to this relational problem, the whole of Paul’s person and the whole in his theology and practice echoing Jesus in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit intensely fought both *for* (*to be*) the gospel of wholeness and its essential relational outcome for the church and its persons and relationships together in wholeness, and *against* (*not to be*) their reduction in any manner, shape and terms in theology and practice.

Paul fully understood when he identified ‘the gospel of wholeness’ that it was ongoingly challenged by and in conflict with reductionism. Therefore, the gospel of wholeness is qualified in this context by its ongoing contention with reductionism (Eph 6:10-18) and necessitates this unavoidable and nonnegotiable theology and practice: In contrast to what has become the conventional way of proclaiming the gospel, Paul defines in relational language the conjoint fight *for* the whole gospel and *against* reductionism, while in reciprocal involvement with the Spirit in triangulation (cf. navigation) with the situations and circumstances of human contextualization for the reciprocating contextualization ongoingly needed *to be* whole from inner out, to live in uncommon wholeness with qualitative and relational significance, and thereby to make whole the human condition, even as it may be reflected, reinforced or sustained in church and academy. Indispensable, and thus irreplaceable, for this theology and practice are both the strong view of sin as reductionism and the complete theological anthropology for persons in whole ontology and function *to be* what and who the Trinity seeks in compatible reciprocal relationship together. A gospel that does not vulnerably address the sin of reductionism with the essential relational outcome of whole ontology and function is an incomplete gospel at best, not whole but fragmentary. This outcome only unfolds from the full profile of the Face constituting the whole gospel (as Paul highlighted, 2 Cor 4:4,6), whose uncommon wholeness Paul claimed and thereby proclaimed for the wholeness of the church and its persons and relationships together.

It is a bad assumption to claim to know the identity of someone while lacking the full profile of their face. This is how stereotypes are created that claim to know the defining presence of a person and to understand the extent/nature of their involvement. This stereotypical assumption and thinking continue to prevail until clarified and corrected by the essential reality of their full profile. Accordingly, the face of YHWH, the triune God, the Trinity has been stereotyped and continues *not to be* until corrected by the full profile essential of the Trinity. In uncommon orthodoxy and uncommon Trinitarianism, the whole-ly Trinity is integrally *person*-al and inter-*person*-al,

distinguished by the ontological footprints and functional steps of the trinitarian persons together, and thus is essential only *to be* nothing less and no substitutes. That is to say, this is the truth only if wholeness is the essential reality constituting God and life. Anything less and any substitutes are only *not to be*, at best a virtual reality composing God and life. The full profile of the face of the Trinity's presence and involvement emerges only whole and uncommon, and thereby unfolds only *person*-al and inter-*person*-al.

The essential truth and reality have unfolded to illuminate the understanding of the simple: The whole profile of the Face of the Trinity has been disclosed *to be* with us Face to face in uncommon presence and whole involvement, in order for the essential who, what and how of all life *to be* in uncommon wholeness together. The challenge for Face has been fulfilled and this challenge now shifts to our face *to be* in reciprocal relationship Face to face to Face. Therefore, the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement in the common context of the world challenges trinitarian theology and practice and holds accountable the church and all its persons and relationships *to be* in uncommon wholeness, and thus congruently in uncommon likeness of nothing less and no substitutes for the Trinity embodied, enacted and disclosed in irreducible and nonnegotiable relational terms.

Without the *person*-al inter-*person*-al Trinity's uncommon presence and whole involvement, church theology and practice with its persons and relationships are in the common relational condition 'to be apart' from wholeness, in need to search for the full-profile face of who, what and how makes them whole. Perhaps a theological fog distorts their theology, or what they want over need biases their practice; regardless, the gospel of the Trinity's presence and involvement must be accounted for in order to be claimed in wholeness. There are, of course, various approaches epistemologically, hermeneutically, ontologically, functionally and relationally that can be used, but there is just one essential key to the whole of God's life and ours. "Pay attention to what you hear *from me in relational terms*; the measure you *use in your theology and practice* will be the measure you get" (Mk 4:24).

Taking For Granted What Is Essential

In the global church today and its related academy, has theology become preoccupied with the secondary and has its practice become lacking in the significance of the primary? A 'yes' would make evident our theology and practice taking for granted what is essential and thus who is essential. In a compelling way this should not surprise us, because this consistently has been our history from the beginning.

When YHWH consummated the covenant relationship with Abraham, this reciprocal relationship was composed *to be* whole (*tāmiym*, Gen 17:1). Israel then consistently transposed the qualitative relational significance of the covenant from inner out to outer in. What was essential for Judaism's theology and practice was either taken for granted or just ignored, such that Israel's identity markers no longer reflected the whole identity of YHWH. Conforming to purification standards was one of their main identity markers, most notably centered on circumcision as a critical distinction defining who they were and determining what they were as better than those uncircumcised. Paul,

the unconverted Jew made whole, later clarified what was essential to be a Jew (Rom 2:28-29), and then corrected what and who were essential *to be* in covenant relationship together (Gal 6:15). The essential clarified and corrected by Paul had at the very least been taken for granted (cf. Rom 9:6-8,16; 10:1-3).

The early church in Sardis, in the esteemed distinction of their secondary practice, demonstrated taking for granted what was essential in their practice by either not fully knowing or taking for granted who their God was (Rev 3:1-3). The early church in Ephesus, operating for rigorous doctrinal certainty, got preoccupied by the secondary in their theology by taking for granted who was essential to their theology and practice (Rev 2:1-5). The early multicultural church in Thyatira, in their hybrid theology and practice, took for granted what and who were essential, and thus had to be accountable to the whole-ly Trinity "who searches hearts" (Rev 2:18-23)—the primary inner out essential to churches and all its persons and relationships.

Underlying this history of taking for granted what and who are essential is the pervasive assumption from the beginning that we are not and will not be reduced in our theology and practice. This assumption of the wholeness of our God and our life is the most critical problem facing the church and its persons and relationship today, the essential condition of which is in urgent need of triage care by the Trinity's wholeness. For essential clarification and correction, the theology and practice of the gospel of wholeness in Paul's relational language required this relational imperative: "Let the *uncommon wholeness* of Christ rule in your hearts, into which *wholeness* [distinguished from common wholeness] indeed you were called in the one body" (Col 3:15). In order for us not to diminish, minimalize or just take for granted what is essential, Paul made definitive this uncommon wholeness of Christ in the ongoing integrated function of two inseparable realities unfolding from the relational outcome of the gospel—which 'already' constitutes the ontology of "God's chosen ones, holy and *intimately* loved," (Col 3:12) in uncommon likeness of the whole-ly Trinity:

1. The whole person from inner out is constituted by the qualitative function of the heart restored to the qualitative relational likeness of the Trinity (Col 3:10; 2 Cor 3:18), the person who is the qualitative function of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17), which Jesus made whole from above (Jn 3:3-7); therefore, the person's ontology and function cannot be defined and determined from outer in without fragmenting the whole person to reduced ontology and function (Gal 6:15).

2. The integral function of whole persons from inner out is vulnerably involved in the reciprocal relationships congruent in relational likeness of the whole of the Trinity (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:20-26; Col 2:9-10; 3:10), which are constituted by transformed relationships together vulnerably integrated as equalized and intimate (Col 3:11,14; Gal 3:26-29; 5:6)—without the relational barriers of distinctions and the relational distance of the veil, in uncommon likeness of the whole-ly Trinity.

Paul understood that without uncommon wholeness ongoingly determining our life from inner out, the church and its persons and relationships are susceptible to their default condition and mode in reduced ontology and function.

From Paul's own experience, if the uncommon wholeness of Christ and thus the Trinity is the only determinant ("rule," *brabeuo*) in our hearts, then the relational outcome will be the essential ontology and function of whole persons integrally in whole relationships together. This essential ontology and function is a nonnegotiable for the gospel, or its outcome is reduced from what is essential in the whole-ly Trinity. This essential relational outcome is whole-ly distinguished in the qualitative and relational significance of the new creation 'already', which composes the new covenant relationship together of the Trinity's church family in uncommon wholeness *to be* the Trinity's uncommon temple (Gal 4:28-31; Rom 8:6,15-17; 2 Cor 5:18; Eph 2:14-22).

This essential reality unfolded from the Word and was further illuminated by Paul in whole understanding en*light*ed with the Spirit, in order for the whole of God and life *to be* in the common context of the world. What is essential in the whole-ly Trinity is essential for the whole of life and wholeness in life. Therefore, the profile of the face of the Trinity we use in our theology and practice will be the life we get.

"Pay attention closely to *the whole-ly*…!" You may experience difficulty to face the Face, but stay focused on the primary who is the trinitarian essential for the whole of your God and life.

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