

Sanctified Christology

A Theological & Functional Study
of the Whole of Jesus

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Introduction: Approaching the Whole of *the Word*

What is the portrait of Jesus that you have in your possession? Is it a still photo(s) or a motion picture? And how would you characterize the main descriptions, ideas, knowledge and understanding persons hold about Jesus of Nazareth? More often than not, the Jesus of our perceptions does not coincide with the *whole* of Jesus in the narratives of the Bible. A sanctified Christology hopefully will help eliminate this gap, or at least serve to better perceive his whole person in the incarnation.

In Jesus' high priestly (formative family) prayer he revealed: "For them I sanctify [*hagiazō*, cause to be holy] myself, that they too may be truly sanctified" (Jn 17:19).¹ His statement is somewhat puzzling. Taken by itself this statement could suggest: that Jesus lacked deity and thus a holy nature (as the theology of Arianism assumed); or that Jesus was merely a man elevated to divine status (as defined in adoptionism or dynamic monarchianism); or that in emphasizing the distinction of Jesus' divine and human nature (as the Antiochenes did) Jesus worked on sanctifying his human nature. None of these positions on Christology sufficiently explain the whole of Jesus (not defined by only one part[s] or aspect), nor do they account for the whole of the triune God's self-disclosure in the incarnation. Why, then, did Jesus sanctify himself or even need to?

The implications of this question bring out Jesus' whole purpose for his actions, which will be addressed in this study. I will attempt to define the significance of Jesus' statement in his life and practice to formulate a complete Christology, as well as to formulate how this becomes functionally necessary for our life and practice in the primacy of our relational response to him as his followers—"that they too may be truly sanctified"—in what can be summarized as "Sanctified Christology." This complete Christology will constitute a full soteriology of both what Jesus saves *from* and *to*; and it will define a discipleship distinct from what prevails in conventional Christian practice and provide the basis for identity formation as Jesus' followers in relational progression to the Father and the whole of God as family. This will further result in an ecclesiology (doctrine of the church) rarely experienced in church practice today that is signified in the Trinity, whose relationships together constitute the whole of God, thus necessitating a pneumatology (doctrine of the Holy Spirit) in which the Spirit constitutes this relational progression to its eschatological conclusion.

Included in our discussion then is: what it means to be a person (and the ontology of personhood); what it means to be whole and how wholeness involves more than the individual person and must include persons together in the relationships necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity; and how those relationships function in the relational context and relational process vulnerably revealed by Jesus in his sanctified life and practice. All of these together help us to grasp the coherence of the triune God's desires and actions from the first creation through the incarnation to the eschatological consummation of the new creation.

¹ Unless indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the NIV.

The Approach of This Study

In this modern period of history the person of Jesus has been shaped into different forms and images, thus making it difficult to have a clear christological picture, much less an understanding, of who and what this person Jesus is. Recent so-called critical scholarship and the current “quests” for the historical Jesus tend only to offer an elusive Jesus too ambiguous to grasp, or a person without much significance to take to heart, even distasteful to take seriously. With this study I am not attempting to answer the current “christological problem,” though certainly this conversation is unavoidably engaged by the following reflections on Jesus of Nazareth.

I undertake my reflections with the presupposition that the biblical narratives of Jesus are not only history but more significantly reflect communication from God—even with the presence of some human shaping, understood as responses of faith. Moreover, God’s communicative action is intended not merely to be informative but its purpose is only for relationship. Thus, this intentional communicative action is enacted in the relational context and process specifically of the whole of God, that is, the Trinity. It is this trinitarian relational context and process which provide the further and deeper understanding of Jesus’ sanctified life and practice for a complete Christology.

As communicative action the life and practices of Jesus become disclosures of his person, which certainly have been subject to various interpretations and perceptions, including stereotyping. Part of the difficulty we have with his disclosures involves how we functionally embody Jesus in the incarnation—not to mention how we disembody him. It is insufficient for the incarnation to only put flesh on Jesus to quantify his embodiment. This would be a reduction of the whole of the Word embodied; this reductionism also is used to disembody Jesus’ disclosures to quantify in propositions and doctrine. The incarnation, however, is the embodiment of Jesus’ whole person (both quantitative and qualitative), thus the whole of God, nothing less and no substitutes. Most significantly, this communicative action signified throughout the incarnation is not to dispense information *about* God but only to constitute relationship *with* God.

Jesus’ vulnerable self-disclosures (distinct from being mere exhibits), by which he extended communication from God, were not enacted in isolation nor merely in a general social context but *engaged a relational process*. Thus by the nature of this relational process his disclosures of Self (not the exhibit of an object) must be seen (or perceived) as well as received (in contrast to only observed) in this specific relational context. The nature of this specific relational context with this specific relational process involves who, what and how God is, by whose image human persons were created (Gen. 1:27; 2:18). And Jesus must be seen and received in this relational context in order for his disclosures to have significance beyond limited information. Moreover, apart from this relational process such information invariably is shaped only by an observer, perhaps along with a body of observers from tradition.

In other words, as Jesus communicates, we (who seek to know him) must “listen” in order to complete a functional relational connection. Listening, however, is never a simple process in any relationship—without falling into “speaking” for the other person, particularly God.

Further, listening involves more than being quiet to let the other person speak. *How* we “listen” is equally important; that is, what predispositions and biases we bring to

the relational process influence not only what we “hear” but how we interpret those messages. This issue is about our perceptual-interpretive framework, which defines the lens we “see” through that determines what we pay attention to and what we ignore.

What we pay attention to in relation to Jesus’ person and what we ignore become crucial both for our christological conclusions and our practice as his followers. Problems of Christology emerge when we pay attention primarily to the information and details of Jesus’ life—the quantitative elements denoted by the Greek word *bios*.² Think about this for a moment. At what point would you say that you know someone? What do you specifically base that knowledge on? And how deep is that knowledge? Theological and biblical studies need to answer these about Jesus.

In modernity, speculation and observation based in rationality (with a scientific paradigm) are the primary sources of knowledge. Evangelical Christians (namely neo-evangelicals) in the twentieth century applied this methodology to the theological task. Postmodernity challenges modernism’s assumptions and practices and contends that knowledge is not disembodied (reduced), therefore must be situated to understand its human shaping. This contextualizing is limited, however, and tends not to engage a relational process, thus in effect reducing the source of knowledge to its relative human shaping (which has its own biases and limitations, however embodied). While this approach certainly dispels the illusions of a modern quantitative method, it is inadequate for biblical knowledge of God.

Underlying modernist thinking from the Enlightenment, as well as much theology in earlier church tradition, is an interpretive framework acquired from ancient Greek philosophy. The early Greek development of personal freedom or agency (the sense that they were in charge of their own lives and free to act as they chose), accompanied by a strong sense of individual identity (arguably originating individualism), and their practice of objective thought and inquiry for the pursuit of knowledge based on rationality and logic were basic to their framework. This interpretive framework, for example, analyzed the person in isolation separate from others (thus without relational context) and reduced the person to properties by which to categorize the person on the basis of its abstracted attributes—e.g., Plato’s dualistic embodied-immaterial view of the person. Using this approach to God in the theological task or biblical exegesis has constrained God in a quantitative box, limiting the *what* and *who* we can know of God. Furthermore, in Western thinking this framework assumes that what underlies the individual are the common notions of freedom and independence in self-autonomy and self-determination; this removes the person from the relational process which gives primacy to relationship.³

² Greek and Hebrew word studies used in this study are taken from the following sources: Horst Balz, Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce Waitke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980); Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 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).

³ For an expanded discussion on the origins of Western thinking and its differences with Easterners, see Richard E. Nisbet, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...and Why* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

What does this interpretive framework do to our understanding of God, as well as the person and the church?

The issue remains in the significant difference between truly knowing someone or only knowing something about someone. The source of any so-called knowledge of God will be either from human reason or God's revelation, though not to exclude some interaction between them. God's self-revelation is knowledge embodied in the incarnation of the Son (Jn 12:45,46; 14:9, 2 Cor 4:6), which is extended by the Spirit (Jn 15:26; 16:14,15). That is, it is given in a distinct relational context with a specific relational process; and by the nature of this, it has to be received in the specific way compatible to that relational context and process. This necessary condition makes mere "observation" of God's revelation insufficient for knowledge of God—yielding conclusions either lacking or distorted. This condition also applies to the inadequacy of reader-response theory (readers actualize textual meaning "in front of the text" in contrast to going "within the text" or "behind the text"), though some moderate reader-response focus does have value, particularly regarding our perceptual-interpretive framework;⁴ I will approach the text integrating all three (within, in front of, behind) positions to further engage this relational context and process. Yet, engaging the whole of the biblical text necessarily involves *epistemic humility* signifying that knowing God is contingent on the relational initiative of God's grace. Any knowledge of God disconnected from this relational context and process becomes disembodied, thus reduced to information which at best is only knowing something *about* God and which most likely serves as epistemological illusion for faith.

To know Jesus beyond information *about* him, to truly know the who, what and how of his person, requires involvement in *the relational epistemic process* which Jesus vulnerably initiated with us by his self-disclosures. This is the qualitative aspects of God's self-revelation contained in the other Greek word for life, *zoe* (cf. Jn 10:10; 14:6). Yet, this relational process of understanding is to be distinguished from Schleiermacher's "art of understanding" which tends to be overly subjective with its reliance on human consciousness.⁵

"Sanctified Christology" will not ignore the qualitative life and practice of Jesus and will pay attention to the primacy of the relational context and process communicated in and by his person. Yet, how well we "listen" in this relational epistemic process will depend on a shift (notably redemptive change) from a quantitative interpretive framework (focused on secondary matter, e.g., on the outer-in attributes, examples, even teachings of Jesus, plus other issues "behind the text") to a qualitative interpretive framework (which does not ignore the quantitative but gives primary focus to the inner-out aspects of the whole person and relationships). This does not reduce the process to focusing primarily on the listener/interpreter "in front of the text," nor to the limited issue of the meaning and role of language—though communication is fundamental to the relational process.

⁴ For a summary discussion of "Reader-Response Criticism," see Robin Perry in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 658-661.

⁵ For a brief description of Schleiermacher's position in modern hermeneutics, see Anthony C. Thiselton, "Biblical studies and theoretical hermeneutics" in John Barton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1998), 95-113; Thiselton, *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 129-130, 277-278.

This shift to a qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework is not without difficulty (both intellectually and emotionally) since the prevailing lenses operating in the world (the West especially) are focused on secondary matter and occupy us (even to our enslavement) with elements of *bios* (such as duration, manner, means and situation, in which we make investment). Reducing life from *zoe* to *bios*, reducing the whole person from the inner out (signified by the importance of the heart) to the outer in (e.g., focusing only on Jesus' teachings or behavioral examples), reducing the primacy of relationships and intimate involvement (both with God and others) to secondary activity and occupying space together are the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of *reductionism*.⁶ Unless we contend with reductionism—individually in our lives and corporately in church practice and the Christian academy—we will have ongoing difficulty shifting to a qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework. Consequently, I want to emphasize clearly at the beginning of this study: *reductionism presents a formidable challenge to a relational epistemic process in general and to a complete Christology of Jesus' life and practice in particular*. Thus reductionism will be addressed ongoingly throughout this study, in particular its epistemological illusions and ontological simulations as well as the reductionist substitutes in our life and practice.

What Job learned illustrates these competing processes to understanding and knowing God (see Job 42:1-6; cf. also Samuel's experience, 1 Sam 16:1-13). In trying to explain his frustrating circumstances, Job misspoke about his understanding of God (Job 34:35; 35:16). God responded: "Who is this that darkens [*hasak*, obscures] my counsel [*esah*, plan, purpose] with words without knowledge [*da'at*, understanding]?" (Job 38:2). (Speaking for the other person without really understanding that person could describe much of biblical studies.) In realizing that, Job confessed "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful [*pala*, denoting beyond] for me to know" (42:3); and he learned how his speculations reduced the transcendent God and obscured God's involvement with him as well as God's purpose for the big picture.

When God engaged Job further "Listen now, and I will speak" (42:4), God challenged him to deeper relationship for this epistemic process. Job had to turn from his reductionist interpretative framework in order to enter this relational epistemic process with God, and then to "listen" to God with a qualitative framework. In doing so, Job opened his person to God to receive God's self-revelation. Moving beyond the limits of the quantitative (see Job 26:14) and of "my ears had heard of you" (42:5), Job made relational connection with God resulting in the qualitative conclusion to truly understand God more intimately—"but now my eyes have seen you" (42:5). This is the relational outcome of epistemic humility.

What Job learned also teaches us how perspectives about God become reductionist when: (1) they are not based on God's self-revelation, and/or (2) our perceptual-interpretive framework limits (or reduces) God's revelation—for example, not letting Jesus be his whole person and speak for himself. This further demonstrates that there is a direct correlation between how well we will know God ("face to face") and the perceptual-interpretive framework we function with in our life and practice (cf. 2 Cor 4:4,6). Our study of Jesus' sanctified life and practice increasingly will make this matter

⁶ Reductionism tries to make the whole of something more simple than it really is by reducing its complexity to only its smaller components (or secondary aspects) and, in turn, uses those aspects to determine/define the whole of something, thus diminishing or *minimalizing* its integrity.

imperative as an issue for change—redemptive change (where the *old* dies and the *new* is raised in its place).

Luke recounts, along with Matthew’s Gospel (Mt 11:25), that in a moment of leaping or dancing for joy Jesus exalted “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure” (Lk 10:21). Jesus was not suggesting God’s revelation was selectively given to only certain persons, and thus not available to all. He was referring to knowing and understanding God’s self-revelation, which is grasped not as observers (however astute) but in the relational context and process. And he reminded his disciples how blessed they were to be receiving God’s disclosures in this vulnerable relationship (Lk 10:22,23).

The “little children” (*nepios*), about whom Jesus was so excited, is a metaphor for a whole person: an unassuming person merely being whom God created—with a heart open and involved, a mind free and adaptable to the improbable (i.e., able to go outside of the box). More specifically, this “child-person” functions by using the mind simply in the likeness of the triune God, compatible with the holy God’s qualitative distinction from the function of *the common*. Thus, this child-person’s mind does not function apart from the heart in order to be vulnerably present with one’s whole person and intimately involved in God’s relational context and process for the relational epistemic process necessary to know the whole of God. Moreover, while the mind of a child is considered immature and undeveloped according to *common* terms, this is a metaphor for the function of a perceptual-interpretive framework which is unrestricted by predispositions and biases. As our mind grows in development, we also put on different lenses which tend to become more and more restricting, in effect reductionist (e.g., imagination, creativity, spontaneity decrease). This ironic development describes “the wise and learned,” who, as Jesus directly implied, depend on their rationality (*sophos* and *synetos*) without epistemic humility; and thus they fail to function as a whole person necessary by nature to engage the relational epistemic process to receive God’s self-disclosures and know the whole of God in relationship together as experiential truth (to be discussed shortly).

This functional distinction between the whole “child-person” and the reduced “wise and learned” is crucial to grasp in the function of the Christian academy and the practice of the church. What are the implications of this for biblical and theological studies, for seminary education, or even for conventional church Bible study? What is the significance of this in the epistemic process to know the transcendent and holy God and, most importantly, its significance for ongoing relationship with the whole of God embodied in Jesus?

Our discussion must take seriously Jesus’ declaration because, as we will discover, this is more about the life and practice of his followers in relationship than about the “wise and learned”—notably those who speculate about theology (“from below”) and/or formulate practice only on their terms (which in effect is “bottom-up causation”).⁷ This course will not lead us to fideism (the claim that Christian belief is contrary to reason) but rather submits in epistemic humility the whole person to engage

⁷ For a philosophical discussion of how modern practices have influenced theology, see Nancey Murphy, *The Nordenhang Lectures 2003, Theology in a Postmodern Age*, 2nd revised edition (Czech Republic: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

compatibly in the relational context and process by which Jesus' vulnerable disclosures of God are revealed. The relational outcome of involvement in this relational process is knowing and understanding the triune God made accessible in the incarnation. And Jesus' sanctified life and practice is the basis for involving us further and deeper in this relationship.

The Basis of This Study

In Jesus' summary prayer interceding on behalf of all his followers, he tells his Father: "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do...I have revealed you to those whom you gave me" (Jn 17:4,6). "Revealed" can have either of two senses depending on the Greek word used: to merely exhibit the object revealed (*apokalypso*), or to extend this further to address those to whom the revelation is made (*phaneroo*). This is an important difference we need to grasp because this has functional implications.

Jesus did not merely exhibit the Father but disclosed him in the relational process with his followers (*phaneroo*, as Jesus prayed here). Certainly Jesus *apokalypso* the triune God and fully exegetes the Father (*exegeomai* in Jn 1:18). Yet more importantly, *phaneroo* completes the purpose for God's self-disclosure in the incarnation of the Son, mediated by the Spirit, as the relational process only for intimately participating in and knowing the life (*zoe*) of God: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3); "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (17:26). Simply stated, God's revelation communicates relational messages to us from the whole of God as Trinity for the sole purpose of intimate relationship together as family, God's family.

All communication has not only a content aspect but also a relationship aspect which helps us understand the significance of the content of communication. In these relational messages, which are usually implied, a person conveys something about one's self, about one's view of the other person and/or about their relationship together. These relational messages qualify the content aspect. As these relational messages are received and understood, there is a deeper basis for knowing that person and a better grasp of how to respond back.⁸ The application of this process to the dynamics of Jesus' vulnerable life and practice will take us further and deeper into the purpose of God's disclosures.

In the biblical narratives, the story of Jesus takes us further than history and mere information *about* God. While being historical event, the incarnation (beyond merely the manger) takes us deeper as God's being, nature and presence—the functional sum of God's glory (Jn1:14)—are made vulnerable to us in *who* and *what* God is. This is not for information to categorize in propositional truths and to fragment in systematic theologies but for intimate relationship together (Jn 17:22). As communicative act in and for this relational context, God also engages this relational process such that this makes the total of who, what and how God is *accountable* to us—all for, within and by relationship.

⁸ For the conceptual dynamics of human communication, see Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin, Don D. Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967).

Accountability is a popular buzzword in current church practices, particularly for small groups, yet with mixed motivations and outcomes. A main reason for this is that accountability often is not practiced in a reciprocal relational process involving necessarily being vulnerable to each other. Yet, God in self-revelation is accountable to us based on the life and practice of Jesus who initiated vulnerable self-disclosures only for relationship, intimate relationship together. In this specific relational context, the manner in which Jesus came was “full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).

In the OT the psalmist asks God for “your light and your truth” in order to lead him to where God is—not just to a holy place where God dwells but to God himself (Ps 43:3). The Hebrew term for truth (*emet*) denotes God’s faithfulness, that is, one you can count on to be who and what he is (cf. with righteousness). This provides us with the relational function of truth.

In the NT there is a strategic shift of God’s presence from a place (e.g., his dwelling in the tabernacle in the OT) to the vulnerable incarnation of God’s glory (the functional being, nature and presence of God) directly in Jesus (“who is the image of God...the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ,” 2 Cor 4:4,6). God not only sent light but came *in person* as the Light (Jn 1:4; 3:19; 12:46), “full of grace and truth” (the OT often renders these terms in combination as “covenant/steadfast love and faithfulness,” cf. Ps 25:10; 40:10, Prov 16:6). The Light emits who and what God is particularly in qualitative difference in contrast to darkness. Truth functions in the Light because it reflects who and what God is; that is, truth always points and leads to God, just as the psalmist asked (Jn 3:21).

“Full of grace and truth” (covenant love and faithfulness) are not mere static attributes of Jesus’ substance. This is *the Christ*. As the Messiah he is the covenant extension and fulfillment of God’s promise and thematic action to restore his creation to the wholeness of the whole of God.⁹ Thus “grace and truth” functionally are relational expressions of God’s righteousness—the who, what and how of God—and functionally serve to relationally extend what God began at the first creation and fulfills in the new creation, along with the Spirit, for eschatological relational conclusion. When not reduced, the whole Truth illuminates this relational context and process. Truth, as incarnated by Jesus, serves this relational purpose and functions for this specific relational process by being the embodiment of “the One and Only” we can count on to truly be who and what he is (Jn1:14,18). Jesus tried to explain his purpose of truth to Pilate, but he only responded back from a Greek philosophical framework reducing the issue to an abstract “What is truth?” (Jn 18:37,38).

Jesus’ self-disclosure as the Truth (Jn 14:6; cf. the relational significance of Jn 8:31,32, to be discussed in Chapter 3) reveals that the only significance for the truth is for relationship—specifically relationship to the Father (Jn 12:45), who can be known only in redeemed relationship (cf. Jn 8:33-36). God’s revelation and truth, therefore, are only for this relationship, not for information to formalize and thus “dwell” in propositions and doctrine, effectively as if in a place (temple or shrine). The latter project is static and tends to become an end for ourselves; though the intention contains God, its function constrains God.

⁹ For a more extensive discussion on this wholeness of God, see my overlapping study, *The Person, the Trinity, the Church: the Call to Be Whole and the Lure of Reductionism* (Wholeness Study, 2006), online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

The influence of modernity has skewed the focus dominantly on formulating propositional truths as foundational knowledge and beliefs. Postmodernity rejects any foundational scheme (or metanarrative) and looks more to experience in each human situation—not formulating propositions—as the basis for knowing and forming beliefs. I suggest what is needed to respond to the deficiencies of both is engagement in what can be called *experiential truth*. While propositional truth may have rational and objective basis, it is functionally static and primarily quantitative information, that is, reductionist knowledge, and thus has no qualitative significance for the whole person and the relationships necessary to be whole. For *experiential truth* to have validity and be reliable, it has to be more than the subjective—that is, be embodied only in oneself or in one’s community—as practiced in postmodernity. Thus, *experiential truth* must also have an objective basis; yet this objective basis cannot be functionally static (like that from modernity) but must be dynamic functionally for this knowledge to be beyond reductionism. What takes us beyond both reductionism and oneself?

For *experiential truth* to have a dynamic objective basis means that *experiential truth* must involve a relational epistemic process, where truth is beyond oneself as “subject” and is found in the Other as “object,” yet who is also known (experienced) as Subject in relationship. The only process that makes this a rational reality without reductionism, yet experiential beyond oneself, is a relational process in the specific relational context initiated by the Other; a context initiated by oneself for the Other remains subjective without objective basis. Truth becomes dynamic functionally when truth is for relationship. And the experience of this truth has objective basis when the object of truth, the Other, engaged in relationship is the historical person (of the biblical narratives), Jesus the Truth, who as Subject vulnerably disclosed himself to us.

Experiential truth is based in relationship with this person Jesus the Truth vulnerably revealed, who as the Way also reveals the relational epistemic process for knowing the whole of God in intimate relationship, and who also as the Life (*zoe*, not *bios*) redeems us for this qualitative difference of life together as his very own family in communion with and in likeness of the Trinity. Thus, we need to grasp this deeper epistemology Jesus revealed in his sanctified life and practice because his disclosures are the basis to experience in our life and practice the deeper ontology of the new creation “in Christ” (individually as persons, corporately as church, and both together as God’s whole). As we will discuss, anything less becomes the epistemological illusions and ontological simulations of reductionism.

Since Jesus’ self-disclosures are for relationship, given in the relational context and process he initiated, these God revelations must by their nature be received in that specific relational context and process. This then precludes our independent (“wise and learned,” Lk 10:21) speculations and formulations of what in effect are our terms (not the approach of a vulnerable child). Yet, while Jesus initiated this relational context and process, the relationship is not unilateral or one-sided. This is a reciprocal relationship which involves relational responsibilities, notably being vulnerable and accountable to each other. Part of our relational responsibility is to fully receive and thus be accountable for all of God’s self-revelations. This is not the observations of Jesus’ life and practice by “the wise and learned” in measured (distant or detached) relationship. Rather this is receiving the person Jesus with the openness of the whole person (in childlike

significance discussed earlier) and involvement in a vulnerable relationship—a reception and response, including by the church as a whole together.

Receiving Jesus with the openness of the whole person needs to include the exercise of the mind and the use of human reason, yet not as the prime determinant of understanding. Since Jesus' self-disclosures do not come in a gift package of a fully assembled understanding of God, the whole person is relationally responsible to vulnerably engage Jesus in all his disclosures and to fully connect them together in order to grasp the whole of who, what and how God is. This aspect of the relational epistemic process is described by the Greek word *syniemi* (to understand) denoting putting together the various disclosures by Jesus into its whole, like putting together pieces of a puzzle for a view of the whole picture. We need *syniemi* to understand the whole of Jesus in the various pieces of his life and practice. Yet, *syniemi* is a function of the whole person, not merely the mind. The importance of the heart signifying the involvement of the whole person is defined by Jesus as fundamental for *syniemi*; the failure of heart function in those who lacked *syniemi* described those to whom Jesus spoke in parables (Mt 13:15).

Despite the opportunities Jesus' disciples had to receive his self-disclosures (noted in the preceding context, Mt 13:11,16-17), *syniemi* did not come easily for them. After his disciples had observed him perform various miracles and had direct experiences with him, Jesus confronted them about their lack of understanding of him by failing to put these pieces together (*syniemi*, Mk 8:17, cf. Mk 6:51,52). Later, he shared his frustration with the disciples—"Don't you know me...even after I have been among you such a long time" (Jn 14:9)—because they were not engaging him in the relational epistemic process very well. They certainly knew loads of information *about* Jesus yet they did not truly know the person.

A related word *synesis* (understanding, comprehension) denotes the ability to understand concepts and see the relationships between them for a grasp of the whole. This stated Pauline purpose (in Col 2:2,3, cf. 1:9) was defined for us to have this understanding of the whole (*synesis*, v.2) in order that we would specifically know (*epignosis*, not just be informed about) the full significance of the various pieces of the mystery of God revealed in the face of Christ. Apparently even as a boy at twelve Jesus demonstrated this *synesis*, which amazed those who heard him engage the teachers at the temple (Lk 2:47). Paul claimed to have this *synesis* (Eph 3:4) but only as an outcome of engaging the relational epistemic process from Jesus with the Spirit (Gal 1:12, Eph 3:3,5), not by mere human reason. Yet, not all *synesis* activity is meaningful. While defending the significance of the cross of Jesus the Christ, Paul reminds us that some *synesis* is fruitless—notably the insight of the rationalists (1 Cor 1:19-21). This suggests that *synesis* from a reductionist interpretive framework determined merely by human reason results in only epistemological illusions of the whole. While this may have some usefulness in particulate matters (e.g., in science), it is insufficient for understanding the whole.

Synesis is not the practice of "the wise and the learned." It is the necessary option of all who vulnerably seek to know and understand God, and thus the relational responsibility for which all Jesus' followers are accountable. Yet, since this relational responsibility is our reciprocal relational response, it is not to be undertaken apart from the relationship. That is, *synesis*, *syniemi*, or any other interpretive response, must be engaged in ongoing dialogue with God. Functionally this means the reading,

interpretation (exegesis) and involvement with Scripture must always be engaged with the Holy Spirit who mediates the relationship (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). Our relational responsibility only defines the reciprocal relational work ongoingly engaged together with the Spirit, and thus the Spirit's presence and function are certainly not to be forgotten, diminished or minimalized in this relational process. Such involvement also means that the Spirit needs to be pursued as the ultimate determiner for knowing and understanding God, which includes transforming our response for the new creation, as our study will discuss.

As Jesus is received and responded to with this involvement in relationship, what will emerge increasingly in this study is the following. Jesus is the most significant basis for knowing and understanding God, both theologically and functionally. This basis is most significant in two ways, which have a sequential sense as well as a reflexive sense:

1. Jesus provides *the hermeneutical key* that opens the ontological door through which the Spirit informs us of the triune God.
2. Jesus also provides *the functional key* that opens the relational door to the ontology of the whole of God, the necessary way through which the Spirit transforms us to intimate relationship with the Father bonded together as the whole of God's family (church and new creation) constituted in the Trinity.

These two keys Jesus provides need to be understood as both theological and functional since these aspects should always remain together—though being functional has often not been part of the theological task.

We will need to grasp in this study how the person is seen, related to and involved in the relationships of the whole of God throughout God's self-disclosures in Jesus' sanctified life and practice. This will help piece together the *who* and *what* of the whole of God, which will then engage by *what* and *how* the whole of God does relationships. To reduce, diminish, or minimalize any of this has relational consequences, which this study will examine.

The biblical interpretations for this study then necessarily must be theological. This could be problematic if one's interpretation is dominated by an existing theology one brings to the Bible, particularly to the Word embodied. While no one is without theological presuppositions, how we use them is crucial. We can be chastened in this engagement with the following perspective: *theology should not be the task of systematically informing us about God but about establishing the coherence of God's self-revelation vulnerably extended to us for relationship, so that we can intimately know the triune God and experience life together as the whole of God's family in likeness of the Trinity.*

As the hermeneutical and functional keys, Jesus' self-disclosures open up and take us to the Father (Jn 1:18; 14:6; 17:6), and thus to the whole of God, the Trinity. This is not static information but dynamically functional to "dwell with" us for relationship with the Trinity (Jn 14:23, cf. Rom 8:15), and to "dwell in" us as God's family together (Jn 17:21-23,26, cf. Eph 2:22). Jesus engages us in this distinct trinitarian relational context and process which intimately involves us in this relational progression to the whole of God—a relational progression which involves us further and deeper into relational communion with the Trinity. To stop in this relational progression to focus mainly on Jesus is to become non-biblically christocentric, thus not "dwelling with and in" the Trinity.

Basing this theological and functional whole in Jesus' self-disclosures is both a necessary and sufficient process to formulate a complete Christology (without reduction) functional for the whole of our life and practice. This Christology does not function simply to inform our life and practice but to transform us to "the image of his Son" as family together (Rom 8:29). Therefore, the vulnerable life and practice of the person Jesus are the necessary keys to this study; and this Christology (without being overly christocentric) becomes the primary theological starting point, while vitally integrated with a relationally functional pneumatology (discussed in chapter nine), from which emerges: a full soteriology (including not only saved *from* but more so saved *to*, discussed in chapter six), an ecclesiology of the whole (without reductionist substitutes, discussed in chapter eight), a missiology predicated on the whole (thus deepening missions, discussed in chapter seven), an eschatology of relational conclusion of this relational progression (not events about the Kingdom, discussed in chapter ten), and the related aspects of each of these. All the above theological areas converge to serve as functions of the whole of God's thematic action, which integrates our discussion, thus providing the necessary theological coherence for our life and practice to function with, in and for the whole of God.

Theology, then, and all interpretations of Scripture related to it need to converge and to be dynamically functional. For theology, and its interpretations, to function dynamically and not be reduced, it must engage the trinitarian relational context of family and needs to involve the trinitarian relational process of family love—just as Jesus incarnated vulnerably in his sanctified life and practice, full of grace and truth (covenant love and faithfulness).

For a functional theology to give coherence to all the theological aspects of Jesus' self-disclosures in our discussion to follow, I suggest this working definition:

Christian theology is the biblically informed study of God providing the context and process for practice to intimately know the whole of God constituted in the Trinity, thus functionally reflecting the vulnerable disclosure of Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life—the relational Way for the deeper epistemological Truth to experience the ontological Life of the whole of the triune God.

As the basis for this study, this is the door Jesus opens to the whole of God through which we (individually and corporately as the church) must enter together with the Spirit in order to be Jesus' followers (in relational progression) as the new creation in the eschatological plan of the whole of God. For this purpose Jesus sanctified himself in vulnerable life and practice in order that we too may be truly sanctified in our life and practice.

The Purpose of This Study

We must be aware of not reducing the theology of sanctification to a static attribute by which to categorize a person in a condition or identity as "holy." This is not the purpose of this study, nor its direction. The process of a person or some aspect of that person being sanctified implies undergoing a significant change. What this change involves directs us to the purpose of Jesus' sanctified life and practice; and the

significance of his purpose always directs us to relationship—first and foremost with the whole of God, then with the whole of each other together as the church and the new creation, and then with the whole of all creation.

When the Word became flesh, the glory of the One and Only, who was made vulnerable to us, is his divine-human person. His disclosures as both Divine as well as human are for relationship, yet involve different aspects of the dynamics of relationship. On the one hand, this second Person of the Trinity communicated directly to us “in the face of Christ,” and the triune God is disclosed vulnerably by “Christ who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4,6)—relationally disclosing who, what and how God is, all for the purpose of relationship together. While the humanity of Jesus is certainly involved in this relational action from God, there is another aspect of this relational dynamic necessary to understand to complete the whole function of his divine-human person, and thus the purpose for Jesus’ sanctified life and purpose.

Since God’s revelation and truth are for relationship, what God communicates and discloses is never for unilateral relationship and to be merely received by us. For this specific relational process to be fully engaged and for its relational dynamic to be complete, there must (*dei* by its nature, not from obligation or compulsion) be compatible response back from us. On the other hand, then, the humanity of Jesus also enacts this response back to God in order to both fulfill this response to replace our past failure as well as help us understand who, what and how we now need to be; this was imperative so that we can complete the relational dynamic necessary for ongoing relationship together.¹⁰ In other words, the humanity of Jesus also functions to become that necessary response back to God to complete the relationship (“sanctify myself”) in order that we can respond back to God in the same way. Yet, merely following Jesus’ example/model is not sufficient response back to God because the Father wants us “to conform [*symmorphos*, be together with in form] to the image [*eikon*] of his Son” (Rom 8:29), “who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). The Father does not divide the divine-human person Jesus; he is wholly Son. And how the Son responded to and involved himself with the Father in the Trinity is also the response the Father expects us to conform to in relationship together as family in the whole of God.

“Sanctified Christology” is specialized in its focus on Jesus’ function in fulfilling this relational purpose for us. By his sanctified life and practice declared in his formative family prayer (Jn 17:19), Jesus does the relational work necessary to constitute his followers (and their relational response back) in the specific relational context and process of the whole of God. The whole of God disclosed is both triune and holy, thus Jesus is constituting us both in the relationship together necessary *to be whole* (in communion with the *life* of the Trinity and in likeness of the *practice* of the Trinity) as well as in the function of this relationship together only *on God’s terms* (holy and Uncommon, thus nonnegotiable and irreducible).

To be constituted in this specific relational context and process of the whole of God, then, is for all Jesus’ followers (both individually and together as church) to function in the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. This is life and practice on God’s terms, sanctified “from above”; and this must be clearly distinguished from life and practice of relationship with God on our

¹⁰ For a similar examination of this relationship but from a conceptual perspective of dialogic process, see Alistair MacFadyen *The Call to Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 45-47.

terms, reduced “from below,” however unintentional or inadvertent. This involves the need for change—redemptive change.

In the vulnerable incarnation of the Son, Jesus’ sanctified life and practice provides us with the irreducible trinitarian relational context in which this relationship needs to take place; and by engaging God in it Jesus also constitutes us in the nonnegotiable trinitarian relational process by which this relationship needs to function. Therefore, Jesus’ sanctified life and practice is *sufficient* for us to understand how God does relationship and what our response in relationship with God needs to be; and, further and deeper, grasping Jesus’ sanctified life and practice and embracing him in it is *necessary* to experience this relationship as a functional reality and experiential truth. “Sanctified Christology” integrates Jesus’ sanctified life and practice to be functional dynamically for practice—not to *do* something as his mere disciples but to *be* the Father’s very own in relationship together in the whole of God’s family.

In constituting his followers in relationship only on God’s terms, Jesus is not so much focused on defining a position vis-à-vis human culture, though functioning on God’s terms will certainly result in such a position(s),¹¹ which will be discussed in chapter seven. More importantly, rather than his followers being primarily defined by human contextualization, Jesus establishes the ontology of their primary identity (who, what and how they are) in the holy and triune God. Sanctified life and practice emerges from Jesus’ divine context, not our human context—though it certainly is involved *into* the human context and for the human condition. The whole of this process involves Jesus’ “call to be whole,” which then defines and is conjoined with his commission to be sent not merely to the world but *into* (*eis*, as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:18) the world—that is, “sent to be whole” to be relationally involved *into* the world for the world to know and to experience the whole of God (as Jesus further prayed, Jn 17:21-23), to be discussed in later chapters.

In response to the Father’s desires (Rom 8:29), by conforming to the likeness of his Son, and thus the image of God, we start to function in the who, what and how of the image of God in which we were created. As our discussion will unfold, we need Jesus’ sanctified life and practice to define, direct and enable our response back to God to complete the relational dynamic for the intimate relational outcome Jesus continues on to ask of the Father in his formative family prayer (hear Jn 17:20-26). The fulfillment of this prayer is the functional purpose of this study.

This will necessarily involve: redefining how we tend to see the person and how we define ourselves; reprioritizing relationships and refocusing the prevailing way we do relationships; which then makes imperative reforming our conventional practices of discipleship, reworking our ecclesiology and transforming how we do church; consequently, deepening our missiology and making our mission whole. These are issues requiring redemptive change which we can expect to confront us in Jesus’ sanctified life and practice, and therefore can anticipate our need to address in the discussion ahead. And the Spirit is present to relationally work with us through each step to its completion.

There is also an auxiliary yet secondary purpose this study may possibly serve. The relational epistemic process used in this study to engage Jesus’ sanctified life and practice might also be considered a “theological interpretation of Scripture.” In his

¹¹ For a discussion on various positions in relation to human culture, see H. Richard Niebuhr *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2001).

introduction to theological interpretation, Kevin Vanhoozer defines such reading of Scripture simply as coming to hear God's word and to know God better.¹² If the reading in this study truly engages this process, then God will be heard and responded to. Vanhoozer goes on to say: "The strongest claim to be made for theological interpretation is that only such reading ultimately does justice to the subject matter of the text itself. ...To read the biblical texts theologically is to read the texts as they wish to be read, and as they should be read in order to do them justice."¹³ If the reading which follows fulfills this relational epistemic process, then this study will serve to help close the modern gap between biblical studies and theology—the fragmentation both between and within these disciplines. Such fragmentation is reflective of reductionism and the relational condition "to be apart" from the whole of God (cf. Gen 2:18), to which God's thematic action since creation has responded, acting ultimately in the vulnerable incarnation of Jesus' sanctified life and practice.

The Structure of This Study

While God's thematic action since creation and throughout the incarnation have a distinct flow and common direction, this study of Jesus will not have a linear direction (e.g., from the manger to the Cross) to give it a sequential format; nor will it have a systematic organization (e.g., of different aspects of Jesus' life or teachings). Yet this study does have a necessary relational progression in which Jesus' sanctified life and practice takes his followers.¹⁴ This relational progression will provide the implicit structure of what follows.

Nevertheless, as in the nature of relationships, relationship is reflexive (going back and forth between the subjects in give and take, even up and down or in and out) but never merely linear; and a systematic relationship would not have the qualitative significance to be whole much less be a satisfying experience, though such a relationship is easier to control and maintain a comfort level of vulnerability. Linear and systematic relationships are reductions of God's design and purpose for relationships. And we cannot impose these frameworks on the main issues of his practice to be discussed: (1) the who, what and how Jesus presented of his Self, (2) the quality of his communication, and (3) the depth level of relationship Jesus engaged. These issues do not emerge in linear or systematic fashion.

The reflexive nature of relationships will reflect the course of our discussion in this study: not linear or systematic, going back and forth, with certain matters being repeated not only for emphasis but due to their recurring involvement in the relational context and process to help us understand in particular what is important to God. I hope this reflexive interaction will become evident in the progression of this study, and that any lack of linear and systematic structure will not be a source of distraction or confusion. In addition, when I discuss a narrative, I will often use the present tense

¹² Vanhoozer, ed. *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 19-25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴ For a full discussion of this relational progression, see my study *The Relational Progression: A Relational Theology of Discipleship* (Discipleship Study, 2004), online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

instead of the past tense—and at times both in the same context. This is intentional to help us be more involved in an action, not merely historical observers. As we all work cooperatively with the Spirit in this relational process, I anticipate Jesus and the Spirit will take us further and deeper in our life and practice, individually and together as his church—maybe even more so than we would desire.

While the existing gap between biblical studies and theology needs to be closed, more urgently the connection lacking between theology and/or biblical studies and church practice needs to be fully reestablished. Church leaders are often left “on hold” with little (or no) understanding of these disciplines’ application, or even relevance, for real life and practice. This disconnection happens routinely when theological engagement distances itself from church practice by not insuring that theology/biblical interpretation is functional—dynamically functional in the relational context and process of the church, which then by its nature must be trinitarian as the Trinity functions in the whole of God. Any reductions of this relational context and process, which are necessary for connection both with God and with each other, render theology to epistemological illusions and church practice to ontological simulations—both overlapping in the sum of the substitutes from reductionism.

The wholeness of function in likeness of the Trinity must (*dei*, again, by its nature, not out of obligation or compulsion) find its outworking in the life and practice of the church. This is who, what and how we are together when our life and practice functions in the relationships necessary to be whole, the whole of God’s family.

To serve this purpose and help us function in actual church practice both within the church itself and in its surrounding context, as well as into the world, the discussion in each chapter of this study will include a section specifically toward meeting this functional purpose. This involves directly integrating our theology to function dynamically in church life and practice. *How* we do church and *who* does it and *what* we do church for are basic to who, what and how we are as Jesus’ followers, and thus are crucial to what follows in this study.

Moreover, every aspect that has been touched on or referred to in this Introduction will be included in this conversation on the theological and functional implications of the whole of *the Word*—with the hopeful conclusion for wholeness in theology and practice.

Chapter 1

The Person Presented

The presentation of one's self in everyday life can be understood as a composite process shaping the person presented as the result of two influences from (1) the person's surrounding context and (2) how that person desires to be seen by others in those contexts.¹⁵ There is likely tension between these two until a person establishes an identity compatible to the surrounding context. The person Jesus presented certainly was not immune to those influences and that tension. Yet how much these two sources of influence shaped the Self in the presentation of Jesus remains for many a christological problem. I will not directly address that problem but will attempt to exegete the biblical narratives for the person Jesus presents in his life and practice.

In this chapter the primary issue of how his person is to be defined emerges to help us address the fundamental issue of what defines our person. This critical issue of the ontology of the person underlies the first of three major issues for all practice:

1. the significance of the self presented, along with
2. the quality of one's communication and
3. the depth level of relationship one engages.

These are issues of importance throughout this study.

The Emerging Person

Revisiting Jesus as a boy at the temple (see Lk 2:41-52, and our earlier discussion on *synesis*), we get our initial glimpse of his self and what shaped the person he presented. Just prior to entering adulthood (beginning at thirteen in Jewish culture), this boy of twelve emerged in an improbable manner as a person distinct from his sociocultural, religious, kinship group, household and parental contexts. This is not to say that Jesus' identity formation was independent of those influences but to establish that his person was not defined by them.

When Jesus' parents finally realized he was missing from their caravan returning home from Jerusalem, they went back to find him at the temple. This boy was AWOL (absent without leave/permission), and his parents clearly let him know what was custom and legitimately expected of him (v.48). Yet, while respecting them and affirming his involvement in their surrounding context (v.51), Jesus simply asked them the questions (maybe in rabbinic tradition as a method for further knowledge and understanding): "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (v.49). Hearing "had to be in my Father's house" probably was shocking to them—especially for Joseph in a normative patriarchal family. Thus it would be reasonable that "they did not understand..." (*syniemi*, v.50)—after all, at this stage they had insufficient pieces to put together to grasp the person Jesus presented (cf. Jn 2:1-5, to be discussed

¹⁵ For a classic social psychological study to help understand the latter part of this process, see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959).

shortly). And apparently Jesus was patiently accommodating of them since he didn't press the issue, at least at this stage (cf. v.51 and later in Jn 2:6-8).

What they could not learn and understand of Jesus' person, however, we can grasp and be accountable for. When Jesus said "I had to be in my Father's house," he was not identifying being in a certain place (like church today) nor merely defining certain things to do (like serving has become). These easily become reductionist substitutes (cf. Mt 21:12-16, to be discussed later). This interaction reveals that even before adulthood Jesus asserted his person and declared who and what he is. How so?

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

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

In spite of all the things Jesus did—by which we usually define him—it was this relationship that defined him (Jn 10:38b; 14:20a; 17:21). As Jesus presented, "*who* his person is" was not Joseph and Mary's son but the Son of his Father together in the Trinity; and "*what* his person is" was not defined by human contexts nor by what he did in those contexts. To be defined primarily by human contexts and what one does in those contexts would be the result of reductionism. Even before adulthood, in the midst of tension with reductionist influence, the whole of Jesus' person emerged.

Though his parents didn't understand the person presented vulnerably before them, we are accountable to *syniemi*. And the further implication of his person for the ontology of our person and our practice of personhood is the functional need to address the critical issues of *how* we are being defined and *what* is defining us. In the incarnation,

the person presented is inherent to who, what and how God is and thus fundamental to the ongoing functional purpose of Jesus' sanctified life and practice—a person of nothing less and no substitutes. Yet reductionism ongoingly challenged the person Jesus presented, which we need to understand clearly before continuing.

Reductionism Made Explicit

First of all, it should be understood that reductionism is always positioned against wholeness, the whole. It has no significance without the presence of the whole. Reductionism thus challenges the ontology of the whole person, seeking to redefine the person based on secondary aspects (parts) from quantitative outer-in functions such as what the person does and has—without the qualitative significance of the heart signifying the whole person. This reduced person then functions in ontological simulation of the whole person and thus interacts with others (particularly God) apart from the qualitative significance of the relationships necessary together to be whole (with the triune God). In reductionism, the underlying assumptions of the person and of their relationships affected in this process are based on incomplete or false understanding, which in effect are lies serving as epistemological illusions (specifically of the Truth of God). The origin of such lies, and thus of reductionism, is understood clearly in three pivotal interactions with “the presence of the whole” following his baptism.

While in the desert fasting for forty days, Jesus, “full of the Holy Spirit...led by the Spirit” (Lk 4:1, signifying the trinitarian relational context and process), is hungry (Mt 4:2) and encounters Satan. In these three interrelated interactions (temptations, tests), the importance of heart function for the whole person and its significance in relationship with the whole of God definitively emerge in what are basic relational tests. Matthew's Gospel (4:1-11) has a different order than Luke's (4:1-13) but we will examine Luke's order for its progression in this relational process.

First Relational Test:

In the first test (Lk 4:3), Satan's reductionist approach is apparent in what he tries to get Jesus to focus on: stones to bread. His test may appear to be about food and the circumstance of Jesus' hunger, or even a test of Jesus' deity (“if you are the Son of God...”) to prove what Satan certainly already knew. These initial words (“if you are”), however, challenged not the factual truth of Jesus' whole person, the certainty of which Satan is incapable to diminish. Rather Satan's words seek to diminish the functional integrity of the presence of this truth by trying specifically to confuse the basis on which Jesus defines his person. Satan ingeniously uses this moment, influenced by Jesus' circumstances, to get at something deeper and more consequential. More implicitly then, Satan is trying to get Jesus to see his own person in a reductionist way, which Jesus exposes by responding: “a person [*anthropos*, man or woman, which implies all of us] does not live on bread alone” (4:4).

Since the tendency is to look at Jesus' response apart from its context, the usual interpretation of his words is merely to prioritize the spiritual aspect of life over the physical (material), thus inadvertently substituting dualism (e.g., from Plato) for the whole person. That would be too simplistic and inadequate to meet the challenge of

Satan's test. Jesus was neither reducing the whole of life nor the person into different aspects (parts) with the spiritual at the top of the priority list. By his use of reductionism, however, that is exactly how Satan was trying to get Jesus to see his person and function accordingly—which included the reduction of turning stone to bread as only a mere quantitative miracle without the qualitative significance of the person it points to (the purpose of miraculous signs). Satan was trying to reduce the whole of Jesus' person to only a part of himself because he knew the relational consequence this would have.

Satan cultivates this reductionism with the influential lie, which prevails as the human norm today: *the need and importance to see ourselves and therefore to define the person by what we do and have, as well as to define our life and practice by situations and circumstances*. This perceptual-interpretive framework gives priority to the parts (or aspects) of the person and relationships which functionally make up ontological simulation and epistemological illusion. The consequence of this process becomes a life and practice with reductionist substitutes focused on secondary matter, not the primacy of the whole person and the relationships necessary to be whole.

When we define our person according to this lie, we also define others (including Jesus, to be discussed shortly) in the same way. Furthermore, the truth of God is nullified by this lie because in our life and practice we function as if God also sees us and defines us in the same way—which will be seen shortly in relation to the Truth. As our whole person gets reduced, our life and practice gets reduced to situations and circumstances. When we focus on situations and circumstances, Satan effectively takes our focus away from the primacy of relationships. Then we function in all of our relationships (particularly with God) based on these secondary criteria instead of the importance of the whole person and the primacy of intimate relationships.

* * *

This makes explicit the two major goals of Satan (seen initially in the creation narrative, cf. Gen 3:1-7):

1. To reduce the whole of the person, specifically by a quantitative (outer-in) focus on what we do and have, thus functionally separating or distancing us from the qualitative (inner-out) importance of the heart signifying the whole person.
2. To separate or distance us from functioning in the relationships necessary to be whole, specifically by our function without heart, thus without our whole person, in order to diminish (or prevent) intimate involvement and deeper relationship with God—the reduction of relationship of the whole of God.

Satan initiated reductionism for life and practice based on lies (e.g., false assumptions, inadequate methodologies, incomplete practices), which he generates (as the author of lies, Jn 8:44) for this twofold purpose. In Satan's challenge of God's whole, he uses the process of reductionism therefore to effectively formulate two influential competing substitutes to accomplish his goals: one, an *ontological simulation* of the whole of God but without the qualitative significance of the heart, and, two, an *epistemological illusion* of the truth of God but without really knowing the triune God in intimate relationship. Consequently, Satan is ongoingly involved both in the work of reductionism as well as in *counter-relational work*.

* * *

We need to understand Satan’s main challenge to our life and practice. Yet, we will not grasp the influence of his presence without qualitative awareness of and relational focus on “the presence of the whole.”

Jesus connects us to the whole—for which there is no substitute—by the latter half of his response to Satan’s first challenge: “. . .but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (recorded only in Mt 4:4). Rather than focus on situations and circumstances to define a person’s life and limit that person, Jesus demonstrates the need to *focus relationally* by sharing these words from Deuteronomy 8:3. The original OT words were given “to teach” (*yada*, to understand personally, to know intimately) the Israelites in their hearts (8:2,4) that reductionist life focuses on situations and circumstances (parts like food in the desert), whereas, in contrast, wholeness in life involves the relational meaning of “on every word. . .” These words cannot be reduced to mere truths, propositions or beliefs, nor limited to the “spiritual” realm; that is, these words cannot be disembodied. They are “every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (8:3). “Mouth” (*peh*, also used as an idiom signifying direct communication with Moses “face to face,” Num 12:8) signifies direct communication from God—a communicative act which is in a relational context involving a relational process of intimate connection in the same way that the incarnate Word vulnerably discloses (*phaneroo*, not *apokalypto*) his whole person for his followers to experience as a relational reality.

Thus the person Jesus presents to Satan in this relational test is unequivocally making evident in his sanctified life and practice “the presence of the whole.” And as Jesus clearly defines by these words, the whole of God constituted in the Trinity determines (top-down causation) the whole person and the relationships in life necessary to be whole.

Second Relational Test:

As this encounter continues, the reductionist occupation and its relational consequence emerge in the second relational test (Lk 4:5-7). As an interrelated extension of the first test, Satan further offers status, authority/power, privilege and possessions to Jesus to use as a means to better define his person based on the quantitative criteria of reductionism (used in the first test). Modern scenarios of this offer would involve areas of education, vocation, economic security or even the “possession” of certain relationships. Yet the pursuit of these reductionist substitutes comes with a cost that intentionally or unintentionally compromises the integrity of who and what the person is, and thus how that whole person functions in life and practice; this cost includes the relational consequence of less direct qualitative involvement, and thus intimacy, with God. This compromise and relational consequence were overtly presented to Jesus by Satan in order for us to fully understand the reductionism intrinsic to “if you worship me” (4:7).

What is overtly presented to Jesus, however, is rarely presented as explicitly to us. If this compromise and relational consequence underlying this pursuit of reductionist substitutes are more obscure for us today, it reflects how Satan tweaks some truths with another major lie: *to have any of these resources will make me a better person, or at least enable me to accomplish more—even with the intention, for example, to better serve God and others.* While there is some truth that such resources can be helpful toward this purpose, in this process of reductionism we see the genius of Satan to blur the distinction

between truth and lie. His influence is not accounted for when we give priority to defining the person by secondary aspects of what one does and has over the whole person—and consequently do not distinguish between the importance of the qualitative and the secondary significance of the quantitative, both in our person and our relationships.

In this second relational test, Jesus counters Satan’s challenge with “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only” (4:8). We tend to hear his words merely as a rule of faith, which we either perceive with only quantitative significance (e.g., in the activity of what we do) or often take for granted with their familiarity (e.g., as an obvious expectation or given obligation). Certainly we would worship God over Satan and serving Satan is not an option, that is, as long as these choices are always straightforward in our situations and circumstances, as it was for Jesus in this second test. We need to grasp the significance of Jesus’ second response when he declared “worship” and “serve” in this response. Because Jesus is again connecting us to the whole, he wants us to focus relationally on the context and ongoing process these terms provide. “Worship” and “serve” are not about “doing something” before and for God but about the qualitative relational significance of *being involved* with God in intimate relationship. His response is not about a mere rule of faith but about the relational imperative necessary for relationship together. Jesus is defining as well as exercising the relational work necessary to be whole in order to negate Satan’s counter-relational work that reduces both the whole person from the heart and the intimate relationship necessary to be with the whole of God.

Satan does not necessarily displace all the forms of worshipping and serving God, he only substitutes their practice with ontological simulation and epistemological illusion. He has no need to contend with these practices if they have no qualitative and relational significance. When the qualitative whole of God (namely, God’s heart and intimately relational nature) becomes secondary in our practice, we shift to the practice of reductionist substitutes for the whole. While this shift may not change our activity level related to God—but could even increase the activity—reductionist practices invariably create a shift in the relationship by displacing the functional centrality of God (not in doctrine or as the object of worship and servicing) with the relationship now functionally focused on us, that is, where the parts have priority over the whole. This becomes increasingly an inadvertent process of practicing relationship with God on our terms, which by implication is bottom-up causation. This is the major issue which emerges in Jesus’ third relational test.

Third Relational Test:

These three interrelated tests in Luke’s order reveal a progression in Satan’s counter-relational work and the comprehensive impact of reductionism. Since, at this stage, Satan has been unable to reduce Jesus’ person by distancing him from his heart or to divert him from intimate relationship with the Father, he now seeks to disrupt directly how that relationship functions, though in quite the opposite way one might expect (Lk 4:9-12).

The dramatics of this scene at the highest point of the Jerusalem temple should not detract from the important relational work going on here. Satan quotes from the Scriptures, yet not in the convention of reductionist proof-texting (4:10,11). He uses this

quote (from Ps 91) to challenge Jesus to claim a promise from the Father—a proposal suggested commonly by many in church practice. His challenge, however, is not about building trust and taking God at his word. We have to focus deeply on relationship with God and what Satan is trying to do to the relationship.

Jesus counters Satan with the response: “do not put the Lord your God to the test” (*ekpeirazo*, test to the limits, see how far it can go, 4:12). How does this work? Sometimes the dynamics in relationships get complicated or confusing, and Satan uses reductionism to compound the relational process. God certainly wants to fulfill his promises to us; yet, we must go deeper than the typical perception of this process which puts it in a quantitative box of reductionism, thus imposing a shift on the relationship apart from the whole of God—and the functional centrality of God. We always need the whole (and the context of God’s big picture beyond ourself) to keep in focus that God fulfills his promises only *on God’s terms* (for the big picture). If Jesus tried to evoke his Father’s promise in the manner Satan suggested, then he would be determining the relationship on his own terms (with the focus shifted to him). This is the real nature of this subtle relational test Jesus refused to do and the ongoing underlying temptation Satan presents to all of us: to test the limits of God and how much we can determine or even control (directly or indirectly) the relationship on our terms, even unintentionally. The false assumption here, of course, is the crucial lie, which functionally (not theologically) pervades our life and practice: *that the relationship is negotiable and that God accepts terms for it other than his own.*

These relational tests continue for Jesus in one form or another as the person he vulnerably discloses is now further presented to others. Yet this person Jesus presents is always whole and only for relationship, that is, on his terms. Consequently, reductionism and its subtle influence and substitutes will also persist to challenge Jesus, even to follow him in would-be disciples and in the early disciples themselves. Nevertheless, “the presence of the whole” always exposes Satan’s counter-relational work intrinsic to reductionism; and Jesus’ sanctified life and practice will clearly make evident for our life and practice how to partake of and participate in the whole of God. Sanctified Christology formulates the relational context and process Jesus makes imperative as his life and practice extends out.

The Person in Practice

After his interaction in the temple at age twelve, Jesus does not reappear in the biblical narratives until well into adulthood at around age thirty. This may suggest that he was isolated prior to that; perhaps this is true in terms of certain roles and functions he performed in his public ministry. Yet we do have indication that during this period he continued to extend his involvement in relationships, both with God and with others (see Lk 2:52). One thing for certain is the incarnated life of this person of the Trinity was not in a vacuum. The person Jesus presented was always vulnerably practiced in human contexts, in direct human interaction, in public (in contrast to isolated in private). His sanctified life and practice demonstrates the nature and extent of his involvement.

As we go back to Jesus' baptism, this may raise more curious thought about his needing to be sanctified—thoughts raised at the very beginning of this study. Yet his was not the same baptism that John the Baptist called for (Mt 3:1-2, Lk 3:3), because he had not sinned and did not need to repent. By his action Jesus fully identifies with those who have repented and are prepared to receive the kingdom of God. And his baptism makes evident to them that the person he presents is whole, complete and thus can be counted on to be who, what and how he is (Mt 3:15)—that is, the Messiah, the Son of God.

Jesus therefore presents to them publicly in his baptism the kingdom of God (cf. Mt 12:28)—more specifically, the family of God, as the Trinity converges openly in function in this moment of experiential truth (Mt 3:16-17). In the full significance of his baptism, Jesus discloses the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love (“my Son whom I love”), as well as demonstrates the redemptive nature of the relational progression necessary for his followers to the whole of God. Jesus' sanctified life and practice is only for this purpose “so that they too may be truly sanctified” in life and practice.

In Human Contexts:

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

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

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

Jesus' response to Mary is no longer filial when he addresses Mary simply as “woman” (*gyne*, general term for woman, married or not). This redefines the nature of Jesus' involvement with Mary from the human context to the trinitarian relational context of family. Thus, though Jesus' response is no longer filial, it is nevertheless distinctly familial; and this distinction is specific to the relational context which defined his person. As witnessed also in the boyhood episode, this interaction reflects the tension between the contexts defining Mary and Jesus respectively. This tension is heard in his question “why do you involve me?” (Jn 2:4), which is rendered more clearly “what is that to you and to me?” Assuming Mary was still defined primarily by the human context, she gave priority to this gathering and acted in obligation to communal responsibility in support of

the wedding hosts. We can say that Mary merely acted in who and what she is defined by that context. And this significance was not lost to Jesus in “what is that to you.” He clearly wanted Mary to know, however, what his priorities were and what and who defined him: “my time has not yet come”—his Father determines that (Jn 8:28,29; 14:31). Consequently, “what is that to me” cannot be defined by “what is that to you.” As most of his interactions reveal—which would include involving Jesus in what we ask for in many of our prayers—the person Jesus presented is continuously being challenged to redefine himself. In response, Jesus continues to address the two critical issues about the presentation of his person: *how* his person is defined and *what* defines his person.

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

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

How does his miracle fit this sociocultural situation? Did Jesus merely misuse his power in a rather insignificant situation with no apparent purpose? Or did Jesus diminish his purpose by this miracle? Taken out of context, either explanation can be made. Yet, given our discussion of the person Jesus presented, how is this miracle in this situation (about wine at a prolonged wedding reception—commonly up to seven days—perhaps in overindulgent celebration since they ran out of wine) significant for who, what and how Jesus is?

In terms of the wine this really had nothing to do with the person Jesus presented; essentially, the situation was about “old wine” while Jesus was “new wine” (cf. Lk 5:37-39). The miracle itself also had nothing to do with the whole of Jesus’ person, that is, defining his person by what he did. Biblical miracles are not an end in themselves, used as a reductionist substitute for self-definition, though that is a prevailing perception and

practice, even in Jesus' time (cf. Jn 2:23-25, to be discussed shortly). Miracles are "miraculous signs" (*semeion*) with a spiritual end and purpose, which lead to something out of and beyond themselves; that is, they are indicators, "fingermarks" of God. Thus, a miracle is not valuable so much for itself as for the person it reflects, just as Jesus described and practiced (see Jn 10:38).

Since this biblical narrative is the first recorded miraculous sign of Jesus (Jn 2:11), this happened early in his public ministry and in the disciples' involvement with him. I suggest Jesus used this situation to take the opportunity to build further and deeper relationship with his disciples. Given that Jesus did not define his person by what he did, the miracle was not to draw attention to himself nor for the benefit of the general public (cf. Jn 2:9)—as if *apokalypso* were his purpose. This *semeion* was a disclosure of his whole person presented to the disciples for relationship together—as *phaneroo* indicates in "He thus revealed his glory" (v.11). While it may be clear how disclosing "his glory" could have helped the disciples theologically, what is the functional significance of "his glory" which would take them further and deeper into relationship together?

With His Glory, Nothing Less and No Substitutes:

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

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

The concept of "the glory of God" denotes the revelation of God's being, nature and presence to us. In the incarnation the vulnerable disclosures of Jesus' whole person engaged us with God's glory—that is, God's being, nature, and presence with us: the who (being), the what (nature) and the how (presence) of God. Who, what and how Jesus *is* vulnerably discloses who, what and how God *is*—that is, *phaneroo* God's glory for relationship. Thus, the who, what and how of Jesus is the hermeneutical key to the ontology of the glory of God (cf. 2 Cor 4:6). And the who, what and how of the person presented in Jesus' sanctified life and practice discloses the functional involvement of God's being, nature and presence with us. Briefly (more to be discussed later) the person of Jesus presented openly disclosed:

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

All of God’s being, nature and presence function for relationship together.

That which is God’s glory is “his glory.” Who, what and how God is is who, what and how Jesus is (Jn 10:38b; 12:45; 14:9). Yet this is not about the mere exhibit (*apokalypto*) by Jesus of the ontology of God; and any Christology which is embedded only in this for foundational purpose is insufficient and incomplete. The person Jesus presents (*phaneroo*) is the vulnerable incarnation of the functional whole of God in relationship. Disclosing the whole of God in relationship is *the incarnation principle* of “nothing less and no substitutes”; a complete Christology must also be “nothing less and no substitutes.” This is who, what and how Jesus is and “his glory” disclosed to his disciples functionally for further and deeper relationship. Because Jesus vulnerably extended (the *how*) his whole person with heart (the *who*)—“nothing less and no substitutes”—to them for intimate relationship (the *what*), the narrative of the wedding concludes with “his disciples put their faith in him” (Jn 2:11). That is, “his disciples could respond back and open themselves to him in further trust and deeper involvement”—not based on what Jesus did (a miracle) but based on his whole person whom Jesus vulnerably presented to them.

It is vital to grasp from this interaction in this particular context at the wedding in Cana, that the presentation of “his glory” was contingent on this incarnation principle of “nothing less and no substitutes.” In other words, the person Jesus presented—whether with Mary, in the sociocultural situation, or with the Father—was the function only of his whole person because Jesus maintained in sanctified life and practice the integrity of who, what and how he is—“nothing less and no substitutes,” i.e., without reduction or redefinition. This functionally involves both:

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

As Jesus experienced, the pressure to be redefined by reductionist influences is ongoing. Consequently, Jesus was vulnerably responsive to someone for relationship only on his terms, though he was vulnerably involved with anyone. Later in Jerusalem, many persons believed in him because of the miracles he was doing. Despite their response to him, “Jesus would not entrust himself to them” (see Jn 2:23-25). Their response was not to his whole person (“his glory”) and for relationship on his terms. For Jesus to respond back to them would have necessitated redefining himself by their reductionist terms, which would not have involved relationship further and deeper with the whole of God.

Jesus never compromised who, what and how he is for the sake of gaining followers (cf. Jn 6:25-66, to be discussed later in this chapter). These were not the kind of followers he came to call.

Jesus' sanctified life and practice addresses the issue of being able to distinguish a person's source of validation, confirmation and affirmation. What is our primary source of these and thus where do we functionally entrust the ontology of our person and the personhood we practice: the human or Divine? Moreover, Jesus' unwillingness to respond back to these so-called followers is a vital distinction of leadership in contrast to those who build a following on reductionist terms, albeit with good intentions. This further helps us understand in our life and practice the difference between what I call "*discipleshipisms*" (the reductionist alternatives prevailing in church practice today) and what is the authentic discipleship of Jesus' call to "Follow me."

His Person Presented to New Disciples

The function of Jesus' sanctified life and practice established the greater context of his whole person—a specific relational context beyond any human context in which Jesus seeks to involve his followers, define his disciples and help them function. The person Jesus presented from this greater relational context is made vulnerable in human contexts as his whole person is extended to others to "Follow me." Yet his whole person, this relational context and the relational process involved are not explicit in the biblical narratives of each disciple responding to his call. They are more explicit in the narratives of those who refused his call (e.g., see Jn 6:22-66, Mk 10:17-22, Lk 9:59-62, to be discussed later in this chapter), which may suggest the reason for their refusal. How then do we understand the early disciples' apparent immediate reception of and response to Jesus' call?

The initial introduction to Jesus came from John the Baptist to two of his disciples, who then followed Jesus (Jn 1:35-39). While this was an introduction and not a call, Jesus engaged them and responded to their rather indirect question "where are you staying?" "Come and you will see" was not about seeing a place but about fellowship together and "seeing" the person Jesus presented; they spent that day with him, which was likely the rest of the evening since it was 4 pm. Whatever impression this made on Andrew (one of the two with John the son of Zebedee possibly the other), he introduced Simon (Peter) to Jesus the Messiah (Jn 1:40-42). Their interest was about messianic hope and desires to have the promise of Messiah fulfilled. It was not until after this period of introduction (however long it was) that the call from Jesus to "Follow me" began (see Jn 1:43-50, Mt 4:18-22, Lk 5:1-11,27-28), and continued, essentially being his last words said directly to Peter (Jn 21:19-22, to be discussed later).

Whatever events can be included in this introductory period is unclear due to the uncertain length of this period and the chronology of some events. Yet it would be a fair assumption that at the very least the person these soon-to-be disciples witnessed was unconventional from cultural and rabbinic tradition. This of course led some others to reject Jesus, which may also have raised some red flags about the early disciples' messianic expectations. Besides the limited things they witnessed Jesus doing and saying, there is no other narrative information from the biblical text to understand the early

disciples' response to Jesus' call to "Follow me." That is, unless we claim that they didn't really understand Jesus' call. There is some truth to their lack of understanding the full significance of Jesus' call (to be discussed later) yet this is hardly sufficient basis to suggest for making a radical change for their life.

For a better understanding of the disciples' reception and response to Jesus' call, I suggest we need to explore not only the content aspect of Jesus' communication with them but also its relationship aspect. Understanding this relational aspect of Jesus' communication is important because it qualifies his content. The relational aspect, which was discussed earlier in "The Basis of This Study" of the Introduction (p.7), are relational messages (usually implied) from a person conveying: (1) something about one's self, (2) something about one's view of the other person, and/or (3) something about their relationship together. Jesus' communication included these relational messages shared not only with the early disciples but with all his followers. Taking into account all that transpired in context, the relational messages in each interaction could be identified.

To the first two he said "Come and you will see (Jn 1:39)—again, not about seeing a place but his person. The suggested relational messages, corresponding to the above list: (1) "I am here to be vulnerable and make myself accessible to you" because (2) "you are important to me" and (3) "I hope we can build relationship together—not a mere kingdom but the family of God."

When Andrew brought Simon to the Messiah, "Jesus looked at him" (*emblepo*, to look closely, directly at, Jn 1:42). Given such direct and close eye contact by the Messiah must have made Simon somewhat uncomfortable, but there was an important message in this non-verbal communication; and then for Simon to hear "You are...you will be..." Suggested relational messages: (1) "Despite what my foreknowledge may tell you, I myself am personally and openly involved to engage with you," even though (2) "I know you more than you know yourself, I don't define you by what you do or have; your whole person is special to me," and possibly including (3) "I look forward to relationship together."

The next day Jesus begins to initiate the call, which in itself was unconventional for a rabbi to do; in that tradition students usually chose their teachers. The first person recorded to receive Jesus' call was Philip, whom Jesus simply found and extended "Follow me" (Jn 1:43). The word for "follow" (*akoloutheo*) means to accompany, go with, and occurs almost exclusively in the Gospels. As commonly seen in today's practice, following Jesus in his day often did not involve being a disciple (cf. Mt 4:25; 8:1, Mk 10:32); it was merely an association for those persons, albeit with the Messiah, but for the wrong reasons (cf. Jn 6:14-27). The Greek word involves relational significance when it refers to individuals. And this is the significance Jesus conveys to Philip, though Philip struggled to function in it (see Jn 14:8-11). Suggested relational messages, taking into account what Philip told Nathanael (v.45): (1) "I am indeed the Messiah but I am not defined by my role or by what I do; there is much more of me to know and experience," and (2) "I am calling you not for messianic duty, nor because of anything special you've done or anything special you have but only because you are important to me," and (3) "I want to take you further and deeper in relationship with the whole of God."

Then Philip told Nathanael about his encounter with Jesus of Nazareth (Jn 1:43-51). Nathanael didn't hesitate to share honestly his skepticism, displaying his bias of a

prevailing stereotype disparaging Nazareth, which Jesus could have rebuked but instead affirmed Nathanael's person (v.47). In the interaction that followed, the content of Jesus' communication convinced Nathanael to acknowledge Jesus within the limits of his current interpretive framework (v.49). Jesus told Nathanael "you will understand much more about me than that" (v.50), and that all of them will see the activity of God (v.51). Assuming Nathanael became one of the twelve apostles, he would be listed by the name Bartholomew in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts (Mt10:2-4, Mk 3:16-19, Lk 6:14-16, Acts 1:13). Suggested relational messages: (1) "I am who you say I am, but I am much more to confess in your faith, and more importantly to experience in relationship" and (2) "I appreciate your honesty and your willingness to engage me further," therefore (3) "Don't stop here, Nathanael, but let's go deeper in relationship together in order to understand the whole of my person—and along with the others, to experience in relational progression together the whole of God."

Later, Jesus extends the formal call to Simon and Andrew, James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Mt 4:18-22, Mk 1:16-20). By this time they had limited opportunity to observe Jesus, yet the information they had about him seems insufficient to make a radical change to their lives. One experience they had, however, helps us to better understand their reception and response to Jesus' call, though the chronology of this moment is not certain (see Lk 5:1-11).

After some initial time with Jesus, Peter and Andrew returned to their vocation of fishing. When Jesus saw them fishing, he called them specifically to follow after his person (Mt 4:18-20, Mk 1:16-18). With such response of commitment, Jesus said "I will make you fishers of men." The relational response to Jesus is the imperative here and must not be subordinated nor preceded by the mission, service or related role, that is, what they did, just as Jesus' sanctified life and practice defined (cf. Jn 12:26, to be discussed later). Suggested relational messages: (1) I am not defined by my role nor what I do, so *don't* reduce my person to Messiah, Teacher, Savior, nor to my miracles, my behavioral examples, or even to merely my teachings," and (2) "I don't define you by your service, sacrifice, role, or anything your do or have. I call you because you are important to me—your person, not what you can do for me or give to me," therefore (3) "With the heart of my whole person I am vulnerable and accountable to you for relationship, intimate relationship together, and I want you to be vulnerable and accountable to me with your whole heart for this relationship."

Moreover, Jesus' declaration "I will make you..." is important to understand in the above relational context and process. "Make" (*poieo*) means to make with the underlying sense of "bringing about" a change in the state of a person; *poieo* here in the Greek indicative mood likely is used to express this condition. Jesus' declaration cannot be reduced to a mere change of vocation. The implications of this are better understood with the relational messages, taking into account their experience with Jesus and the catch of fish (Lk 5:4-11, whether parallel with above or separate): (1) "I, myself, am the incarnation of God, nothing less and no substitutes, yet my whole person is vulnerably disclosed not to judge and separate but to redeem for relationship—a person not to be afraid of, redefined or reduced," and (2) "You are rightly awed yet unnecessarily afraid of the difference between you and me, be assured I don't define you in human terms. A major part of your problem is how you are defined and what defines you. This has become who, what and how you are and this needs to change—transformed from the

inside out for your whole person. Nothing less than your whole person and no substitutes for your whole person,” so (3) “Don’t focus on doing “fishers of men” but on the primary issue of our relationship. Stop trying to redefine my purpose, me and our relationship because I, myself, don’t do relationship with you except of my terms. To follow me is to accept my irreducible and nonnegotiable terms and to function in relationship together with nothing less and no substitutes.”

When Jesus declared “I will make you fishers of men,” this was not only about his followers’ mission. There is a more important purpose and priority involved to which the early disciples responded—even without full understanding yet with a sufficient sense that receiving and responding to Jesus’ call was both important and necessary for their lives. Since Jesus neither defined them by nor pursued them for what they could do, this was not about switching from fish to men but about the further and deeper issue of who, what and how they were as a function of their whole person. This is about the person not defined primarily by human contexts, thus diminished or minimalized by reductionism. That is, this is about wholeness, and Jesus’ call is “the call to follow me in relational progression to the whole of God.” Thus Jesus’ call is “the call to be whole”—both for the person to be whole and for the relationships necessary to be whole, both of which are necessary together to be whole in likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity. And when mission (“fishers of men”) is understood in this trinitarian relational context and process (cf. Jn 17:18, to be discussed later), missiology is deepened and mission practice is made whole.

Jesus’ call to “Follow me” constitutes the call to be whole. And the call to be whole involves the call to be redefined and transformed. “Follow me” implies this call, which the relational messages in Jesus’ communication help us understand. This is not to suggest that the early disciples understood the full significance of his relational messages. This does suggest that their reception and response to his call signifies being stirred or touched by some aspect (relational more likely than content) of Jesus’ communication. It was significant enough to bring out their need or desire to make this radical change in their lives: Simon and Andrew “left their nets and followed him” (Mt 4:20), James and John “left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him” (Mk 1:30), and after the catch of fish, the four together “pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him” (Lk 5:11).

The “catch of fish” experience unnerved Simon face to face with Jesus, not so much about the quantitative difference (in what he did) of the person Jesus presented (which would be expected) but more so the sense of the qualitative difference (the significance of who and what he was) of this person (Lk 5:8,9). While at first this person’s presence was difficult to receive, Jesus’ relational messages (as discussed above) had to have touched them in some sense to evoke their vulnerable response (Lk 5:10,11). It seems highly unlikely that the mere content of his message “from now on you will catch men” could have assured them to be vulnerable with this person presented, much less evoked their radical response.

This call to be redefined, transformed and made whole is even more dramatic in Jesus’ call to Levi (Mt 9:9-13, Mk 2:13-17, Lk 5:27-32). Levi was a lower-level tax (toll) collector employed by a chief tax collector (like Zaccheus in Lk 19:2, to be discussed in Chapter 3) who was contracted by the Roman government in a system of collecting fees on the goods and services passing through. The system commonly lent itself to abuse and

often employed unethical workers without loyalties who engaged in a loose, ritually unclean lifestyle. To what extent this describes Levi is unknown; nevertheless tax collectors were identified as the “enemy” by some segments of the Jewish community and were despised by practicing religious people, not to mention considered socially lower class.¹⁶ With this background, Jesus finds Levi at his toll booth and, without any further narrative information, extends his call to “Follow me.”

How do we understand both Jesus’ behavior and Levi’s response? Jesus’ rebuttal to the Pharisees moments later, about compassion and who needs a doctor (Mt 9:12-13), gives us partial answer. But this tends to focus only on what Jesus did, and his example and words here often are interpreted apart from his person. Yet the whole person Jesus presented is more dramatically made evident in this interaction than in his earlier calls involving foreknowledge and the catch of fish. While Jesus never played to the audience (or crowd in this context, Mk 2:13), his person presented is a resounding statement for all (including us) to grasp. This statement reverberated of his whole person: “who, what and how I am is not defined by the human context, and therefore is neither determined nor controlled by any human situation.”

Jesus’ sanctified life and practice always addressed the issue of *how* the person presented is defined and *what* defines that person. And the person presented must be congruent with the nature of who, what and how the person is. For this congruence to be the significance of the person presented (the first issue for all practice) involves the two further issues of practice: (2) the quality of the person’s communication, and (3) the depth of relationship the person engages.

The significance of the person Jesus presented, the quality of his communication and the depth of relationship he engages all emerge dramatically in his call to Levi. Given the background of this surrounding context, Jesus crosses social, cultural and religious boundaries to connect with Levi. It should be understood also that Levi crosses these boundaries (barriers for him) as well by receiving and responding to Jesus. What do they see in each other that warrants such a call and such a response?

Jesus’ sanctified life and practice functioned with a perceptual-interpretive framework congruent with who, what and how his person is, thus determining what he would see. With this lens, Jesus doesn’t pay attention to the Levi defined by the surrounding context. Jesus sees Levi deeper than from the outer in of a reductionist quantitative framework; therefore he sees a person from the inside out experiencing reductionism who needs to be redefined, transformed and made whole. The person Jesus presented pays attention to this Levi; and the significance of Jesus’ person is not lost to Levi, who is used to being treated with contempt. He well knows that for this Rabbi (and miracle worker at that) to engage him is radical, counter-cultural, and simply contrary to life as he knew it. Yet, Jesus wasn’t making a sociocultural, political or philosophical statement. He is making a statement of his person only for relationship: “Follow me.”

Along with the significance of Jesus’ person engaging him, what can Levi grasp of the quality of his communication? The content of Jesus’ message, linked also to his action to engage Levi in this surrounding context, is qualified by these implied relational messages: (1) “I am not defined by reductionism nor is my action determined by it; who, what and how I am is whole in the relationships necessary to be whole, for which I make

¹⁶ For more background on tax collection and collectors, see Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 82-83, 387-388.

my person vulnerable to you,” and (2) “In spite of how others see you and you may feel about yourself, nevertheless I see you in your whole person, and you are still important to me and I want *you*; here is your opportunity to be redefined, transformed and made whole,” so that (3) “we can have intimate relationship together and you can experience belonging in the relationships necessary to be whole as a full member of the family of God.” The significance of Jesus’ person discloses the quality of his communication, the content of which is qualified by these relational messages. And the third relational message defines the depth of relationship Jesus vulnerably engages with Levi, which Jesus practices in loving involvement with Levi over table fellowship with his friends (“tax collectors and sinners,” Mk 2:15) after Levi’s response to the call—an important situation to be further discussed in Chapter 3.

Aside from the conviction of the Spirit in the call to all these early disciples, what does Levi see in Jesus to warrant a radical response for such a drastic identity change? For Jesus’ person to be vulnerable to him and openly be exposed to social sanction and ridicule certainly must have spoken volumes to Levi. And to hear this person say (with both content and relational aspects of his communication) that he wants *me*, my whole person, for relationship together undoubtedly disarmed Levi and touched him at his core—the significance of his heart, most likely guarded from others in the surrounding context. This person Jesus presented was too significant, qualitatively different and relationally intimate for Levi to dismiss or resist.

Yet, for him to cross those social, cultural and religious barriers, Levi would openly have to let go of his *old* life and reject reductionism—its perceptual-interpretive framework and its substitutes for the whole of persons and relationships, both prevailing in the surrounding context. This is a risk Levi is able to take because he is entrusting his person to relationship with the vulnerable person he can count on to be truly *who* and *what* he is, nothing less and no substitutes. He can count on this person Jesus in this relationship because he personally sees *how* Jesus is in practice—the significance of his person presented, the qualitative difference of his communication, the intimate depth of relationship he engages—is congruent with who and what he is, thus confirming for Levi that Jesus’ whole person is for relationship. This is what Levi must have seen (not merely *blepo*, to see, but more like *horao*, to recognize the significance of, encounter the true nature of, to experience) in Jesus to support making such a drastic change.

Levi’s story is about the gospel. This gospel, however, is not a prevailing popular gospel with an incomplete Christology (tending, e.g., to embody Jesus only in the manger and then on the Cross while focused on disembodied teachings for formulating beliefs and propositional truths) and a truncated soteriology (jumping from Cross to propositions which are focused on “saved *from*” without the function of “saved *to*”). An incomplete Christology is disembodied (apart from the function of the person) from the whole person Jesus presented throughout his life and practice, thus its Jesus (without the function of the person) is essentially dysfunctional for experiential relationship. Accordingly then, a truncated soteriology is disengaged from the relational process with the whole person Jesus and no longer in relational progression with him. Thus its salvation is nonfunctional in the trinitarian relational context of God’s family, notwithstanding doctrine; furthermore its salvation is without the function of experiential truth in the significant relationships necessary to be whole together in the whole of God’s family.

Levi encountered a “complete” Christology of the whole person Jesus presented to him—not teachings and propositions but the whole person for relationship; and the significance of Jesus’ whole person engaged him in a full soteriology—not only to be redeemed *from* the old but more functionally important to be transformed *to* the new and made whole. Jesus’ call to Levi provides us with a clear understanding of the gospel, the one that is theologically and functionally necessary for our life and practice. This is the gospel in action—acting in the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. Functioning with anything less or with any substitutes is not the gospel of the whole person Jesus, the Christ, and thus renders such function to the epistemological illusions and ontological simulations of reductionism.

It is difficult to suggest that Levi would have made a radical change for a popular gospel. Likewise, for the other disciples, their radical response to Jesus’ call is difficult to explain (not to diminish the Spirit’s work) without some understanding of Jesus’ relational messages qualifying “Follow me” (which certainly would involve the Spirit’s work). Without this understanding of Jesus’ communication, we are left to consider that the disciples just somewhat blindly or irrationally changed the course of their life to follow Jesus. Without suggesting they understood well his relational messages, and knowing they had ongoing difficulty grasping the trinitarian relational context and process while following him after the call (to be discussed later), nevertheless in their call they still received the *person*, not a proposition about the person; and they still responded to this person for relationship together, not to follow a teaching, a model or a missional goal. They had the incarnation of the Son of God before them—nothing less and no substitutes. The truth of God and God’s self-revelation were embodied in the whole person Jesus. And it was this person vulnerably presented to them, relationally pursuing and extending his whole person to them, intimately involved with them first and foremost for relationship together.

The disciples’ response to this person was not irrational and at the same time was not the outcome of mere rationality. No amount of socio-historical, philosophical or even theological inquiry can account for the *presence* of God in the person Jesus. That is, God’s self-revelation and the truth of God in the person of Jesus are communicative acts not for mere exhibition but for relationship (cf. Jn 1:11,12,18). As communicative acts, God’s revelation and truth cannot be understood merely by observation (scientific, critical or casual). They are understood only as it is received in the relational context and process in which God is disclosed by the person Jesus; this understanding is the outcome in the relational process of *experiential truth* discussed in the Introduction. Such a relational response is characterized with great joy by Jesus as the vulnerable engagement and trusting involvement of a child (a whole person, Lk 10:21, also discussed earlier in the Introduction). Jesus strongly contrasted this involvement to the disengaged observer or the quantitative engagement of any inquirer using a reductionist interpretive framework. The disciples reflect “the child-person” rather than “the wise and learned,” thus their further (though far from complete) understanding of the person Jesus presented.

“Follow me” involves nothing less and no substitutes than the whole person and the relationships in relational progression necessary to be whole. For this purpose Jesus functionally sanctified himself in ongoing life and practice in order to make evident the greater context of his whole person, so that our life and practice is contextualized (not merely embedded but relationally belonging) in it: *the specific trinitarian relational*

context beyond any human context in which Jesus seeks to involve each of his followers, define all of his disciples and help them together function in its compatible relational process, the trinitarian relational process.

Jesus' relational messages not only qualify his call to "Follow me," they also constitute the full significance of the person behind the "me" and the underlying meaning of the process to "Follow." In other words, "Follow me" cannot be reduced from Jesus' whole person nor substituted for by practice separated from direct relational involvement with his whole person—which are what an incomplete Christology and truncated soteriology result in doing. This directly involves the practice of discipleship. Any theology of discipleship must (*dei*) by its nature be conjoined with "Follow me" and further be predicated on the full significance of "me" and the underlying meaning of "Follow." This is of immeasurable importance for our life and practice (individually and together as church), which has become a prevailing issue of growing proportion.

While many notions of discipleship may be embedded in Jesus' teachings or examples, they are not embodied (a function of the person) in his whole person to follow for relationship. The person Jesus presents is a function of the whole person; and his whole person is a function of relationship. If the person Jesus vulnerably presented and disclosed is truly for relationship, then we cannot disembody (separate out in function) his teachings from this person, nor can we merely look at his examples detached from this person, nor examine his words disconnected from his person. This is an issue for both the epistemic process of those wanting to know Jesus (as discussed in the Introduction) as well as for the practice of discipleship of those professing to know Jesus as his followers.

To follow any of the above practices disembodied from the whole person Jesus vulnerably presented for relationship is not discipleship on God's terms but *discipleshipisms* on our terms. Discipleshipism is based on what Jesus did (examples, miracles) and/or on what he said (teachings, commands) or has (title, role, power) but not based on his whole person (nothing less and no substitutes) first and foremost for relationship together. Thus discipleshipism is reductionist and tends to be overly christocentric, often rendered merely to epistemological illusion of the Truth and ontological simulation of the Life that Jesus incarnated.

In contrast to discipleshipism and in theological conflict with it, discipleship on God's terms is: rooted in who, what and how Jesus is, and thus inherently predicated on "Follow me" in the full significance of the whole person behind "me" and the underlying qualitative relational meaning of the process to "Follow"; therefore discipleship must (*dei*) by its nature involve following his whole person for vulnerable relationship, intimately functioning in the trinitarian relational context and relational process together in relational progression to the whole of God as family.

In discipleship, a person who responds to Jesus' call to become his follower enters the relational progression not merely as a believer but is now his disciple (*mathetes*). What further does this relationship as his disciple involve? This will be an ongoing discussion, which continues next with Jesus' sanctified life and practice focused on his popularity with would-be disciples and the shape of their call.

A Popular Jesus

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

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

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

Yet, the complete narratives of Jesus defining who, what and how his whole person is also reveal him counteracting a popular Jesus as well as clearly defining the terms of relationship with him. The skewed perceptions of a popular Jesus are directly addressed in both would-be disciples and his early disciples. Our discussion returns to these narrative accounts in the biblical text.

Good Intentions: Knowing What's Important

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

Since they defined Jesus by what he did, they no doubt also defined themselves by what they did. This is indicated by their response to Jesus' critique: "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (v.28). While Judaism emphasized righteous works, Jesus answered with the singular "work of God" to address the deeper issue here (v.29). The significance of "work" over "works" is crucial to grasp not only because it identifies how the person is defined but also for how that in turn determines how relationships are done. How we define ourselves strongly determines how we do relationships—both of which in turn greatly influence how we practice church, to be discussed later.

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

In response to their quantitative focus on miracles and bread (vv.30-31), Jesus expands this limited human context to the qualitative relational context of his Father (thus the Trinity, v.32). At the same time, Jesus shifts the focus from quantitative bread (past and present) to the qualitative bread signifying his whole person (vv.33,35). Yet the significant difference of the qualitative bread from the quantitative bread continues to be the source of tension and conflict for these would-be disciples throughout this interaction. Jesus both discloses his person and exposes their persons when he shares "eats of this bread...this bread is my flesh" (v.51), "eats my flesh and drinks my blood" (v.54). Every time Jesus said this about the bread as his flesh, they only thought in quantitative terms, suggesting possible thoughts of human sacrifice and cannibalism (vv.52,60). The person Jesus disclosed, however, was not merely what he did in the flesh but, more significantly, who, what and how he is embodied in his whole person. And the whole person Jesus presented and disclosed (*phaneroo*) is only for redeemed relationship together on his terms (nothing less and no substitutes). This Jesus, then, of complete Christology and full soteriology, involves his redemptive work in the flesh and more completely his relational work of *the whole*. Therefore, as should be understood in the Lord's Supper and practiced in the Eucharist, Jesus invites them (us) to *partake* of nothing less than his whole person (not only what he did), and to *participate* intimately in his whole life without substitutes in the ongoing function of relationship with the whole of God (vv.56-58). His followers are at the height of *who* and *what* they are as they partake and participate together at the table as *whose* they are in the whole of God.

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

After their departure, Jesus asked the Twelve if they wanted to leave also (v.67). Simon Peter's answer could be interpreted as either a traditional confession of faith or a discipleship response to the embodied words of Jesus' whole person for relationship together (v.68). Confession alone is insufficient to "Follow me," though it was likely part of Peter's answer attached to his response to follow the whole of Jesus (cf. Mt 16:15-16). Yet, as we will understand later, Peter still struggled with Jesus' whole person and negotiating the relationship on his terms. The substantive difference between Peter and the would-be disciples was his openness to pursue the whole person Jesus presented for relationship only on Jesus' terms. To believe genuinely (dynamic faith) and to follow authentically (discipleship) are always *relationally specific* to Jesus' whole person (nothing less), and thus they only have *relational significance* in the direct intimate involvement of relationship with him (no substitutes).

Sincerity: Two Errors for Relationship

A would-be disciple seeking a popular Jesus always has tension or conflict with the person Jesus presents. The dynamics of this encounter are seen even more notably when a rich ruler anxiously sought Jesus (see Mk 10:17-22). No account is given of his previous exposure to Jesus' popularity, yet it is unlikely he was unaware of Jesus at this later point in his public ministry. It is also likely he witnessed Jesus' intimate reception of children preceding his own encounter with Jesus, which may have heightened his interest in Jesus.

The encounter begins as he imposes himself on Jesus with the greeting "Good teacher." Given the Jewish conception of God's goodness and who, what and how Jesus is, this seems to be appropriate address to the person Jesus presented to this man. Yet, Jesus' response—"Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone" (v.18)—appears to indicate the rich ruler is not addressing his whole person as God, possibly suggesting at least his faux pas. His address as "teacher," however, seems appropriate regardless of his perceptions of Jesus, that is, appropriate if he only implies a title not a function. The meaning of "teacher" (*didaskolos*) involved a much more significant relationship with those who called someone teacher back then, than it does today in Western culture. To have someone as your teacher meant that you were more than a student or learner. It meant you were their disciple (*mathetes*), an adherent, which involved a deeper attachment to the teacher. And the specific terms for adherence were determined solely by the teacher.¹⁷ The rich ruler does not pursue Jesus to function in this kind of relationship, despite his humble posture ("fell on his knees") and seemingly significant address. Their interaction will confirm this person's level of interest and engagement.

By asking "what must I do to inherit eternal life" (v.17), he indicates his perceptual framework and the limits of his focus—just as the earlier would-be disciples asking "what must we do" (Jn 6:28). Since he defined himself by what he did (keeping the commandments, v.20) as well as by what he had (great wealth, v.22), he reduced his person to these quantitative aspects. Moreover, with the lens of this reductionist framework, this is how he perceives Jesus: as a teacher only for information, as useful or profitable to advance his life. In other words, he only sees Jesus for what he does and

¹⁷ 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).

has—nothing more. He does not engage Jesus’ person further nor involve himself deeper with the Teacher for relationship together. This was a critical error he made, the first of two critical errors of relationship.

Yet, this was no casual “seeker.” Despite all he did in life (accomplished socially and religiously) and all he had (acquired status, accumulated wealth), this serious, devoted, successful person wanted more in his life—“eternal life.” This is not about the longevity of quantitative *bios* but the qualitative *zoe* which is of God. Jesus doesn’t dismiss him nor diminish the desire of his pursuit. Quite the contrary, Jesus looks at (*emblepo*, look at directly, closely, cf. to Simon, Jn 1:42) him and loves (*agape*, indicating the deep level of involvement) him (v.21).

The relational messages implied in this interaction are valuable to identify from both persons. Suggested relational messages from the rich ruler: (1) “I define myself by what I do (and have), so I can do it, or at least I need to do it as best I can. Just tell me what I have to do,” and likewise (2) “You (God) define me by what I do also. That’s how God is,” therefore (3) “Relationship is based on what we do, so I have to fulfill doing this to participate in God’s life.” Suggested relational messages from Jesus: “I don’t define myself by a role as teacher or savior and by my knowledge. Don’t look at me in the same way you look at yourself. I am a whole person vulnerable to you to partake of and participate in,” and likewise (2) “I don’t define you by what you do and have either, so stop reducing yourself. Your person without those reductionist substitutes is important to me and valuable just for you,” therefore (3) “I want *you* for relationship together—person to person, heart to heart, nothing less and no substitutes—so don’t let reductionist substitutes prevent us from coming together.”

In the content of those familiar words which came out of Jesus’ mouth (v.21), he lovingly tries to help the man to redefine his person and to free him from what reduced his whole person and prevented the relationship necessary to be whole. This would require a shift in his perceptual-interpretive framework from quantitative to qualitative—which is what he really sought in *zoe*. Sadly, the rich ruler separated himself from the whole person Jesus vulnerably presented to him, thus clearly demonstrating his continued condition of enslavement to reductionism, that is, defining himself by what he did and had (v.22). This enslavement exposes his second critical error of relationship.

The rich ruler pursued the Teacher only to learn what to do (his first critical error) “to inherit eternal life.” “To inherit” (*kleronomeo*, to be an heir) something was not an end result any individual can make happen by one’s effort, which the rich ruler appeared to assume. “To be an heir” required a specific relational context involving a process which can have the relational conclusion of an inheritance. In those days, the specific relational context of an heir was the family of which one was a full member (either biologically or by adoption); a family slave, for example, would not qualify for an inheritance, only a son would. Since the rich ruler was not free from his reductionist framework and practice of defining his person and doing relationships, he clearly pursued this inheritance of God’s life functionally while in enslavement, that is, in effect from a position of a slave. This was his second critical error of relationship. Regardless of his best efforts, a slave could not qualify for an inheritance, only a son would qualify as an heir to partake and participate in the Father’s life, thus belong permanently in his family (cf. Jn 8:31-36). And functional enslavement prevents even Christians from experiencing this intimate belonging of relationship together, beliefs notwithstanding.

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

Accountable for His Whole Person:

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

The first person is identified as "a teacher of the law" (scribe) who asserts to Jesus "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go" (Mt 8:19). Since he was schooled in the rabbinic tradition, he knew what it meant to be a disciple (*mathetes*). That would suggest an advantage in his favor as he now offers (or responds, if Jesus called) to become a disciple of Jesus. Whether he merely wants to learn a "fresh" interpretation of the law or he is expressing a deeper commitment to Jesus—likely the latter, given his "wherever you go" is in the Greek middle voice, subjunctive mood—Jesus responds in a curious way: "...the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Lk 9:58). This is commonly interpreted as Jesus identifying the rigorous sacrificial life of discipleship; an alternative reading I propose is about sojourning. Thus I suggest Jesus is making a deeper response to this teacher of the law—not about what his disciples *do* but of who, what and how they *are* and whose they are.

Since "no place to lay" is in the Greek subjunctive mood, Jesus is not describing an existing reality. Rather the subjunctive only expresses a potential possibility and only marks contingency. While using the contrast to the reality of the animal world (foxes and birds having a place), Jesus then is not pointing to current reality of discipleship or even future discipleship in the world—though he is pointing to a distinct process of discipleship in this context. Part of this process involves being a sojourner in the world: unlike the animals *of* the world, "no place to lay." Yet, the reality of sojourning *in* this world can only emerge from the further and deeper process of discipleship inherent in "Follow me." While a sojourner in this world is subject to the pressures and influences *of* the world, that person cannot be defined and determined by the surrounding and prevailing human contexts. This is the deeper issue Jesus addresses in his response.

As a teacher of the law, this person is not merely deeply knowledgeable about the law, he is also embedded in the Judaic religious and sociocultural context. Thus, he is bringing this particular perceptual-interpretive framework with him in his assertion to Jesus, which influences how he sees Jesus as well as himself. Without specifying what his framework is, Jesus implies in his response: that as a sojourner he himself is not

defined by the human contexts of the world; that who, what and how the Son of Man is can only be defined and determined by the further and deeper relational context of his Father; and that together his whole person is of this trinitarian relational context as family, in which the person he vulnerably presents is compatible in function only with the trinitarian relational process of family love. What Jesus implies in all this for this person to understand about his own self is: that his framework needs to shift from a reductionist quantitative framework to a qualitative relational framework; that he needs to change how he is defined and what defines him; that discipleship is ongoing vulnerable involvement with Jesus' whole person in the primacy of relationship together only in the trinitarian relational context and process of the whole of God—nothing less and no substitutes. And that no matter how good his intentions, the de facto state (functional reality) of who and what he is will always implicitly shape how he functions as his disciple.

Jesus clarified that discipleship is this call to be redefined, transformed and made whole. Whatever this teacher of the law heard in Jesus' response and however he perceived Jesus after this, we are given no further indication in the narrative about his response back to Jesus. I suspect that following Jesus was more to be accountable for than he expected, even with his previous experience as a disciple—radically more deep. This interaction, however, provides the broader context for the following two would-be disciples, which suggests looking at these three interactions as a set rather than separately (see Lk 9:57-62). These three would-be disciples exercised strong initiative and displayed considerable interest in following Jesus, yet something happened to each of them. While these appear to be describing the sacrifice and service of discipleship, the underlying accountability for Jesus' self-disclosures exposes the deeper issue.

Prior to undertaking his discipleship, the next person requests “first let me go and bury my father” (Lk 9:59). It was an important responsibility in the ancient community for a son to bury his father, particularly the eldest son. Certainly, as Son himself, Jesus understands the importance of honoring one's father. Given the role of a son, this man makes a legitimate request of Jesus to adjust to his special circumstance. Yet, Jesus appears to deny the request, counter the religious values and change the man's role (9:60). If we look only at the man's circumstance, Jesus' response would definitely imply all of this. If, however, we look at his circumstance in larger context, beyond the human context to Jesus' relational context, a deeper picture emerges. In saying “let the dead...” and “...proclaim the kingdom,” Jesus is juxtaposing two different realities here: (1) the prevailing social reality of the world, which includes the family of those whose essential function is spiritually dead (“let the dead bury their own dead”); while this social reality is a basic one in which we all participate, Jesus is clarifying for this would-be disciple not to let this reality define him nor determine who, what and how he is; in contrast, thus functionally in conflict, (2) Jesus brings forth the reality of the kingdom of God—not a conceptual idea (reign) or a future condition (realm) of the kingdom of God—that is, the family of those who truly are *alive*, a new creation in Christ, who are redeemed from reductionist definition, determination and control which dominate the social reality of the world; those belonging to this new reality also need to share it directly with others in family love, just as Jesus discloses it, for relationship in God's family, because every person needs the experiential reality of this family of the living.

When Jesus told him “but you go and proclaim,” he neither denied him his role as a son nor denounced the religious value of honoring his father. He did clarify for him, however, the ontology of his person as a disciple. Who, what and how this person is by its nature then subordinates all other determination and function. Discipleship is not a hybrid of the two realities, in which the whole of one’s person and function become reduced to something less and some substitute. Moreover, Jesus is not changing his role to a missionary (“go”) or evangelist (“proclaim”). “Proclaim” (*diangelo*) means not merely declaring the kingdom (family) of God but to declare fully, completely. By this, Jesus means “go and proclaim” not in a quantitative sense (as many view the Great Commission and evangelism) but in its qualitative significance. The former does indeed make it about a role and what he should do. This emphasis reduces the whole person and functionally deemphasizes the relationships necessary to be whole constituting the family of God, thus a truncated soteriology with a gospel suffering from a lack of relational significance. Such a proclamation would not be full, complete, that is, whole.

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

Following Jesus is about more than interest, however strong. The adherence of a disciple to Jesus involves deep *attachment* and distinct *priority* for the experience of belonging as one of his true disciples. The third would-be disciple in this grouping declared his plans to follow Jesus but first wanted to “go back and say good-bye to my family” (9:61). Seems reasonable, except saying good-bye (*apotasso*) in their cultural context connotes a lengthy process (maybe many years) and a number of duties to perform before leaving. His use of *apotasso* in the Greek aorist form also indicates an open-ended period of time. While this person may have had a stronger interest to follow Jesus than he had in his family, he demonstrates a stronger attachment to his family. Attachments reflect where the heart is embedded and thus would always exert greater influence than interests (which only reflect the focus of the mind), no matter how strong the interest. As a consequence of his attachment, his primary priority was still with his biological family over Jesus.

The differences of interest, attachments and priorities disclose where the person is. Jesus ongoingly clarifies this for persons, particularly his disciples (would-be and real). When he talked later about the need to “give up everything” (*apotasso*, same word as good-bye) to be his disciple (Lk 14:33), this is not about relinquishing all else and detaching ourselves from them, particularly the relationships he described earlier (see Lk 14:26). In that context and in these current contexts, this is about how the person is defined, who/what determines their lives, and thus how relationships are practiced. For this purpose, Jesus is emphatic with this third would-be disciple that anything less or any substitutes in discipleship are a reductionist compromise, which is not “fit for service” (*euthetos*, usable, suitable, 9:62); that is, it’s not relationally meaningful, thus neither significant relationally to God nor acceptable for relational function in God’s family.

Jesus held these would-be disciples accountable for his whole person presented and disclosed vulnerably by the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love. Thus, his call continues to be clarified as the call to be redefined,

transformed and made whole—to follow him for relationship together in relational progression to the whole of God, the Trinity qua family. Anything less than and any substitutes for this are reductionism of the incarnate Jesus and the whole of God’s self-revelation, which renders our life and practice both theologically and functionally to epistemological illusions and ontological simulations. Consequently, all who confess this Jesus are accountable—from the scholar in the academy to the teacher behind the pulpit to every person in the pew.

Functional Implications

Since we are all accountable for the entirety of God’s self-revelations in the whole person of Jesus’ life and practice, there are interrelated issues we (individually and together as church) need to address and account for in our life and practice. What we pay attention to and tend to ignore (if not theologically, at least in function) about Jesus is a reliable indicator of what we pay attention to and ignore about each other in the practice of church. For example, if we pay attention to what Jesus did but ignore his whole person, we will pay attention to what persons do—relate to, talk about, pray for, work with—while overlooking their whole person, thus basing relationship on the amount of what we do together rather than on how deeply we are involved with each other.

How we practice church is an ongoing issue and priority in this study. Yet, we cannot adequately address this issue without the interrelated, and generally antecedent, issue of how we functionally (not in theory or rhetoric) practice relationships—to be discussed more in the next chapter. Moreover, this relational issue cannot be adequately addressed without the interrelated, and generally antecedent, issue of how we define ourselves and what defines our person. The issue of what defines us also involves our basic perceptual-interpretive framework: the functional lens used in our primary culture (and subcultures) which determines essentially what we pay attention to or ignore in ourselves, others (including Jesus), our relationships and church life and practice. These three basic interrelated issues (what defines us, how we practice relationship and thus practice church) interact upon each other to further reinforce and more deeply embed us in practices of which we have to give account.

Is the Jesus presented at church and is the Jesus represented in our practice the whole person Jesus vulnerably presented and disclosed for relationship? The theological implications of an incomplete Christology directly affect our life and practice and the Jesus they are based on. An incomplete Christology indicates we don’t really understand the person Jesus much less intimately know him. Without “the presence of the whole” in sanctified life and practice, we are susceptible to the substitutes of reductionism, to ontological simulation and epistemological illusion.

We all have to take seriously and make explicit the presence of reductionism—each scholar, every teacher/pastor, all persons in the church. The incarnation is not a mere historical event, not only a basic foundation for faith. The incarnation is the embodiment of the whole of God and the fulfillment of God’s thematic relational work since creation—the significance of which is deeply known in the experiential truth of relationship, that is, when not reduced. It is this counter-relational work of reductionism in our midst which ongoingly challenges the whole of God’s relational work.

Moreover, we need to acknowledge the reality that reductionism tends not to be the blatant activity often associated with Satan but rather is usually an obscure process having the appearance of being reasonable, normative and even righteous (cf. 2 Cor 11:14,15, most likely engaged in church contexts). This means any shift to reductionist substitutes for the whole may not be apparent because the overt forms may remain while the underlying or deeper significance is absent. For example, this shift may not involve a shift in basic theology and doctrine but what they are based on (e.g., a scientific paradigm and foundationalism, not the whole of God), or it may not be a shift in basic types of Christian practice but how Christians function (e.g., without the significance of heart), not a change in outward behavior but without the relational significance of intimate involvement. The latter is notable in the routinization of worship (cf. Mt 15:8-9), particularly in the ritualization of the Eucharist without partaking of Jesus' whole person (not only what he did) and, even more significantly, without participating together intimately in relationship with him in the function of the trinitarian relational context of God's family and the trinitarian relational process of God's family love.

In its teaching and practice, the church is clearly accountable for a complete Christology and a full soteriology. The incarnation principle of nothing less and no substitutes is not only paradigmatic for all of our life and practice, more importantly it is imperative for each person and the church together—the relational imperative of the whole of God. This principle needs to be ongoingly examined and accounted for in the three major areas for all practice: (1) the significance of our person presented, (2) the quality of our communication (both content and relational aspects), and (3) the depth level of relationship we engage.

As Jesus functioned ongoingly throughout the incarnation, sanctified life and practice must (*dei*) always address the issues of how the person presented is defined and what defines the person presented. And the person presented must be congruent with the nature of who, what and how the person is, just as Jesus consistently was. For the person presented to be congruent with who they are and to be compatible with whose they are, furthermore, involves the other major areas of the quality of communication and the depth level of relationship engaged—discussed further in the next chapter.

In all of this, Jesus unequivocally disclosed that anything less or any substitutes of his person and ours are insufficient for relationship on his terms. This brings us to the crucial issue of discipleship and the critical question: what are our churches filled with? Discipleship is a crucial issue because our prevailing notions of discipleship appear inadequate to distinguish Jesus' disciples, thus incapable of defining the make-up of a church as his followers. This goes back to what we pay attention to and tend to ignore. Apart from what Jesus said to the rich ruler, for example, in terms of what this person accomplished and had attained and accumulated in his life, he (and persons who function like him) would be considered a model Christian and sought after by most churches for membership.

We cannot ignore, however, what Jesus clearly shared with would-be disciples without engaging in reductionism of his person. We cannot ignore what is insufficient and unacceptable to Jesus to be his follower without redefining this with reductionist substitutes. Church teaching and practice of discipleship in particular make evident on whose terms relationship with God is engaged.

The incarnation establishes the larger context beyond any human context in which Jesus vulnerably discloses the whole of God for relationship. This is the only person Jesus presented. If we are to receive and respond to God's self-revelations and thus be distinguished as the people of the Book, then first and foremost we have to become persons of the Word. And if we are to be indeed persons of the Word embodied (including all his embodied words and practice), then we must by its nature function together in the full relational significance of Jesus' whole person.

The function of his sanctified life and practice in the trinitarian relational context and process seeks to define us, involve us and help us function in a sanctified life and practice of nothing less and no substitutes. This is neither optional nor negotiable, only the relational imperative. And the vital relational message in this imperative call to be redefined, transformed and made whole is God's deep desire for us to partake of and participate intimately in the whole of God's life in relationship together as family. Yet, this call to be whole does not preclude the ongoing challenge of an alternative practice of reductionism and defining ourselves, doing relationships and practicing church on our terms.

Sanctified Christology theologically and functionally allows for nothing less and no substitutes.

Chapter 2 The Person in Relationship

As we journey further on this christological path, we need to be aware of what we pay attention to and what we ignore. The whole person Jesus presents becomes more vulnerable, making himself relationally accessible, and thus his interactions will be increasingly intense. And it may be our tendency at critical periods to veer off his embodied course and unintentionally or inadvertently find ourselves on “the road to Emmaus.”

This is where Jesus found two of his disciples in this familiar post-resurrection scene (see Lk 24:13-32). Yet, the text informs us that these disciples “were kept from recognizing him” (v.16). Since the verb “kept from” (*krateo*, to hold, restrain) is in the Greek passive voice, this is usually taken to mean the disciples were unable to recognize (*epiginosko*, to know specifically) Jesus either because of God’s action or Jesus’ post-resurrection body was slightly different, making his appearance harder to recognize from before. I suggest their own predisposition and bias kept them from making connection with Jesus—indicating a Greek reflexive passive of the subject acting upon itself.

While these disciples solemnly reflected on the tragedy over the weekend and their bewilderment on this third day, notice the transition in Jesus’ interaction with them. At first Jesus engaged them as if to be ignorant of what was happening (24:19). This gives the disciples the opportunity either to discuss events and information, or to focus on the whole of Jesus’ person and relationship with him—just as we have the opportunity in this study. Being predisposed as they were, they talk about the events and information about Jesus of Nazareth. This is not to say such discussion is irrelevant, or even unimportant, but it should not be at the expense of ignoring, diminishing or minimalizing what is most important in Jesus’ life and practice.

Ignoring the deeper significance of Jesus’ whole person is a prime indicator of where we are. Jesus intensifies his relational work with these disciples by confronting (not merely chastening) them with where they are: “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe” (24:25). These are strong words which clearly demonstrate how the disciples are accountable for where they are. The word “foolish” (*anoetos*) also means ignorant, mindless, stupid; it emphasizes culpability of the subject person(s) and describes one as intellectually reckless or negligent, failing to think responsibly, having no sense and implying that one should have known better (cf. Gal 3:1-3). It means neither a lack of education nor an inability to think but a failure to focus and think it through (cf. *syniemi*, as discussed in the previous chapter). The word “slow” (*bradys*) of heart stands in contrast to swift, quick in response. Thus, “slow of heart” here means to be reluctant, dull, unresponsive, that is, to trust Jesus and take him at his word.

Their “foolishness” and “slowness” were not because of what God did or anything circumstantial. Even as Jesus further connected for them various pieces of God’s self-revelation (24:27), their hearts did not respond (“burning within” but not responsive, v.32) to his whole person vulnerably pursuing them for relationship. Their predispositions and biases—a function of their perceptual-interpretive framework—resulted in their hearts being functionally withdrawn from Jesus in relational distance despite immediate physical proximity; and thus they were oblivious to his vulnerable

presence and insensitive to his intimate relational work. This was a consequence of their own action, which they did to themselves.

What appears to be a rather passive and somewhat innocent course by these two disciples is in actuality their willful decision to veer off the path of the embodied whole of Jesus. As his followers, they functioned irresponsibly and in effect relationally rejected him by their actions, however inadvertent. Yet, Jesus does not admonish his disciples merely by exposing the *old* without also giving them the opportunity for the *new* to be raised up. While holding them accountable for where they are and giving them responsibility for their response to him, he keeps pursuing their hearts by breaking bread with them (24:29-30). By partaking of and participating together in the vulnerable presence of his person, they would experience intimate relational connection with him. And as Jesus concludes his relational work with them, their perceptions finally make a qualitative shift to know specifically (*epiginosko*) who this person really is (v.31).

This post-resurrection interaction is used to introduce us to the increasingly intense interactions of the whole person Jesus in relationship to be discussed in this chapter in particular, and the rest of this study in general. This christological path, however, is incompatible with the function represented by “the road to Emmaus.” What course we take will essentially define what we pay attention to and what we ignore. As we follow Jesus, we need to ensure that our predispositions and biases reflecting where we are (and our perceptual-interpretive framework) do not result similarly in our own hearts being functionally withdrawn from Jesus in relational distance despite full narrative proximity, and thus detached from the vulnerable presence of his whole person and insensitive to his intimate relational work.

The Relationship of God

In understanding that the person presented by Jesus is a function of the whole person—nothing less and no substitutes, thus irreducible—we now need to understand that Jesus’ whole person is a function of relationship in the trinitarian relational context and process—nothing less and no substitutes, thus nonnegotiable.

Since God’s self-disclosures in Jesus are presented to us specifically for relationship, Jesus’ sanctified life and practice is about how God does relationship. We can grasp how God does relationship by following the face of Jesus in his face-to-face interactions. It is the significance of this function of relationship in the trinitarian relational context and process which brings coherence to God’s thematic action throughout human history: planned by God before creation and started at creation before the Fall, formalized in the covenant and fulfilled by Jesus the Christ, while currently being brought to eschatological completion by the Spirit—discussed further in the next chapter. In this complete Christology the whole gospel clearly emerges for experiential truth of Jesus’ full soteriology, the significance of which is only for relationship together.

The most significant relational function in the incarnation of how God does relationship is Jesus vulnerably disclosing his relationship with his Father. Ontologically, they are one and their persons are equally the same (consubstantial, Jn 10:38; 14:11,20; 16:15; 17:21), thus inseparable (never “to be apart” except for one unfathomable experience on the cross, Mt 27:46). As trinitarian persons (not modes of being) in the qualitative significance of the whole of God (not tritheism), they are intimately bonded

together in relationship (understood conceptually as perichoresis) and intimately involved with each other in love (Jn 5:20; 14:31; 15:9; 17:24). This is the relationship of God which Jesus functionally makes evident about the Trinity (discussed in chapter nine).

At Jesus' baptism and transfiguration (transformation), the Father openly said: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17; 17:5). The term for "to be well pleased" (*eudokeo*) can also be rendered "delight." To be pleased with a son expresses a common bias about parental approval of what a child has done; on the other hand, to delight in a son seems to focus on the whole person with a deeper expression of what a parent feels. I suggest "delight" better expresses the qualitative heart of the Father in intimate relationship with the Son about his qualitative whole person, and thus should not be interpreted as the Father's approval of the Son's performance. In other words, the Father delights in the Son and loves him for himself, not for what he does. If we are predisposed to parental approval, we will ignore the deeper significance of their relational involvement.

Moreover, it is important to pay attention to their language as they interact. In the Father's expression above, his words to the Son are simple, what can be considered "ordinary" language of the heart, and thus intimate. Jesus' language with the Father in the garden called Gethsemane (Mt 26:39,42) and on the cross (Mt 27:46) is painfully simple and disarmingly direct language—words straight from his heart. There are no platitudes, formal phrases or "sacred terminology" in their interaction—simply communication from the heart, and thus ongoing communion together in intimacy. Yet, their intimacy can easily be ignored by our relational distance or even be reduced by a non-relational quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework.

Their interaction at Gethsemane needs further attention for us to understand its theological and functional implications. As the vulnerable disclosure of how God does relationship, Jesus functions in the only way he does relationship—the relationship of God, nothing less and no substitutes. This particular interaction demonstrates the relational process of family love involved in the Trinity's relationship with each other. Consider: what had been planned together even before creation and was now being fulfilled by the incarnation, the Son astonishingly did not want to continue; and imagine what the Father feels upon hearing the Son's request. This is a strong contrast to an earlier interaction (see Jn 12:27-28). Despite the unique circumstances, what we need to understand about the Trinity and grasp for our relationships is why this interaction even happened at all.

Certainly human weakness is involved in this situation but this is not the significance of this interaction. The incarnation was predicated on the principle of nothing less and no substitutes, and thus always functioned in relationship on the basis of nothing less and no substitutes. Why this interaction even happened at all is because by the nature of their relationship such an interaction could happen, was "designed" to happen, therefore was expected to happen. That is, what this interaction signifies is the complete openness (honesty as it were) and vulnerableness of their whole person (not reduced to roles and performance) with each other in the intimate relational involvement of love as family together. By being completely vulnerable here, Jesus makes evident how they do relationship together. In other words, the trinitarian persons can (and need to) be their whole person before each other and intimately share with each other anything, so to speak—without the caution, restrictions or limits practiced in human relationships

since the primordial garden (cf. before the fall they “were both naked and they felt no shame,” Gen 2:25). Anything less than and any substitutes of their whole person and these relationships necessary to be the whole of God no longer would constitute the Trinity (whom Jesus vulnerably disclosed) and therefore becomes a reduction of God.

In addition, the incarnation principle of nothing less and no substitutes not only functionally defined who Jesus is in relationship but also functionally determined whose he is in relationship. The Son did not reduce his person with the Father by becoming overly christocentric. Not only did he openly express his desire to avoid the cross but he clearly expressed his deeper desire “yet not as I will but as you will” (Mt 26:39). The Son’s prayer was not about himself, though he openly expressed his person. This was not a matter of the priority of the individual, which also includes not merely the individual desires of only the Father. This was about the whole of God, the Trinity qua family. There is no aspect or function of individualism in the nature of the Trinity, though each is distinct in their person and unique in their function. As a trinitarian person, the Son made evident the interdependent (functionally in conflict with independent) relational nature of the Trinity as the whole of God’s family. Furthermore, in another interaction the Son also defined how the Spirit never functions independently but only interdependently in the whole of God (Jn 16:13-15); this points to the Spirit’s work as not for the individual’s agenda but always for the whole of God’s family, the church (cf. 1 Cor 12:7).

The relationship of God necessitates the function of the whole person, yet never centered on oneself and thus always as a function of relationship in the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. What emerges from the relational dynamics disclosed between the Father and the Son is that the most significant function of relationship is signified by God’s love. Their family love constitutes the Trinity’s relational oneness (functional communion) reflecting the ontological trinity of God.

Yet, love (*agape*) should not be perceived in reductionist terms, which unfortunately predisposes many of our notions of love to diminish the importance of the whole person and the significance of relationship in likeness of the Trinity. God’s love, however, of each other in the Trinity is not about what to do (reductionist substitute)—as if the persons of the Trinity needed to do anything with each other to demonstrate or prove their love (cf. Jn 15:9,10). As the Father made evident at the Son’s baptism and transfiguration, the Trinity’s love is only about *how they are involved with each other’s person*. The synergistic (and perichoretic) mystery of this qualitative involvement is so intimate that though three disclosed persons yet they are one Being, though distinct in function yet they are indistinguishably and indivisibly one together—without relational horizontal distance or vertical stratification. And this relationship of God is disclosed not for our mere information but made accessible for us to experience in relationship together in likeness. This accessible relational experience is the functional purpose of Jesus’ formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26).

In the context of his full prayer (known as his high priestly prayer), the purpose of Jesus’ sanctified life and practice (Jn 17:19) is directly correlated to and causal of this relational outcome to experience the whole of God in relationship together. To call his prayer a high priestly prayer is accurate because this is Jesus’ intercession (cf. Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). Yet, formalizing Jesus’ involvement in this vital interaction with the Father tends to focus only on what Jesus does, and his role as high priest, rather than on their

relationship together. His role and what he does in it functionally serve only for this relationship, the relationship of God as family.

Jesus' sanctified life and practice is always about relationship first and foremost, even while interacting (praying) with the Father. Thus his all-embracing prayer reflects the whole of this relationship—and its theological and functional implications—further and deeper than any other moment in the incarnation. All of God's thematic action in human history since creation is enacted directly for this relational outcome—nothing less and no substitutes. The whole, therefore, of sanctified Christology (which involves a full soteriology) is only about being intimately one together as the whole of God's family (what we are saved *to*). This then makes his summary prayer more than high priestly, but it functions more completely as Jesus' *formative family prayer*. It is his formative family prayer which keeps unfolding the functional significance of the relationship of God throughout this study.

Redeemed from Reductionism in Relationship

In likeness of the communion of God (in the Trinity), our communion with God (with persons in the Trinity) is disclosed to us in Jesus' sanctified life and practice as a function only of relationship, redeemed (from the *old*) and transformed (to the *new*) relationship. As we continue to follow the face of Jesus in his face-to-face interactions, how Jesus does relationships with various human persons is an extension of how he does relationships with the trinitarian persons of God. This extension is clear because Jesus never engaged in reductionism by reducing his person and how God does relationship. Nor does he reduce human persons who are an extension of God's image and likeness created with the relational design and purpose of the relationship of God. Reductionism always counters the function of God's self-disclosure as nothing less and no substitutes.

What distinctly characterizes these relationships in Jesus' vulnerable sanctified life and practice is without reduction: functional communion in the intimate relational involvement of love at the deepest level of qualitative significance (both the heart of God and the human heart created in likeness). Jesus makes his whole person accessible to them for this relationship.

Our predispositions and biases rooted in reductionism create functional barriers to perceive, receive and respond to the relationship of God. The implication of this is sin—that is, sin as reductionism—from which we need to be redeemed (functionally freed for relationship). As *the functional key*, Jesus unlocks and opens the relational door to the process of transformation (completed by the Spirit) for functional involvement in the relationship of God. This need for redeemed and transformed relationship is evident as Jesus is further involved with others, notably his disciples and close followers.

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

Their first interaction takes place because “Martha opened her home to him” and his disciples during his later Judean ministry (see Lk 10:38-42). The term for “opened her home” (*hypodechomai*) denotes a distinct act of caring for them by Martha, which she apparently initiated; also, identifying it as “her home” is unusual when there is a male in the family. Her hospitable and kind action is certainly well received by this likely tired and hungry group, and could easily have been the basis for significant fellowship. But fellowship is an issue in which the function of relationship is critical.

Thinking relationally is always more difficult when the surrounding context defines persons in fixed roles and confines them to the performance of those roles. The non-fluid nature of their sociocultural context made individuality outside those roles an aberration; thus the norm not only constrained the person but also limited (intentionally or inadvertently) the level of involvement in relationships. These barriers made the function of relationship critical for Martha since she was a product of her times.

The person Martha presented to Jesus was based on her role and what she did, which she seemed to perform well. By defining herself in this way, she focused quite naturally on her main priority of all the hospitable work (*diakonia*) to be done, that is, her service or ministry (*diakoneo*, Lk 10:40). This work, on the one hand, was culturally hers to do while, on the other hand, was an opportunity for her to serve Jesus. Yet, defining her person by what she did and the role she had also determined what she paid attention to and ignored (from her perceptual-interpretive framework) in others, and thus how she did relationships. More specifically, Martha stayed within the limits of her role in relationship with Jesus, whom she related to based on his role. This can be seen clearly in their second interaction when Lazarus died (see Jn 11:1-40).

Since the persons Martha and Mary each presented to Jesus coincide in both situations, a composite from both narratives will be used to give us a fuller understanding of how each functioned in relationship with Jesus. Before returning to their first interaction, in this second interaction Martha extends herself again to Jesus when her brother died (Jn 11:21); she didn't lack in initiative. Her opening words to Jesus are exactly the same words (see Greek text) Mary would share with him in their encounter later: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (v.21, Mary in v.32). Yet, while expressing her discouragement and seemingly holding Jesus accountable, in the same breath she qualifies her words with an indirect statement: “But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask” (v.22). Whether she was suggesting or requesting that Jesus do something, her indirectness was probably true to cultural form by not asking Jesus (Master, Teacher) for a favor directly.

Furthermore, Martha stayed within the limits (functional barriers) of relationship between men/rabbi and women. Her indirectness evokes from Jesus a simple yet personal response of what will happen: “Your brother will rise again” (v.23), implying his relational involvement with them. Since Jesus had already taught about the future resurrection from the dead (Jn 5:28,29; 6:39,40), Martha must have learned that before by making reference to it here (v.24). These words by Martha are what a good student would be expected to say. On the surface of Jesus' response, he then seems to take her on a short theological exercise, yet he is really trying to make deeper relational connection with her at the vulnerable level of her heart—“believes in me,” the intimate relational work of trust (vv.25-26). Martha responds with a clear confession of faith (v.27) but without the intimate relational connection with the whole person of her faith, who is kept at a

relational distance as she goes back to call Mary. Later, even her confession is called into question, as she is tested relationally by reductionism: the fact of the situation vs. the person of her faith (vv.39-40).

How Martha was defined by her sociocultural context and what defined her person predisposed her to Jesus and biased how she did relationship with him. With this cultural perceptual framework, she paid attention to Jesus in his role as Lord and Teacher but overlooked his whole person in this interaction; she concentrated on serving Jesus but ignored being relationally involved with him in the first interaction. Consequently, she neither exercises her whole person nor experiences her whole person with Jesus in the function of relationship imperative for his followers.

Revisiting their first interaction, Jesus redirects Martha to what is more important and redefines for her what is truly necessary (Lk 10:41-42). There is an underlying conflict here with Martha's cultural perceptual framework; Jesus doesn't directly deny Martha her framework but shifts her to the deeper qualitative framework of the relational context. Despite the work that needs to be done and the circumstances related to it, he basically tells Martha not to let that define her and determine their time together: "but only one thing is needed." The word for "need" (*chreia*) means usage, act of using, employment, to signify that in which one is employed. Jesus is calling her to the primary priority (her vocation, as it were) in life: *to his whole person in relationship together*—not merely to occupy the same space as Jesus, nor merely to do what Jesus did (e.g., serve), but *to ongoing relational involvement with him in intimate relationship*. No greater priority should employ her life and practice.

This is what needs to define her and to determine their time together. This involves the call to be redefined, transformed and made whole, which implies Martha needed to be redeemed (to be freed). Though she took a small step to connect with Jesus in the second interaction, she needed a redeemed relationship to be involved with Jesus as Mary was (to be discussed shortly).

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

This is a vital distinction for all his followers. Because in defining what is necessary to serve him, Jesus is also clearly definitive about what is insufficient to serve him: to focus primarily on the work to be done, or on related situations and circumstances, no matter how dedicated we are or how good our intentions. Jesus did not

discount the particular service Martha was doing but *how* she engaged it. *How* we serve is just as important as whether we serve or not. Therefore, any reductionist substitutes and practices for serving him are not an option. For all his followers, Jesus makes paradigmatic for serving and imperative for discipleship: *the function of intimate relationship together as the primary priority*.

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

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

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

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

Her whole person functioning in intimate relationship with Jesus is even more evident as we see them in further interactions. Returning to Lazarus’ death and their second interaction, Mary quickly goes out to meet “the Teacher” who has asked for her

(Jn 11:28-29). When she sees him she says the same opening words as Martha earlier (vv.32,21). These are her only spoken words, but not all she communicates to Jesus. When she sees him, “she fell at his feet” (v.32) and says the above while “weeping” (v.33a). Mary makes her whole person vulnerable and fully shares her heart with Jesus, which Martha doesn’t seem to do even with the same words. This communicates profoundly with Jesus, thus deeply moving his heart to make intimate connection with Mary (vv.33b,35,38). In these moments, she experiences her Teacher (*didaskolos*) more deeply and came to *know* him as never before. Their intimate connection is qualitatively distinct from the connection between Martha and Jesus moments earlier. This is the relational outcome in redeemed relationship of the whole person functioning in intimate involvement together.

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

Mary’s action demonstrated the most relationally significant practice of *diakoneo*, in which she served Jesus while intimately involved with his person more than ever before. She gave her person to Jesus, and Jesus not only received her person but also received *from* her person. This continued to contrast with Martha’s *diakoneo* (Jn 12:2), though not to diminish that kind of service. Yet, we need to understand the ongoing choice of function involved here. Mary grew further in her person and experienced more of this relational outcome because she would not allow the counter-relational work of reductionism to prevent her from this opportunity to make intimate connection with Jesus. Without the restraints of reductionism on her heart, she seized the opportunity of the vulnerable presence of Jesus’ whole person (as he said, “you will not always have me,” 12:8).

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

What his early disciples needed to understand as experiential truth, we who have followed apparently have yet to grasp its significance. Jesus not only fully received Mary's person and made her relational action more important than ministry. He further makes the sweeping claim: wherever the truth of his gospel is proclaimed and practiced (in ministry, mission and evangelism) in the whole world (without exception), Mary's action will also be shared in remembrance of her (Mt 26:13, par. Mk 14:9). This is not a memorial to Mary defined by what she did. This is a defining moment in Jesus' sanctified life and practice making evident the functional significance of relationship with him. Remembering Mary is somewhat similar to what Jesus said about remembering him (Lk 22:19). That is, the relational action of Mary's person is basic to the gospel and the functional purpose of God's thematic action and Jesus' sanctified life and practice: *the importance of the whole person functioning in the primacy of intimate involvement together in the relationship of God as the whole of God's family.*

All Christian discourse, at any level, throughout the world needs to involve Mary's functional significance, as Jesus claims. This then urgently raises the question: Where is this person in our life and practice, individually and corporately as church? I suggest what has happened to Mary's action in our midst is primarily due to what is involved in her counterpart's action—gender issues notwithstanding.

As the focus shifts to the (likely) prostitute who similarly anointed Jesus (Lk 7:36-50), we need to be acutely aware of our predispositions and biases which may keep us at a relational distance from the issues involved.

The context of this dinner at a Pharisee's house is traditional and thus well defined in terms of how persons are seen, their fixed roles and their relationship limits; this may be a banquet for Jesus attended by guests in conformity with the host, not an open affair (v.49a). Based on how she is defined and what defines her in this context, the prostitute is totally unacceptable to be even present in the background. Nevertheless, this "impure" woman breaches the religious life and practice of this gathering with even greater implications than those already discussed about Mary's action. While both women exercised their person to pay attention to Jesus' person and ignored the surrounding consequences for their action, the prostitute's choice was even more difficult to make than Mary's.

The difficulty begins with how she is defined and what defines her. Certainly, Simon the Pharisee, along with the other guests, had a clear moral basis for defining her as a sinner (Lk 7:37,39). The prostitute is not in denial about this fact for herself because that in actuality is the reason for her action. That is, on the one hand, the fact that she sinned is not disputed by anyone, least of all this woman; and, on the other hand, the reality she is forgiven and thus redefined is disputed by most present, but not by Jesus and this woman, most of all her. The reason Jesus doesn't dispute her forgiveness is implied in the analogous example he describes for Simon: of prevailing debt in the Mediterranean world and the exceptional act of "debt cancellation" (*charizomai*, to give someone a favor, vv.39-43).

- The theological implication of this is: the more sin we have forgiven by God, the more unearned and unmerited favor (*charis*, grace) we have experienced from God; this has both a quantitative aspect specific to our sin and, more importantly, a qualitative significance relationally specific to the whole of God's family love.

- The functional implication of this is: since this is not only about what Jesus saves us *from* (sin) but most importantly what he saves us *to* (relationship together in God's family), the more grace (and thus forgiveness) we have experienced from God, the more we will love God in qualitative function by being relationally involved with the Trinity in ongoing intimate relationship together, and then extend this family love to others.

This woman already experienced God's forgiveness and grace. She doesn't present herself to Jesus in order to be forgiven. Her moral failure as well as reductionism no longer defined her person and thus determined how her whole person functioned in relationship. She demonstrated having been redeemed from that. And the clear functional indicator for this experiential reality is defined by Jesus as: the deep relational involvement of "she loved much" (v.47)—prevailing in one's qualitative function. He then contrasts for Simon his behavior from hers: the minimum quantitative involvement culturally customary (with which he failed even to engage Jesus) and the vulnerable qualitative involvement of the heart of this woman's whole person (which includes her former vocation's tool, perfume, vv.44-46). And the functional indicator of not experiencing God's grace is also clearly defined by Jesus as: the relational distance of "he who has been forgiven little loves little" (v.47b)—pervasive in one's quantitative function.

As a Pharisee, Simon probably disputed Jesus by pointing to his many good deeds in keeping the Law. This love, however, is only a qualitative function of relationship—never reduced to merely the quantitative deeds of doing something, no matter the devotion or good intention. Since this love is embodied in a person who has first experienced God's grace, then by its nature the act of love by this person functions from the same relational context and process by which God's grace is experienced. There is a direct correlation Jesus establishes here as experiential truth.

Moreover, there is a functional distinction between this woman and Simon which is crucial to understand. There is a redemptive change in her which underlies her relational act of love. Analogous to debt cancellation, she is freed from the burden of her sin on her person and its relational curse. In addition, since, in being forgiven, she is now defined by God's grace and no longer by reductionism, she is freed functionally from the constraints of reductionist substitutes and practices. Thus, this redemption gives her the freedom to vulnerably love Jesus' whole person and to experience him intimately as never before, just as Mary did. Without their freedom the relational act of love would not have been expressed. Maybe deeds of "love" to substitute for this love would emerge—possibly as Martha expressed and probably as Simon performed—but not the relational significance of God's love.

Jesus reaffirms to this woman what she already understood as the basis for her loving action—"Your sins are forgiven" (v.48). She may not have understood all the theology involved but she grasped deeply its functional significance. Then he prepares her to go forth in the surrounding reductionist context to function further as a person who has been redefined, is being transformed and made whole. As she vulnerably gave her person to his accessible person, he now vulnerably extends his whole person back to her (v.50): "Your faith (your ongoing relational trust in my whole person) has saved you (*to* relationship together in God's family, *sozo*, and made you whole); go in peace (in the wholeness and well being of *who* you now are and *whose* you will always be)."

Despite the pressures she would continue to face from the surrounding reductionist context, her whole person and her function together in the relationships necessary with the whole of God will continue to grow (as Mary did) as long as the basis for her life and practice is God's grace. This basis must (*dei*) by its nature be not only as the theological basis but, most important, as the functional basis. God's grace was not new to Simon's thinking. As a Pharisee, his theology from the OT likely included God's grace. Yet, God's grace was not functional in his life and practice—that is, function in the relational significance of God's grace, which Jesus vulnerably discloses to him.

This is the primary issue involved in the absence of recounting Mary's action in our midst. While God's grace may be claimed as the theological basis for our life, the functional basis for our practice tends to be distinguished by reductionism more than God's grace. This then renders having grace as a theological basis to functional irrelevance. That same kind of irrelevance may be ascribed to Mary—especially by males. The relational acts of love, however, by Mary and the ex-prostitute do not reflect a so-called gender-based relational orientation of women. Such a perception is predisposed by reductionism and reflects a general male bias embedded in the function of relational distance—which many females believe or accept also. To diminish the person and minimize the relational act point to the underlying presence of reductionist substitutes and practice, both for the ontology of the person and for the relational purpose of human persons created in the image and likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity. These reductionist influences have the consequence of reinforcing (inadvertently or intentionally) counter-relational work, and thus are in conflict with God's grace.

Yet, the relational involvement experienced in these interactions with Jesus is neither unique to types of individuals nor an unintentional action happening without deeper basis and purpose beyond the individual. This involvement is the relational function of intimately engaging Jesus in his relational context of family and by his relational process of family love. Jesus' relational context and process are both trinitarian, and thus constitute the relationship of the whole of God: which is vulnerably disclosed to us for relationship because of God's grace, which is intimately experienced by us in relationship together by God's grace, and which then is the ongoing relational function of our life and practice only on the basis of God's grace.

This is why Mary engaged the deepest relational work and demonstrated the most relationally significant practice of *diakoneo*, both of which clearly distinguish Jesus' followers and the nature of who, what and how they are. This is what Jesus makes paradigmatic for serving and imperative for discipleship for all his followers. Yet, implied in Mary's relational function and made explicit in the relational function of the ex-prostitute is their basis in God's grace, not based on what they do and have. This is why the significance of this relational function is basic to the gospel, God's thematic action and Jesus' sanctified life and practice.

When we tend to submit to how the surrounding context (even at church) defines us by what we do (and attain) and have (and accumulate), and when the functional basis for our practice becomes defined by what we do and have (however unintentional or inadvertent), then we are under the influence of reductionism.

- The functional implication of this is: we no longer engage Jesus in his relational context and process, and thus in ongoing relational involvement with his whole person; instead we relate to our perceptions about him in a substitute context and

process, which in appearance may not be distinguishable from the former, but lacks the qualitative level of relationship (which is where Martha's practice becomes more distinct); whatever the devotion or good intention, this practice follows Jesus and pursues God on our terms, not God's.

- The theological implication of this is: when we disembodied Jesus' life and practice, and thus disconnect his relational function, there is a reduction of God's relational initiative to extend family love to us and a redefining of God as one who responds in an exchange process to what we do; this diminishes the need for God's grace and creates relational tension (often as relational distance) with Jesus' sanctified life and practice, even while professing a theology of grace.

Further implications involve the ontology of the person and of relationship. The ontology of the person is diminished because the whole person is not affirmed, only the more quantitative aspects of a person. This outer-in approach to a person—focused on what one does and has—is constricting because this reductionist bias never involves the “in” aspect of the person; or it may envision a false dualism without the significance and function of the whole person. Likewise, the ontology of relationships is minimalized because whole persons are not intimately involved in the relational function necessary for relationships to be significant and whole. This deemphasizes in practice the functional priority of intimate relationships—both with God and with each other in the church. In these contexts, ontological simulations are substituted by reductionism for both the person and their relationships.

Reductionism is resistant to God's grace because grace functionally affirms the whole person and constitutes intimate relationships. The difficulties seen in many of the interactions with Jesus' person involve this resistance to him who embodied God's grace. The experiential truth is: *God's grace demands nothing less and no substitutes than the whole person and intimate relationship together.* Jesus makes this evident in the incarnation of his whole God person, as discussed earlier, as well as in other interactions which are important to understand in his sanctified life and practice and for our life and practice.

The Demands of Grace

When Jesus qualified “whoever serves me” by making antecedent the priority “follow me” (Jn 12:26), he established a problematic condition for all of us. This paradigm for serving and imperative for discipleship make our life and practice more difficult. Not only is serving more difficult now without the option of reductionist substitutes and with the nonnegotiable priority focused on the function of relationship; following Jesus is now made more difficult because the terms of discipleship are not only relationship specific with his whole person but also relationally specific only to God's terms.

Once we understand that the ongoing function in relationship together must precede and be the priority over serving, then we have to grasp the face of Jesus. That is, we have to deal directly with God's grace embodied in Jesus and relationship with him on God's terms. Jesus made his whole person accessible to persons in their human context. This never meant, however, that Jesus functioned in relationship with them in

their relational context and by their relational process—in other words, that relationship with Jesus could be on our terms.

“Follow me” is about both relationship and relationship with him on God’s terms. “Face to face” with Jesus involves a specific relational process involving specific persons. This means the “me” Jesus makes imperative to follow has to be the whole person Jesus vulnerably presented in the incarnation. The face of Jesus cannot be our image of him shaped by our own predispositions and biases—especially from a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework—which certainly involve our interests, desires and needs.

This is the problem Peter had in coming face to face with Jesus. As we revisit some of his interactions with Jesus, we can understand the difficulty he had with the “me” of Jesus’ whole person as well as presenting the significance of his own person in face-to-face relationship.

While Peter clearly chose to respond to Jesus’ call to “Follow me” with his whole life (cf. Lk 5:10-11; Mk 10:28), the function of his whole person had difficulty responding to the face of Jesus. This is evident in their interactions, which will be examined for our purpose here by starting with their last interaction during Jesus’ earthly ministry (see Jn 21:15-23).

This post-resurrection interaction takes place obviously after Peter’s denials of Jesus prior to the crucifixion. Since neither of them addresses the pain of these moments, Peter apparently has been forgiven. Assuming this happened, it would be helpful to connect Jesus’ questions about Peter’s love less to his denials and more to the ex-prostitute’s relational act of love (Lk 7:36-50). The implication of connecting these would shift the focus from Peter’s future ministry—demonstrating his love (or even proving it) by fully caring for Jesus’ followers—to *how* he needs to engage serving (cf. the issue for Martha).

The experience of forgiveness (and God’s grace) directly correlates to the exercise of love—an experiential truth Jesus established when defining the ex-prostitute’s action. Love is never reduced to the quantitative deeds of ministry but is only a qualitative function of relationship. Like the ex-prostitute, since this love needs to be embodied in a person who has first experienced God’s grace, then by its nature any act of love by this person functions from the same relational context and process by which God’s grace is experienced. The significance, therefore, of this woman’s (and Mary’s) relational involvement with Jesus is: *the relational involvement of intimately engaging Jesus in his relational context of family and by his relational process of family love.*

As Jesus questions Peter about his love and directs him to his ministry (“feed my sheep”), he is correlating the experience of forgiveness and God’s grace to this matter (“he who has been forgiven much loves much”). Thus, Jesus is focusing on Peter’s need to establish God’s grace as the basis for his life and practice. The outcome of this would constitute Peter’s function only in the context of God’s family and by the process of extending God’s family love. Yet, Peter is having difficulty intimately engaging Jesus in his relational context and by his relational process. This crucial relational involvement is not there for Peter despite his declarations of love for Jesus. Jesus knows this is missing in Peter’s answers, thus he once again calls Peter to the relational significance of “Follow me” (Jn 21:19b).

When Jesus redirects Peter to the relationship and the need for deeper involvement together, Peter demonstrates his relational distance by paying attention to John (“what about him?” v.21), and thus in effect ignoring Jesus’ person vulnerably pursuing him. This apparently strains Jesus’ loving patience. His response to Peter—“what is that to you?” (v.22)—expresses rebuke from Jesus which Peter needed. This is why Jesus, then, emphatically makes it imperative to Peter: “You must follow me”—the only imperative Peter needed to hear and focus on. As the last words (and the first words to begin their relationship, Mk 1:17) Jesus says to Peter, he once again calls Peter to be redefined, transformed and made whole.

Even up to the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus is calling Peter to his whole person for intimate relationship together. The functional implication of this is that the influence of reductionism is still preventing Peter from functioning deeper in the relational involvement of following Jesus’ whole person. This is a functional barrier for Peter to go further in the relational progression, in which Jesus takes his followers to relationship with the Father as his very own in God’s family together. While Peter often represents the early disciples as a group, his difficulties are of his own choosing and doing. He has had various opportunities to be redeemed, yet his reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework always emerged to resist God’s grace. This all becomes evident as we revisit some of his earlier interactions with Jesus.

Two confessions of faith characterize Peter’s discipleship. One confession came when Jesus separated would-be followers from true disciples (Jn 6:68-69), discussed in chapter one. The next confession came when Peter affirmed Jesus’ deity, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” which Jesus acknowledged Peter as having received this revelation from “my Father” (Mt 16:16-17). Yet, confessions of faith are insufficient to follow Jesus’ whole person—even confessing his deity. Peter had yet to grasp that God’s self-disclosures are only for relationship; and he needed to engage Jesus face to face.

He would have that opportunity moments later when Jesus vulnerably disclosed the painful course “he must” (*dei*, necessary, unavoidable) take to the cross and the resurrection (Mt 16:21). Rather than receive the face of Jesus (and God’s grace), however, Peter takes Jesus aside as if to counsel him (maybe partly from the confidence gained due to his confession), not to console Jesus. Peter acts boldly “to rebuke him” (v.22). The word “rebuke” (*epitimao*) means to censure, rebuke; it is an abrupt and biting charge sharply expressing disapproval, harshly taking someone to task for a fault (cf. Mk 1:25). The word implies that Peter expressed a warning as he confronted Jesus on this absurd disclosure. “Never, Lord!”—the word (*hileos*) functions in such phrases as an invocation for overturning evil (cf. in our vernacular, “God forbid!” or “Absolutely no way!”). We have to appreciate Peter’s honesty in sharing his feelings with Jesus. In this sense, Peter made himself vulnerable to Jesus. Yet, despite his honesty, was he really opening his whole person to Jesus? The answer involves why Peter had these feelings.

Jesus’ response to him helps us understand. He responds back even more strongly by identifying Peter as the enemy (v.23); contrast this with moment’s earlier (v.17). Why, because he was a “stumbling block” to Jesus; the word (*skandalon*) always denotes enticing or trapping its victim in a course of behavior which could ruin the person. Compared to earlier (v.17) when Peter was influenced by the Father’s revelation over human reason, Peter shifted from theological confession to his function on the basis of

human rationality. “Have in mind” (*phroneo*) means to think, have a mindset—that which underlies one’s predisposition or bias. This is the activity of one’s perceptual-interpretive framework, which also involves the will, affections, conscience, therefore to be mindful and devoted to that perspective—that is, for Peter’s function, at the very least. In other words, it defines what he pays attention to and what he ignores, thus determines how he will function as a person and in relationships.

Peter had strong feelings against Jesus’ self-disclosure because that was incongruent with his perceived image of God and what God should do. This is not merely about his messianic hopes and expectations but exposes a deeper issue. That is, Peter’s perceptual-interpretive framework reduced Jesus’ whole person and determined the terms of their relationship; this then redefined Jesus to function in Peter’s context, not his trinitarian relational context, thus to be something less than and some substitute for the One whom Peter professed to be earlier. Under the influence of reductionism, Peter resists God’s grace by trying to prevent Jesus from going to the cross—for Peter’s redemption, which he clearly demonstrates the need for, particularly from reductionism. This is how reductionism influences us to function in life and practice contrary to what we believe theologically—a common pattern not unique to Peter.

This influence of reductionism is further understood as it prevents Peter from a significant relational connection with Jesus. Six days after the above interaction, the face of Jesus is presented the most vulnerably than at any other moment during the incarnation. This happens when Jesus is “transfigured” (*metamorphoo*, to transform, to alter fundamentally) before Peter, James and John (Mt 17:1-9)—a privileged experience for them.

The transfiguration marks a pivotal point of Jesus’ disclosure of God’s glory, which these disciples have the unique opportunity to experience further and deeper: the “visible” heart of God’s being, as Jesus is transformed to exalted form and substance (cf. Moses’ face, Ex 34:29); the intimate relational nature of the whole of God, as the Father, along with his Son, communicates directly with them in relationship (cf. with Moses, Ex 24:15-16; with Elijah, 1 Kg 19:8-18); and the vulnerable presence and involvement of God, as made evident in this amazing experiential moment. At this reunion of key persons in God’s family, the whole of God’s thematic action coheres from the past (represented by Moses and Elijah) with the present (presented by the Messiah in God’s glory embodying God’s grace) to the future (by the present constituting reality of God’s kingdom/family). In the Father’s relational communication (an extension from Jesus’ baptism, Mk 1:11) further made with these disciples to build relationship together, two vital messages summarize all that God relationally has disclosed, promised and experienced with his people: (1) the full affirmation of his Son in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love, and (2) the clear imperative (“Listen to him!”) for all his followers to pay attention and respond to him in his relational context and process—because Jesus communicates the whole of God, not only with his words but from his whole person.

The whole of God’s glory is vulnerably disclosed in the face of Jesus (cf. 2 Cor 4:6). Moses and Elijah responded to God’s glory “face to face” on God’s terms to build the covenant relationship together. What does Peter do with God’s glory; how does he respond to the face of Jesus?

God's glory is not disclosed to observe for information, or merely to behold in awe, but only for relationship—by the necessity of God's being, nature and presence. When Peter wanted to erect three tents (for Jesus, Moses and Elijah) as the opportune purpose for him to be present (Mk 9:5), consider what this does to the whole of God's heart and intimate relational presence vulnerably presented to him. In the tension of this vulnerable moment Peter resorts to the past, both immediate and distant, which is still present in function for him. His old mindset (perceptual-interpretive framework) exposed by Jesus six days ago, quickly expressed itself further when he tries to constrain God's glory to a place—just like the OT ways of relating to God indirectly in the tabernacle (tent). Once again, Peter reduces Jesus' whole person and relates to the face of Jesus on his reductionist terms, not Jesus' relational context and process as the Father makes imperative for him.

Certainly Peter's fear factors in to his response, as Mark's Gospel indicates (Mk 9:6). Yet, a response from fear mainly points to what Peter relies on in his life and practice. An analogous example of such response by Peter to Jesus' person and relationship together is their interaction walking on water (Mt 14:22-33). In this experiential moment, Peter initially engages Jesus' whole person ("if it's you...") in Jesus' relational context ("...tell me to come to you"). The situation is not the primary matter to pay attention to here but the relational process of their involvement together is. Peter is making his whole person vulnerable to Jesus on Jesus' terms—though there is some element of "prove it" contingency to Peter's faith, yet not in a passive sense without Peter's full relational involvement. Unfortunately, Peter only pays attention to Jesus' person and the relationship for a brief significant moment. Then he shifts to the situation, which thus produces the fear causing a response to Jesus only in the role to save him *from* his circumstances. The significance of this shift, in contrast to the beginning of this interaction, is: Jesus' person is reduced to what he can do and the primacy of relationship is replaced by the situation and circumstances.

The situation and circumstances are real, but they cannot be the priority to create the context for relationship with Jesus nor be the terms to determine the process of relational involvement with Jesus. A reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework makes this shift (often subtle), notably when there is tension in the relationship. Back at the transfiguration, Peter's shift to the tents exposes: the reductionist substitute he uses for the face of Jesus; how reductionism diminished his direct relational involvement with God's glory embodied by Jesus' whole person; and thus the relational distance he maintains from intimate relationship together with Jesus and the whole of God as family. The relational consequence is that how Peter functions directly prevents their relationship from functioning together in the relational significance of "Follow me."

In his reductionism Peter continues to resist God's grace, and thus he functions neither in the importance of the whole person nor with the primacy of intimate relationships. Yet, since Jesus neither defines his person nor does relationships in Peter's reductionist terms, along with the Father he persists in his relational work to extend family love to him. At the transfiguration, it is also important for us to understand Jesus' relational action and not merely pay attention to his words. After the Father spoke directly to the disciples, Jesus pursued them and tenderly reached down to touch them (Mt 17:6-7). The word for touch (*hapto*) involves not just physical contact but touch with involvement and purpose in order to influence, affect them, notably Peter—that is, by his

relational messages from his relational context of family and relational process of family love.

Jesus' pursuit of Peter with his whole person for Peter's whole person continues in a defining interaction for all his followers, in which Jesus begins to make evident "the full extent of his love" (Jn 13:1-17). His footwashing tends to be oversimplified as symbolic of servanthood or spiritual cleansing, yet we need to understand the relational significance of this action. The phrase "the full extent of his love" (*eis telos*), which Jesus partially makes evident in his action, means: the complete, ongoing thematic action of God's family love (signified by relational involvement) initiated in the covenant and now embodied and fulfilled in Jesus' whole person. Besides in the hours to follow to the cross, how does Jesus make evident "the full extent of his love" in this moment?

If the context of his footwashing is not limited to only the situation and circumstances—as prevailing as they are just prior to his death—Jesus takes his followers deeper into his relational context and relational process. For Jesus, the time now is not about going to the cross, rather "the time had come for him to...go to the Father" (13:1). This situation and circumstances neither define Jesus' person (though they certainly will affect him) because he is defined by the trinitarian relational context of family; nor do they determine his action because he functions by the trinitarian relational process of family love. All of his actions thus are for relationship. As the embodiment of God's grace, Jesus' whole person functions to affirm the importance of the whole person and to constitute intimate relationships together as family—by redeeming and transforming the person and their relationships.

Jesus' footwashing directly overlaps both with Mary's footwashing as the relational action of intimate involvement in family love and with the ex-prostitute's footwashing as the relational act of love emerging from the experience of God's grace. Contrary to reductionism, their involvement is the relational function of intimately engaging Jesus' whole person in his relational context of family and by his relational process of family love. In that upper room with his disciples, Jesus functions with the same relational involvement to intimately engage these future leaders of his family with his relational context and relational process. What is the significance of this for God's family?

By extending God's grace to his followers, Jesus makes his whole person fully vulnerable to his followers. Since God's grace affirms the whole person—which reductionism resists—grace demands nothing less and no substitutes. And Jesus doesn't allow anything less or any substitutes of his own person to be in direct relational involvement with them.

It was cultural custom for the host to provide water for dinner guests to wash their own dusty feet, at the very least (cf. Jesus' comment to Simon, Lk 7:44). Hosts with greater means would have a household servant wash the diners' feet as they reclined at the table to eat. While Jesus demonstrates his humility (as the Teacher, Lord, Messiah) to assume the footwashing work himself, even more significant is "the full extent" of his relational involvement (signifying his family love). Nothing less and no substitutes of Jesus' whole person than he personally assuming this footwashing would be sufficient to constitute his relational involvement of family love—that is, as the embodiment of God's grace. Furthermore, grace demands nothing less and no substitutes of persons to constitute the intimate relationships of family; this is what the ex-prostitute teaches us

and Mary demonstrates for the relational significance of the gospel, as Jesus said earlier in intimate relationship with them contrary to reductionist substitutes and practice. Likewise, in relation to his disciples no household servant could substitute for Jesus and nothing less than Jesus' whole person could make evident this family love.

Functioning fully in his relational context of family and by his relational process of family love, Jesus engages his disciples. Footwashing doesn't represent so much how far (or "low") Jesus is willing to go, as much as the feet are symbolic of the depth level of relational involvement Jesus engages with them. In other words, no level is too deep or beyond any limits for relationship together, which reductionism resists and tries to redefine. God's grace demands this and constitutes this intimate relationship of God's family. This not only makes Jesus' whole person vulnerable but also makes his followers' whole person vulnerable. What does Peter do this time with the face of Jesus?

If Peter's perceptions of Jesus had changed, we could expect a different response than the time he tried to prevent Jesus from going to the cross. Yet, Peter's response to Jesus washing his feet (in the Greek aorist subjunctive mood with a double negative, Jn 13:8) is the strongest expression of categorical denial and refusal of Jesus' action. Did Peter not learn anything from their previous confrontation? While he appears to have accepted Jesus' pending death (cf. Mk 14:31; Lk 22:33), though with mixed reactions (cf. Jn 18:10-11), he has yet to experience redemptive change from reductionism.

Once again Peter functions from his reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework. Under the influence of reductionism, he not only defines his person primarily by what he does but he also defines Jesus this way. Then, of course, just as with the issue of the cross, there is absolutely no way Peter's Teacher (culturally, students served the teacher), Lord, God could do this servile act. If Peter subjected himself to this, he would only reinforce Jesus' and his indignity or humiliation. And, once again, we have to appreciate Peter's honesty; yet this is what he pays attention to while ignoring the significance of Jesus' whole person and the relational involvement necessary for intimate relationship together. The relational messages in Peter's response to Jesus are: Jesus couldn't be his own person; he has to be the person Peter wanted him to be; and Peter would determine how their relationship will function. Despite Peter's honesty, do we get a sense of his whole person?

I suggest, there is a deeper issue also involved here which creates an even more formidable barrier to intimate relationship, as an infectious byproduct of reductionism. This interaction with Jesus very likely stirred up mixed feelings in Peter. Based on his reductionist substitutes and practice to define himself, that's how he functioned in relationships. As the prevailing practice in human relations from reductionism, Peter also essentially compared people on a human totem pole. This process of stratification placed Jesus at the top and Peter below, if not at the bottom. On the one hand, Peter felt very strongly that his servile act (just as the cross scenario) was not worthy of Jesus. In this structure, conversely, Peter would feel also that he was *unworthy* to have his Teacher, Lord, Messiah, God wash his feet, however strong the feeling. The latter feeling more fully explains Peter's relational rejection of the intimate involvement of Jesus' whole person in family love, and thus of God's grace—all while professing faith to the contrary. In his unworthiness, Peter was not open to the vulnerability of such intimacy, even despite Jesus being more accessible to him than at any other time.

Jesus is making evident to Peter that to “Follow me” is a function only of relationship, not of confessions of faith or of serving, however devoted or well-intentioned. He told Peter his washing was necessary for Peter to have a “part with me” (Jn13:8). “Part with” (*meros meta*) means to “share with me,” which involves the relational function of communion together. This is about ongoing intimate involvement in relationship together, not about forming the beginning of a relationship (cf. “in me”)—nor about so-called communion activity, which is how Holy Communion tends to be observed in church. “Follow me; and where I am, my [disciple] also will be” (Jn12:26). Jesus’ whole person was vulnerably involved with Peter in this relational act; and that’s where Peter needed to be to participate in Jesus’ life, and how it was necessary for him to function in order to have intimate involvement together. Just as with Martha, this is what needs to *employ* Peter’s life and practice.

This relational significance of Jesus’ involvement to make evident the fullness of his family love and God’s grace still escaped Peter. When he asked for “my hands and my head as well” to be washed (v.9), his reductionist framework only saw Jesus in the quantitative act of purifying, not in the qualitative function of relationship. Peter was embedded in his surrounding context, which still prevailed in his life and practice. Consequently, Peter’s whole person remained in relational distance and had yet to vulnerably engage Jesus in his relational context and process.

Yet, without redemptive change from the *old* (namely reductionism) we cannot expect Peter to be transformed to the *new*—as the ex-prostitute teaches us about God’s grace and Mary makes functional about the gospel. The same reductionism pervades our life and practice today; and we experience the absence of intimacy in our relationships, even in the church, likely more than in any other historical period. The reductionist substitutes and practices prevailing in modernity need to be redeemed, transformed and restored to God’s design and purpose, as Jesus vulnerably made evident in his sanctified life and practice. Without such changes, we will practice our relationship with God on similar terms as Peter continued to struggle in.

The influence of reductionism always resists God’s grace (which affirms the whole person and constitutes intimate relationship together) by redefining the person to something less and by counter-relational work displacing intimate relationships with substitutes. Grace demands the function of the whole person to be vulnerable to each other (hearts open and coming together) to constitute intimate relationship—nothing less and no substitutes.

God’s grace embodied in Jesus functions vulnerably with the whole person and thus is deeply involved with Peter in family love. And the relational messages to Peter ongoingly from the face of Jesus can be summarized: “To ‘Follow me,’ Peter, it is never enough to make confessions of faith (however crucial) and merely to serve me (however devoted); you have to let my whole person be intimately involved with you and vulnerably wash your feet; but, and this is critical, in order to let my whole person be intimately involved with you, and you with me, you must (*dei*, necessary, unavoidable) let go of your *old* (notably, reductionist substitutes and practices) and then let me go to the cross for you so that you can be redeemed from the old and transformed to the *new* in the function of intimate relationship together as family in ongoing family love.”

A reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework shifts these relational messages to the critical issue: how does unworthy Peter measure up to these expectations in

ongoing life and practice? As the footwashing interaction also points to, the underlying concern for Peter was: how can he be worthy of this relationship? Various interactions with Jesus demonstrate how much he defined himself by what he did, or at least said he was going to do, which Peter depended on to establish himself as Jesus' disciple. Their relationship throughout the Gospels indicates his vacillation between, on the one hand, trying to establish himself by his own efforts and, on the other, not being able to measure up and likely feeling unworthy. This is characteristic of those who define themselves by what they do or have.

Yet, the face of Jesus clearly emerges from the constraining context of reductionism to bridge the relational distance to make evident "the full extent of his love." Embodying God's grace always functions in the relational involvement of family love. And what all his followers need to grasp from Jesus (and the ex-prostitute) is the experiential truth: experiencing God's grace also always functions in the relational involvement of family love.

The ongoing experience of God's grace is a fundamental issue for those who define themselves by what they do or have, and then depend on that to establish worth in their relationships, both with Jesus and with others. It is especially problematic when these persons are active in serving Jesus. By washing their feet, Jesus is not reinforcing a reductionist self-definition and worth but gives his followers the deepest experience of the *new* basis and base for relationship with him and each other. After he washed their feet, he asked them: "Do you understand what I have done for you?" (Jn13:12). "For you" (*hymin*) is in the Greek dative form and should be rendered "to you," because this wasn't a mere deed "for you" to observe as an example of what to do in the ministry of the gospel. Rather "to you" involves Jesus' relational action vulnerably disclosed to them in order to experience "the full extent of his love." "Do you understand" (*ginosko*, to know, comprehend, experience) is not related to knowing information about Jesus and what he did, but rather involves experiencing Jesus' whole person and intimate relationship together in his relational context of family by his relational process of family love.

In direct opposition to reductionism, Jesus displaces the roles (Teacher, Lord, servant, messenger) used to define him and his followers and dissolves the stratified relationships those roles promote (Jn 13:13-16). Jesus only sees their persons as family together; and family love is the only way his whole person is intimately involved with them. Just as Mary and the ex-prostitute functioned contrary to reductionism, all his followers are called to be redefined, transformed and made whole to function "with me" in his relational context of family and by his relational process of family love. This deep experience of his family love (and thus God's grace) is the basis for their relationships and is the ongoing base by which to function with each other. This is the base experience his new commandment points to, which distinguishes his disciples not as mere servants but as family together (Jn 13:34-35)—a relational progression to be discussed further in the next chapter.

Yet, this deep experience of the *new* basis and base for relationship with Jesus and each other has a tendency to get redefined or renegotiated—even unintentionally or inadvertently. This susceptibility often becomes a common practice particularly in a surrounding context influenced by reductionism and its byproduct of feeling unworthy. To share in this experience *with* Jesus and to share this experience *with* others, however,

cannot be reduced and still be the same experience. Its significance is constituted only as a function of the whole person vulnerably involved in intimate relationship together.

When Jesus tells his followers to wash each other's feet (Jn 13:14-15), this directly addresses the issue of unworthiness. Peter genuinely and rightfully felt unworthy in relation to Jesus at different times (cf. Lk 5:8). Reductionism functionally redefines this condition of unworthy (not necessarily theologically) and substitutes practices to achieve one's worth. Since Peter was under the influence of reductionism, he needed to take to heart the relational message from Jesus implied in the experiential truth of this experience: "I, 'the holy One of God' who embodies God's grace, wash your feet even though you are not worthy." Yet, Peter (or any of Jesus' followers) cannot merely receive the relational action of God's grace as one not worthy, and then redefine it as a deed for him to perform in order to try to be worthy. This effort to measure up to Jesus' perceived expectations is a reductionist practice that resists the reality of one's whole person. The fact that Peter is not worthy is not a problem for Jesus and God's grace, yet it is problematic for Peter. Since grace affirms the whole person, grace demands nothing less and no substitutes of his whole person, however unworthy.

When Jesus said "you also should wash...you should do as I...," "should" (*opheilo*) can either be taken as an obligation, an obligatory duty to one another, or be understood with relational significance as to be bound, that is, bonded together in the relationship of God's family. Since Jesus said "as I" (*kathos*, to show agreement between), he clearly means only the latter; perhaps his use of *opheilo* instead of *dei* involves the relational responsibility to choose clearly to function contrary to reductionism, just as Jesus, Mary and the ex-prostitute did. If Peter (or any of Jesus' followers) takes this as a duty to measure up to for his worth, he renegotiates the terms for relationship together and the significance of Jesus' purpose and function. By doing so, then, Peter would continue essentially in function to prevent Jesus from going to the cross for him and God's grace to redeem and transform him.

What Peter needs to grasp from Jesus is: *grace demands the whole of his unworthiness also—nothing less than this person and no substitute practices for this person in relationships*. Grace is the experiential truth with the implied relational message from Jesus: "I, 'the Son of the living God,' die on the cross for you because you can't make yourself worthy no matter what you do and have." Since grace constitutes intimate relationships together as God's family, grace demands only this one conclusion about the function of his self-worth, which otherwise would be a barrier to this intimate involvement together.

God's grace demands that we fully be our whole person—nothing less (and nothing more, no embellishments) and no substitutes (and no role playing, however devoted or well-intentioned). This is who and what Jesus presented in the incarnation and made accessible. Since the whole person is neither in a vacuum nor to be isolated, this person functions only for relationships. The grace of God's self-revelation in the incarnation of Jesus functions only for relationship. As the embodiment of God's grace, Jesus' person vulnerably discloses not only who and what God is but also how God is, which is only for relationship together. Therefore, God's grace demands our whole person to function together in the relationships constituted by the full relational function of Jesus' whole person in the trinitarian context of family and the trinitarian process of family love—that is, functionally constituting the intimate relationships together with the

whole of God as family, and thus persons redeemed and transformed to function in relationships together intimately by family love in likeness of the Trinity.

What God's grace demands of our person is irreducible, and what God's grace demands of our relationships is nonnegotiable. This is who, what and how Jesus is, and who, what and how his followers must (*dei*, necessary by its nature, not obligation) be to function in relationship "with me." To have grace as the functional basis and ongoing base for our life and practice involves nothing less and no substitutes.

Functional Implications

In the complete Christology of Jesus' sanctified life and practice, Jesus' whole person functions both to make God accessible only for relationship by vulnerably disclosing the whole of God, as well as to pursue us for intimate relationship together by his relational work of redemption and transformation. If we are beginning to grasp the importance of the ontological integrity of Jesus' whole person and the relational significance of how he functions, we have to make necessary changes to reflect this. For example, what we pay attention to and ignore necessarily must be redefined. This would reprioritize how we function in our life and practice to focus on the functional importance of the whole person and the primacy of intimate relationships. Sanctified life and practice involves only these two functions, with nothing less and no substitutes.

This raises an issue about the relationship of God and a lingering question about Martha. Why wasn't how Martha served at that stage of her growth process sufficient for Jesus? With similar attention to a profile like the rich ruler (discussed in chapter one), Martha's service would be a welcome addition to and sought after by many churches for some type of service ministry. If churches were as definitive as Jesus, this would significantly reduce the amount of church practices. Yet, this is not an issue of perfection and the excellence of performance but rather the necessity of qualitative involvement by persons and in relationships. Thus, this goes back to the incarnation principle of nothing less and no substitutes.

Since we've all been on the road to Emmaus, we may ask if it's reasonable or fair to be held accountable for all of God's self-disclosures in the incarnation—just as Jesus confronted the two disciples on the road earlier. This would not be the right question to ask. The issue should be, if it was reasonable or fair for God to make accessible nothing less than and no substitute of the whole of God, and also if reasonable or fair that Jesus' person was always vulnerably involved with nothing less than and no substitute of his whole person.

"Nothing less and no substitutes" is a vulnerable disclosure of the relational ontology of the whole of God, the Trinity; and as God's self-disclosure by grace, the relationship of God is epistemologically irreducible and nonnegotiable. Moreover, the relationship of the whole of God becomes an experiential truth when our reciprocal involvement is vulnerably nothing less and no substitutes; this must not be confused with the perfection and total performance of that involvement, which would reduce the involvement to more quantitative than qualitative. Therefore, given how the whole of God embodied in Jesus vulnerably engaged us for relationship, the reasonable and fair question then becomes: can there be any other sufficient response back to God than nothing less and no substitutes of our whole person? And consider further and deeper the

implications for us today of Jesus' words to those turning to the road to Emmaus: "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to [be relationally involved]."

Followers of Jesus cannot ignore the function of Jesus' relational imperative in their life and practice, both individually and as church. Yet, why would we ignore its significance if it is the basis for deeply knowing God and experiencing Jesus as never before (just as for Mary), and the ongoing base for experiencing intimate relationship with each other together as God's family? This raises two interrelated issues in our life and practice, of which we need to be aware:

1. The accessibility of the face of Jesus we ongoingly respond to—not merely theologically acknowledge—the involvement of which is a function of relationship with Jesus' whole person.
2. Our image of Jesus, in everyday usage, shaped by our perceptual-interpretive framework, which also functions to predispose and bias our involvement with him ongoingly.

We need to account for these particularly in the presence of reductionism. For example, a reductionist image of Jesus predisposes or biases us to limit our involvement with him, and thus creates a barrier in relationship together (just as with Peter). This turns what we may think is accessing the face of Jesus into a substitute for intimate relationship and into something less than his whole person. This then is an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism. Without being able to distinguish this in our practice, we can inadvertently reinforce counter-relational work rather than engage the relational imperative in how we function, serve or even practice church together. If this identifies correctly where Martha was, how can Jesus affirm her service without reinforcing reductionism and its subtle counter-relational work?

This addresses the deeper issue. Any aspect of our life and practice (individually and as church) which functions to diminish the whole of Jesus' person and to minimize intimacy in the relationship of God becomes a matter of sin—specifically, sin as reductionism. Whatever creates functional limits to perceive, receive and respond to the whole of God is the relational function of sin. We need to grasp what is involved here. Reductionism is not merely a conceptual framework but more importantly an underlying counter-relational process struggling against the whole of God. There is an ongoing tension and conflict between God's relational work of grace and Satan's counter-relational work, which we cannot rationally ignore or relationally avoid.

Since God's grace demands the function of the whole person to be vulnerably involved with each other (hearts open and coming together) to constitute the intimate relationships of family, reductionism actively resists this. The functional implication commonly overlooked in our Christian contexts is the functional reality (serving as truth): *reductionism has become an acceptable alternative to, and a prevailing substitute for, the demands of God's grace.*

The ontological simulations and epistemological illusions substituting for the whole of God and God's creation (original and new in Christ) are increasingly normative in our life and practice, rather than an exception. While reinforcing counter-relational work is often inadvertent, its pervasiveness in our practice makes our function more like intentionally unintentional. The reality functioning in our midst is: reductionism separates the whole individual person and distances the collective whole of God's people from the whole of the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love.

This has embedded the local Western church in reductionist substitutes of individualism and voluntary association characterized by privatism—to be discussed in later chapters. While these matters are certainly relational consequences from other contextual influences (such as modernity), the full understanding of reductionism can only be gained from adequately perceiving Satan’s counter-relational work.

In the life of a church, and in our everyday life, the priority of relationship over ministry, service and other work is certainly difficult to reconcile in practice, given situations and circumstances—and, more importantly, given our investment in what we do and have. Yet, this is compounded when God’s grace is not the functional basis and ongoing base for our life and practice. For example, relationships are not simple and relational work is not easy. This can appear too demanding to measure up to, or it can be a threat to our worth—both based on what we do and have, as well as the fear of losing what we have attained and accumulated. This is true of a church which fills its pews with “rich rulers” and “Marthas” to define its success, rather than relying on Marys and ex-prostitutes to fulfill its purpose and function in the gospel; this reflects a shift to reductionist substitutes. Moreover, even if the Jesus we follow is not a popular version but the biblically orthodox Jesus, this doesn’t guarantee how we will practice relationship with him. We can still function with an orthodox theology in relation to him but on our terms, not his.

At the risk of oversimplification, this clearly renders us to a difficult position—much as Peter often found himself. That is, in terms of how we function, there is no neutral or intermediate position between the relational work of God’s grace and counter-relational work (which may appear as normative in a surrounding context). We either let Jesus go to the cross functionally for us or we do it by ourselves, even if we claim salvific grace. We either let Jesus ongoingly wash our feet or we resist by keeping our relational distance, even while we participate in the activity. We either are relationally involved or we simulate it with some substitute, even though we advocate relationship. Besides resisting grace, these alternatives reinforce counter-relational work. At this stage in our transformation, we certainly cannot function completely in the relational work of God’s grace; yet we should not have any illusions about our alternatives being anything more than reductionist substitutes—that is, essentially being a neutral or intermediate function. Even acts of common grace are not neutral but imply God’s relational work of grace.

Partaking of Jesus’ whole person and participating in his sanctified life and practice are both only a function of relationship, specific only to God’s grace. His followers have no valid option to this—only the sin of reductionism. What Jesus makes evident in his sanctified life and practice and, therefore, clearly defines for us as necessary to be whole, thus irreducible and nonnegotiable, are: (1) the primacy of relationships, (2) the intimate nature of these relationships, and (3) the equalizing of persons in the process of relationship (an issue, which Mary and the ex-prostitute experienced from Jesus, to be discussed in later chapters).

Jesus’ unequivocal call to us is that we be functionally redefined, transformed and made whole. In this relational work of grace, the accessible Jesus invites us and vulnerably engages us to partake of and participate in the following: the relationships constituted by the full relational function of his whole person in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love. In our response—necessarily as a whole person and together as church—partaking of and

participating in his vulnerably shared life is experienced together as family most significantly in the Lord's Supper. The celebration of the Eucharist is the coherent act of communion with the whole of God, as the whole of God's family, not a mere remembrance of what Jesus did. Thus, our involvement around his table together is only a function of relationship, not a liturgical activity. However you perceive the nature of the communion elements, partaking of and participating in the whole of God's life in relationship together is specific only to God's grace, and thus the demands of grace, nothing less and no substitutes.

Yet, how we engage in the Eucharist is critically correlated to the two interrelated issues raised earlier in this section: (1) the accessibility of the face of Jesus we ongoingly respond to, and (2) our everyday image of Jesus shaped by our perceptual-interpretive framework. The first (1) engages Jesus' whole person at the Eucharist in his trinitarian relational context of family and by his trinitarian relational process of family love, because this is the relational reality Jesus constituted for us to experience together—the relational work of God's grace. The second (2) is engaging our image of Jesus at the Eucharist in an ontological simulation substituting for both the face of the accessible whole of Jesus' person and the intimate communion of relationship together, which renders the partaking and participating to an epistemological illusion as a mere ritual activity—thus reinforcing counter-relational work, however unintentional.

This tension between the relational work of grace and counter-relational work needs to receive much more attention in our life and practice. If what defines us in our life and practice cannot clearly identify grace as its functional basis and ongoing base, then we cannot account for the influence of reductionism. Regardless of the extent of its influence, this tension will continue in our midst (cf. Lk 4:13) because it involves a process persisting until the eschatological conclusion. The issue, however, is not about its presence, only its influence. Just as Jesus demonstrated in his temptations, until we can fully account in our practice for Satan's counter-relational work, reductionism and some form of its substitutes for the whole will remain influential in our midst. Just as the ex-prostitute taught us in her life and practice, until we address reductionism as sin, we are susceptible to its controlling influence on our life and practice, and thus we will lack the freedom (and maybe even the motivation) to love with vulnerable relational involvement (just as Jesus loves us)—even while practicing good deeds.

The relational work of Jesus' whole person clearly puts us in a tenuous position—just as Peter experienced in those two interrelated interactions in the upper room and after the resurrection. Jesus' paradigm for serving and imperative for discipleship vitally make our life and practice more difficult now without the option of reductionist substitutes, with the main priority on the function of relationship, and in relationship together only on God's terms—just as Martha needed to understand and grow in.

This raises some critical questions which require our response, both as individual persons and together as church, including the Christian academy. What have we done with the relational significance of "Follow me" and the importance of Jesus' whole person in the "me"? And, thus, how have we redefined discipleship in our context, assuming we pay attention to discipleship? Given an open review of these matters, what will it take to restore the experiential truth of God's grace as the functional basis and ongoing base for defining our persons, for engaging our relationships, and for practicing church—just as Jesus made evident in the footwashing? "*Unless I...*" "*Listen to him!*"

Chapter 3 **The Person in the Relational Progression**

Western Christologies, in particular, tend to have a gap in understanding the relational significance of Jesus' life and practice, and thus the primacy of intimate relationships together he constituted. Other Christologies, generally from the East and the global South, have a gap in understanding the importance of Jesus' whole person, thus the significance of relational involvement by the whole person. Incomplete Christology, like the former, leads to an experiential gap of the relational reality constituted by Jesus, while the latter leads to a qualitative gap in the relational experience of these relationships. What gets reduced (even lost) in these Christologies as they progress in practice are the relational significance of "Follow me" (discipleship) and the qualitative importance of the whole person's (both Jesus' and ours) relational involvement.

Both formulations of Christology are interrelated theological issues which functionally overlap in our practice. The theological issues involve the ontology of the person interrelated with the ontology of the church, as persons in relationship together. The functional issues involve how we define our person, how we engage in relationships, and thus how we practice church—all of which include the three major issues of all practice: the significance of our person presented, the quality of our communication, and the depth of relationship we engage. Any gaps in understanding leave these matters susceptible to reductionism. That is, they tend to get shaped primarily by the prevailing worldview and the surrounding sociocultural context, and thus inadvertently reinforce counter-relational work. This chapter further addresses this concern in what is the defining basis of Jesus' incarnated person and the ongoing base for his sanctified life and practice.

Christocentric Implications

One of the repercussions from incomplete Christology in the West (or the global North) is somewhat paradoxical. As this Christology has progressed in practice, it becomes increasingly christocentric. The Jesus perceived from the canonical texts (not from extra-biblical sources) becomes overly centered "in Christ," and as a consequence this image functions as a self-contained God figure comprehensive for our belief and practice. That is, the whole of God gets reduced into a "manageable doctrine" (not the person) labeled Christ—predisposing us in practice to revolve around this image, idea, and example of Jesus. A contemporary illustration of this mindset is WWJD (an acronym for What would Jesus do?), which is used to pay attention to Jesus in a way that Jesus' whole person never paid attention to himself in the Bible.

The WWJD formula is not what Jesus asked himself. Jesus was never christocentric in function in the way we often practice. He clearly disclosed the basis of his incarnated person and the ongoing base for his sanctified life and practice: he is directly from the Father (Jn 3:17; 6:38b; 7:16; 8:29), to do only what the Father wants (Jn

4:34; 5:30; 6:38), and only by means of the Father (Jn 5:19; 8:28; 12:49-50), in ongoing life and practice relationally involved in love wholly with the Father (Jn 14:31)—all of his relational action originating from the Father and going back to the Father (Jn 16:28). This is where Jesus' whole person was focused throughout his sanctified life and practice. And what significance do these relational actions have in common? The coherence of all this is crucial to grasp and the focus of this chapter.

The irony that an overly christocentric Christology is not focused on the whole of the canonical Jesus has further implications. This involves what is the improbable face of Jesus disclosed in the biblical narratives and our need (or desire) for the probable. That is, much of the person Jesus presented in function falls outside of our perceptions of what is "normal"—based, for example, on a probability distribution from a bell-shaped curve. This includes the expectations from the sociocultural context of the ancient Mediterranean world, from the religious community of post-exilic Judaism, and their messianic hopes. Though Jesus was a devout Jew who lived according to the law, much of his sanctified life and practice can be perceived in the improbable extremes of the bell curve.

This creates an uncomfortable condition that: one, either skews the range of normal (acceptable) behavior, thus reshaping the curve (i.e., raising expectations); or, two, forces a reinterpretation of Jesus' improbable actions to a more probable (acceptable) range, or promotes a mere disregard of those actions. The latter certainly result in a more normative theology, however incomplete or distorted, while functionally providing a more palatable practice.

This process is illustrated by those students who score extremely high on a test to raise the grading curve. A teacher can either throw out these exceptional scores and maintain the bell curve, or they can be accepted thus reshaping the curve. Most students obviously don't want the curve to be raised since that would increase the expectations of so-called normal probability of student achievement. Unfortunately, many teachers function only within a bell-shaped curve, not only for student performance but for their own as well. How much does this describe church leaders and members?

A similar process takes place in christological studies and practice. Jesus' improbable actions tend to be overlooked or minimized. This selective ignoring or reduction of certain aspects (the improbable) of Jesus' sanctified life and practice then is compensated for by paying undue attention to more generalized areas (the probable) of Jesus. This overcompensation is magnified christocentric practice focused on the probable Jesus, that is, the incomplete or distorted face of Jesus. The evidence of selective omission in Christology is seen particularly in the absence or marginalization of the imperatives of discipleship, including the primacy of intimate relationships constituted by Jesus.

The Transition Continued

The focus of Jesus' whole person throughout his sanctified life and practice was first introduced to us at that temple interaction with his parents as a boy of twelve (Lk 2:41-52). This initial understanding (discussed in chapter one) of Jesus' emerging person continues in his adult public ministry to fully transition into the functional basis of his

person and the ongoing base for his sanctified life and practice. Two situations highlight this transition.

When Jesus drove out a demon from a mute man, the crowd was amazed but some labeled his power from Beelzebul and tested him (Lk 11:14-16). Labels and stereotypes were a common practice from the probable expectations of their surrounding context in those days.¹⁸ After Jesus defined his action as “the finger of God” (11:20), a woman in the crowd boldly cried out a blessing of honor—perhaps in witnessing evidence of the Messiah (v.27). While the honor was indirectly addressed to Jesus, it focused on his mother Mary, implying her agency as the basis for his life. Jesus not only rejects this honor to and through Mary, he redirects the blessing: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (v.28).

Those who labeled Jesus and tested him essentially tried to explain the improbable by the probable of their perceptual framework, which predisposed them to be closed to Jesus’ whole person. The woman also responded to what was probable for the Messiah, rather than understanding the deeper (and improbable) significance of Jesus’ whole person and “the kingdom of God [which] has come to [her]” (v.20).

In redirecting the blessing of honor, “the word of God” Jesus focused on to be honored was never about his words (communication, teachings and commands, cf. Lk 6:46; Jn 14:21) because his words were only and always the Father’s (Jn 7:16; 8:28; 12:49,50; 14:24). By redirecting the honor to the Father, Jesus defined the functional basis of his whole person—which some defined not only as improbable but impossible. By identifying, to the contrary, the true blessed as those who receive and submit to the Father, Jesus disclosed the relational significance of the kingdom he constitutes—which would fall into the improbable range for messianic expectations. Yet, this was the ongoing base for Jesus’ sanctified life and practice, which would constitute the kingdom beyond even our expectations. This is made definitive in the next situation when the improbable becomes the relational reality and experiential truth of God’s people.

The second situation completes his transition from a boy of twelve at the temple. Not only did he need “to be in my Father’s house” (Lk 2:49), he had to make definitive the Father’s relational context and to function unequivocally by the Father’s relational process. No other context and process were sufficient to define, determine or even contain Jesus’ whole person in sanctified life and practice. When his mother and brothers came “to restrain him” (*krateo*, to hold, retain, restrain, Mk 3:21) in his improbable (implied in their perceptions) public ministry, Jesus vulnerably disclosed an improbable relational reality, which extended the bell curve beyond its extreme (see Mt 12:46-50).

Building on his denial of a blessing of honor to Mary expressed earlier, Jesus no longer acknowledged his mother and brothers in the traditional roles of family. These two situations tend to be used to support a strained relationship Jesus supposedly had with Mary and his family.¹⁹ That interpretation fails to understand the deeper relational

¹⁸ For a discussion on labeling, see Santiago Guijarro, “The Politics of Exorcism” in Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, Gerd Theissen, eds., *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 162-164; and for a discussion on stereotypes, see Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 353-354.

¹⁹ For example, see Craig Evans, “Context, Family and Formation,” in Markus Bockmuehl, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 14; also Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 54-

context and process into which Jesus is taking his followers in relational progression—which his biological family eventually experiences themselves. This is not to be confused with rejecting their persons but it does reject those reductionist substitutes constraining the whole person and the relationships necessary to be whole.

Jesus not only redefined his family by asking “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?,” then pointing to his disciples, “Here are my mother and my brothers” (Mt 12:48-49). Jesus also made evident his full transition into the functional basis of his person and the ongoing base for his sanctified life and practice, however improbable it was perceived. As first witnessed at his baptism and established during his transfiguration, Jesus functionally established his person and practice wholly in the Father’s relational context of family and by the Father’s relational process of family love—which together with the Spirit are the trinitarian relational context and process of the whole of God. The implication of this, both theologically and functionally, was: the relational reality of God’s thematic actions since creation “has come upon you” (Lk 11:20) and is now fulfilled. And Jesus would constitute his followers in relationship together as the whole of God’s family.

That is, those who followed Jesus in relational progression to the Father would be constituted as “my brother and sister and mother.” Jesus said “Whoever does the will of my Father” (Mt 12:50)—building further on his redirecting of the true blessed made earlier (Lk 11:28)—to signify those who receive and submit to his Father. Just as Jesus functioned only from, for, by and with the Father, his disciples follow him in function back to the Father, in the Father’s relational context and by his relational process (cf. Jn 14:6). The functional basis of Jesus’ person and the ongoing base for his sanctified life and practice become the functional basis of their whole person and the ongoing base for their life and practice to be sanctified by the relational work of God’s grace.

Yet, this process shared together goes deeper than merely having a common origin or involving a commonality of association as believers—other connotations of “brother” (*adelphos*) and “sister” (*adelphe*). This is a relational progression that constitutes his followers in God’s family in relationship together as his sisters (including Mary) and brothers (cf. Mt 28:10, Heb 2:11,12); moreover, following Jesus in relational progression precludes reducing discipleship to christocentric practice.

When the Father told Jesus’ disciples to “Listen to him!” (Mt 17:5), this is the relational outcome he implies and thus expects from following Jesus in the relational progression (cf. Rom 8:29). Any type of disengagement (in the form of resistance, omission, avoidance or any relational distance) from this relational progression by Jesus’ followers diminishes the experiential truth: of God’s thematic relational action (beginning in the primordial garden, Gen 2:18) for human wholeness, of the covenant kingdom of God’s people, of God’s vulnerable relational work of grace in the incarnation and the emergence of the new creation, and of the Spirit’s ongoing relational function to bring this to completion at the eschatological conclusion of the whole of God’s desires.

55; and John W. Miller, *Jesus at Thirty: A Psychological and Historical Portrait* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 13-16.

Relationship in Progression

When we merely follow (or conform to) Jesus' teachings and example, discipleship becomes more like a traditional rabbinic student as learner immersed in information from/about the teacher rather than an intimate relationship with the teacher's person (cf. the rich ruler's first critical error of relationship, Mk 10:17ff, discussed in chapter one). By revolving around the Teacher and Master more as a learner or servant, the relationship remains christocentric without progressing further and deeper. This is not how the Father told Jesus' disciples to "Listen to him." To "Follow me" takes the relationship with Jesus beyond the role of Teacher and Master, or Lord. We need to understand the developmental process of this relationship in progression.

In the OT, God was ongoingly involved with the people of Israel in situations and circumstances. Yet, the presence of God 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 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). The motions "out of" and "back to" are a singular relational dynamic which is conjoined in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love. The incarnation of Jesus' whole person in sanctified life and practice was the continuous relational action fulfilling the whole of God's thematic relational action beginning with the first Adam. The transcendent God was present now as never before and accessible in a further and deeper way. This reflects a strategic shift in God's thematic action.

The following discussion of this strategic shift (and related shifts to follow) should always be understood in the context of God's thematic action for human persons to be whole—God's metanarrative, as it were—which is briefly summarized:

Initiated with Adam for the human person not "to be apart" from the relationships necessary to be whole in the image 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 God (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 God'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 is all brought to completion at the eschatological conclusion of God's desires 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 following strategic, tactical and functional shifts by God in the incarnation.

We need to also keep in focus that, as a function of relationship, God's metanarrative is experiential truth; without this relational basis, it is reduced to merely information about a sovereign God with no relational significance, thus a gospel without relational clarity, which I suggest is the main reason many postmodernists reject God's metanarrative.

Strategic Shift

In the shift from a place (like the mountain or tabernacle), and from situations and circumstances, God becomes functionally accessible for ongoing involvement in direct relationship. This makes the transcendent God accessible to all peoples and persons, on the one hand, but, on the other, accessible only for the relationship-specific function together of God's family. This then makes the holy God accessible for relationship only to those who respond in Jesus' relational context and process—in other words, relationship only on God's terms (cf. Jn 8:31-42). This strategic shift is made evident in a key interaction Jesus had with a Samaritan woman (see Jn 4:4-26).

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* (to be discussed further in later chapters)—that is, to be freed from constraints of the *old* (and what defined them), and thus opened to vulnerably engage each other in the relationship of the *new*. Jesus tore down the constraint of “double jeopardy” (double discrimination based here on ethnicity and gender, without even considering her apparent social ostracism) for her and gave her direct access to a highly improbable, though ultimately unique, opportunity: unrestricted connection and intimate relationship with the whole of God.

As Jesus vulnerably engaged her, she increasingly engaged him in vulnerable response. As he vulnerably asked her for water (Jn 4:7), she challenged his request (v.9). As he made his person more vulnerable to her (v.10), she exposed her interest in his source of water (v.11) and her curiosity about him (v.12), then vulnerably asked him for this water (v.15). As he tested the integrity of her person (v.16), she made her person vulnerable to him (v.17)—with both experiencing more of the other's person in the openness of their interaction (vv.17b-19). This relational process is important to understand because it illustrates the relational significance of God's strategic shift Jesus then disclosed to her.

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 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.

Jesus assured her that the *old* was about to change (vv.21-22), and that the *new* “has now come” (vv.23-24). The strategic shift in the holy and transcendent God's

presence was being fulfilled before her. As Jesus vulnerably disclosed his whole person to her (v.26), the whole of God became functionally accessible for ongoing involvement in direct relationship. This shift to the new relational context and process, however, necessitates terms significant for compatibility. There is no relational progression with the accessible God without these ongoing terms: “in spirit and in truth” (vv.23-24).

Jesus made clear that worship of (and 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 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? The Samaritan woman then expressed her confidence (*oida*) that someday the Messiah “will explain everything to us” (*anangelo*, to disclose freely, openly, v.25). Jesus responded even deeper by vulnerably disclosing his whole person to her: “I who speak to you am he” (v.26). And what Jesus made clear were the terms “in spirit and in truth.”

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

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.

Throughout the incarnation, Jesus’ whole person vulnerably disclosed the transcendent “God is spirit”—that is, the whole of God’s glory, thus who, what and how God is. This self-disclosure was both nothing less and no substitutes of God as well as only for relationship together. In the Father’s imperative to “Listen to him,” this is *what* the Father wanted his followers to pay attention to and also *why*. The what is of critical importance, not only for obvious theological reasons but more importantly for functional purposes.

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 which essentially has been ignored. Yet, its critical importance has theological implications about the reliability of our Christology, and more importantly creates a functional problem of integrity for the relational involvement of trust. How reliable is your knowledge of someone if the person presented to you is anything less or any substitute of the who, what and how of that person? Moreover, how can you trust someone in a relationship if you can't count on that person's involvement to be beyond anything less or any substitute of the whole person?

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

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

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

The interrelated connection between worship and relational involvement was further made evident by Jesus when he confronted those with rigorous religious practices without the significance of relational involvement (*hypokrites*, see Mk 7:1-8). He illustrated this in their worship practice, which became the mere expression of an outward identity, that is, in effect acting like an actor in a role (*hypokrinomai*, cf. ontological simulation): "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain" (vv.6-7). The term for "in vain" (*maten*) is an adverb used in a final sense to signify purposeless, useless, futile; in this context, while their practice likely had benefits for self-definition and value for socio-religious identity, it is useless for function in relationship with God. As long as "their hearts are far from me" (*apecho*,

to be distant), there can be no change in this relational condition, and thus no relational progression.

In other words, without relational involvement our worship practice (or any practice) has no relational significance to God—no matter how demonstrative, vibrant or intense. Without the qualitative function of our heart, our practice has no relational involvement with God—no matter how much activity, time and effort for God. The distance of our heart is always consequential to relationship with God—not to mention, to the qualitative significance of our practice. Life and practice in God’s likeness is only about relationship; sanctified life and practice must then by its nature be the function of relational involvement, thus of the heart. And the depth of relational involvement is always inversely proportional to the extent of distance our heart has. Moreover, the distance our heart keeps in a relationship is the primary indicator of the quality of our involvement in that relationship. The function of our heart thus becomes the principal benchmark for relational involvement, for what is necessary by nature to make relationships significant, and for what is basic to function in sanctified life and practice.

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” (this self-existing spirit distinct from all his creatures, who alone has life within himself and is the life-giver) as the present and involved “God is heart” (cf. Ps 33:9,11, *leb*, heart). This does not redefine the ontology of God but makes evident the strategic shift of God’s thematic relational action. Jesus is *the hermeneutical key* that opens this ontological door to the whole of God.

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. This relational connection is possible (not improbable), however, only 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*).

As Jesus distinguished in the above practice of worship, Scripture consistently makes the functional (not ontological) distinction between the outer person and the inner, the distinction between what we are doing in outward behavior and what truly exists inwardly, and the importance of grasping the significance between them (see Deut 4:29, 1 Sam 16:7, Ps 51:16-17, Acts 15:8-10, Rom 2:28-29). This necessarily takes us back to creation.

When God created the human person, an aspect of God was “breathed” into the person constituting the “inner person” (*nepes*, Gen 2:7); *nepes* has a quantitative aspect in which God created all living creatures (Gen 1:30) and a qualitative aspect created only in human persons. Though a defined “inner person” implies an “outer person”—which may appear to employ a dualism in defining the human person (inner and outer, spiritual and physical/material)—they are not substances to be perceived separately as in classic dualism from a Greek philosophical framework (notably from Plato). Rather the inner (center) and outer (peripheral) aspects of the person function together dynamically to define the whole person from the Hebrew concept. Thus one functional aspect should not be seen apart from the other, nor should either be neglected; this invariably happens in an outer-in approach to defining the person—which is why the above worship practice only

paid attention to the outer, ignoring the inner. The theological issue then in human ontology and the functional issue in life and practice is: which aspect of the person has more significance and thus needs to have greater importance—though not at the neglect of the other aspect?

In Hebrew terminology of the OT, the center of the person is the heart (*leb*); that is, conceptually, the “inner person” (*nepes*) that God “breathed” of the whole of God into the human person is signified by the heart (*leb*). The biblical proverbs speak of the heart in the following terms: identified as “the wellspring” (starting point, *tasa’ot*) of the ongoing function of the human person (Prov 4:23); using the analogy to a mirror, also functions as what gives definition to the person (Prov 27:19); and, when not reduced or fragmented (“at peace,” i.e., wholeness), as giving life to “the body” (*basar*, referring to the outer aspect of the person, Prov 14:30), which describes the heart’s integrating function for the whole person (inner and outer together).

This suggests the function of the heart signifying the “inner person”—which then is inclusive of the outer—involves two critically irreducible and irreplaceable functions:

1. The definitive aspect for personhood that qualitatively integrates the whole person, thus the heart’s presence signifies the presence of the whole person and constitutes the involvement of the whole person in one’s life and practice.
2. The basis of the person that wholly determines the significance of a person’s relational involvement with the vulnerable heart of God, specifically for intimate relationship together with the Trinity (in whose image the human person is created), the experience of which is constituted in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love.

These two interrelated functions of the heart only begin to define the image of God “breathed” into human persons (discussed further in later chapters).

The function of the intellect apart from the heart may be able to provide quantitative unity for the person—for example, the association of human parts and function described by scientific research. While this knowledge may be necessary at times, the function of the intellect is never sufficient by itself to define the whole person or to experience the relationships necessary to be whole, particularly with God. Reason alone can never describe the ontology of the person, human as well as Divine, nor does it define the qualitative function of relationships between persons. Only the heart provides the qualitative integration of the whole person made in the likeness of the God of heart; only the compatible heart provides the functional basis for experiencing intimate relationship (hearts coming together) with the whole of God constituted in the Trinity.

This defines why the “God is spirit” (heart) seeks those “in spirit” (heart), who by nature must function in likeness of heart to be involved. The strategic shift of God’s thematic action makes evident that the whole of God’s desires are to be directly involved with the whole person for intimate relationship together as family. Since the function of the heart constitutes the relational involvement of the whole person, God cannot count on the whole person for this relational progression until it involves the heart with nothing less and no substitutes.

As Jesus’ heart made his whole person vulnerable to the Samaritan woman, she increasingly opened her heart to be vulnerable to his person. Yet, the openness of her heart could easily have been obstructed by constraints she would either put on herself or allow to be placed on her. These would be tensions or fears caused mainly from the

influence of reductionism. Consider the context and her position: concerns about how she would be perceived by Jesus, the community, his disciples, even her current partner could easily have created a barrier to be open to Jesus; concerns about whether she would be acceptable to Jesus or measure up to his expectations could easily have kept her heart at a distance and presented an inaccurate image, if not a false one. Merely intending to open her heart would not have been sufficient to prevent these matters, or any others, from distracting, diminishing or separating the function of her heart.

These matters need to be redeemed, yet they need to be acknowledged for that to happen. This is the reason that what Jesus disclosed as that which the Father seeks and as necessary for deeper involvement with him included not only the heart but also “in truth.”

Truth is not an abstract concept in the NT. When Jesus incarnated the truth, this was not a proposition and cannot be reduced merely to the operation of reason. The reduction of truth is to disembody truth. Jesus’ whole person changed the context of God’s accessibility by the relational dynamic “out of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). As I discussed previously about “grace and truth,” truth is often rendered “faithfulness.” Truth then is embodied for a relational purpose and function. This is where the focus on truth needs to be because truth is a function of God’s thematic relational action to be accessible directly for vulnerable relationship together. Jesus the Truth functioned only “out of the Father” for this relational progression “back to the Father.” His faithfulness in this relational process is the only reliable basis to have confidence in his self-disclosures as who, what and how God is, as well as to be able to count on him as access to the whole of God for relationship together. The Truth is not about just the critical issue of authority but is embodied for the primary issue of relationship. Reductionism always diminishes this primacy of relationship and effectively substitutes alternatives from counter-relational work.

The issue of truth cannot remain a doctrinal matter; such focus effectively becomes the reduction of truth, not its safeguard. As Jesus vulnerably disclosed to the Samaritan woman, the relational significance of the Truth is how the Word (God’s self-disclosure) needs to become flesh in our lives. The person of truth (faithfulness) is embodied in a person you can count on in relationship; you can count on that person’s word in what the person says as well as in what the person will do. You can also trust the presentation of that person to you because it’s true, valid, authentic—nothing less and no substitutes. This accurately reflects Jesus, the Word embodied.

It is this truth for relationship—made evident and constituted by Jesus to make accessible the whole of God in the trinitarian context of family and relational process of family love—which the Father now seeks *in* us and *from* us in order to experience relationship together *with* us, just as Jesus vulnerably disclosed to this woman. And the Father tells us also to closely “Listen to him,” not for doctrinal purity but for relational intimacy, not for the authority of an institution but for the integrity of family—for intimate relationship together as the whole of God’s family. “Listen to him” who is *the functional key* that opens the relational door to the ontology of the whole of God’s family constituted in the Trinity.

This truth embodied in and from us constitutes by nature the likeness of faithfulness Jesus demonstrated that God can count on for relationship. In the function of relationship the counterpart of truth is honesty, signifying the integrity of the person. This truth in us is the integrity of our whole person, thus the honesty of our heart which the

Father seeks from us to be relationally involved together as family. The function of *honesty in relationship keeps the heart open*—for example, by acknowledging those matters needing redemption. Directly related in function, *honesty also prevents anything less and any substitutes of the whole person*—for example, no incomplete, substitute or false presentations of self, which a “mere” Samaritan woman experienced together with Jesus (Jn 4:18b) but is difficult to experience in prevailing church practice today. When God has the heart and honesty (“in spirit and truth”) of a person, God has the whole of who, what and how the person is. These are the terms necessary to be compatible for relationship with the whole of God—specifically for the relational progression in God’s strategic shift.

Yet, the honesty of our heart as a basis for function is rarely discussed, much less made necessary for our life and practice with God. The implication, theologically and functionally, is that we don’t really “Listen to him!” The irony in this may be: the transcendent God is now more accessible to us than we are accessible to God; the heart of God is more vulnerable to us directly for relationship than we are vulnerable to God; the whole of God is ongoingly more intimately involved in relationship with us than we are ongoingly accessible and vulnerable in relationship with God. A further irony may involve maintaining God in transcendence in order, rightly, not to reduce God to human shaping, and in turn struggling functionally to access God, who has been constrained to be accessible and vulnerable by this predisposition or bias, thus in effect reducing the whole of God to functional deism. The deeper implication in all this, for which we have to account, is reinforcing counter-relational work, despite a theology to the contrary.

In this strategic shift of God’s thematic action, the only significance of the vulnerable presence of the transcendent God is for relationship; and the only relationship that has relational significance to the whole of God is the intimate relationship together as family—that is, the relationships necessary by nature to be whole as God’s family constituted by the Trinity. Therefore, heart and honesty are what the whole of God vulnerably seeks and holds us accountable for, ongoingly. There is no relational progression without these irreducible and nonnegotiable terms. As the Samaritan woman experienced in her function even without theological understanding, heart and honesty are the main ingredients for: the primacy of relational involvement, first and foremost with God; what are necessary by nature to make relationships significant; what are basic to function in sanctified life and practice.

Our theological reflections of human ontology and our functional formulations for life and practice must necessarily grasp the significance of this woman’s experience, and thus also account for the functional involvement of the whole person in the primacy of intimate relationships together necessary to be whole as God’s family. This is crucial to the experiential truth, for both the person and together as church, that Jesus made definitive as the only terms *by what* and *how* God does relationships. Otherwise, the gospel strains for lack of theological and functional clarity as well as suffers for lack of relational significance.

In a further shift by Jesus, this gospel will be characterized as more of the improbable, thus neither a common or popular gospel.

Tactical Shift

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

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 action to God's tactical shift within the incarnation.

A partial theological answer to the question might 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, or at least to focus on if it merely remains on the human person. 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. This cannot be justified as the basis for moving the transcendent God to action. The appropriate question then to focus on becomes about 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, this is not sufficient to explain the holy and transcendent God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement. Even the strength of covenant expectations of God's action prevailing in the intertestamental period (Second Temple Judaism) cannot adequately account for the relational significance of God's strategic shift. The only answer to this question that can be offered for the improbable is: the relational nature of the heart of God's being vulnerably extending the triune God's *relational work of grace*.

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

The improbable is not only about the presence of the transcendent God but also about the involvement of the holy God, who must by nature be separate and distinct from what is *common* (cf. *qados*, Lev 10:10; 11:45). In the mystery of the holy God's involvement, Jesus' whole person demonstrated no relational separation from the common's context (from micro to macro) in his sanctified life and practice. Yet Jesus' relational involvement made evident the intrinsic qualitative distinction of his relational work of grace from the common's function. This distinction of the holy God from *common function* underlies both the tactical shift for the relational progression as well as the functional significance of the gospel.

Jesus emerged in the midst of a religious context pervasive with messianic and covenant expectations, with the surrounding context prevailing in cultural, economic and

political stratification. On the one hand, these factors could have converged to create conditions highly conducive for Messiah. On the other, these factors could have also exerted divergent influences and pressure which would have made it less likely for the Christ to operate effectively. Jesus encountered the effects of both in his public ministry, yet neither effect made his ministry more successful or less fruitful, respectively. His tactical shift was not made for this reason. Though the probability for success or failure based on these factors had no relevance for Jesus, the presence of these factors had important relevance for two reasons. First, they helped define the common function from which Jesus functioned in distinction; and secondly they helped identify the common function from which persons needed to be redeemed.

We had our first exposure to Jesus' tactical shift when he called Levi to be redefined, transformed and made whole (review our discussion in chap. one, Mt 9:9-13). Levi's story was about the gospel, which involved a complete Christology and a full soteriology. In calling Levi, Jesus demonstrated the new perceptual-interpretive framework distinct from what prevailed in common function. 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 this highly unlikely relationship (given Levi's status), Jesus made evident his tactical shift for engagement in the relational progression. This was demonstrated by the significance of their table fellowship together (including the presence of other tax collectors and sinners) after Levi's response (Mt 9:10). Levi was not only redeemed from the old but freed for 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.²⁰ This relationship would transform Levi and make him whole, which Levi would experience even further in relational progression.

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

While celebrating Levi's commencement in the relational progression, Jesus disputed these religious reductionists by clarifying his vulnerable presence, purpose and function (vv.12-13). In the strategic shift of God's thematic action, the incarnation was only for direct relationship together as the whole of God's family. As God's ultimate response to the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole, Jesus

²⁰ 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.

vulnerably functioned to call such persons to be made whole in the likeness of the Trinity. He made this evident by definitively declaring that these persons are qualitatively distinct (but not intrinsically distinguished) from the “the healthy” (*ischyo*, to be whole) and from “the righteous” (*dikaios*, congruence in actions to one’s constitutionally just, right character, which implies wholeness instead of disparity, vv.12-13). In other words, those who were not whole and who remained apart from the whole were the persons Jesus came to be vulnerably involved with in his relational work of grace in order to reconcile them back to the whole of God.

“The sick”-“sinners,” whom Jesus called, were not those perceived by common function—that is, those commonly perceived by a surrounding context as sick or sinners. While Jesus certainly never ignored those defined as sick and sinners, he was involved further and deeper than merely with physical disease and moral/ethical failure. Levi was not suffering physical disease, though he likely was perceived as a sinner of moral/ethical failure, assuming the stereotype for tax collectors applied to him. Yet Jesus notably pursued Levi also for the “social illness” (distinguished from physical disease) he was suffering that made him part of “the sick” (*kakos*, v.12).²¹ The term *kakos* not only denotes to be physically ill but also to be lacking in value. This suggests social interpretation (not medical) which labeled persons to be lacking in value. The consequence of having this label was exclusion from participating in valued relationships of the “whole,” 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). Levi didn’t belong to the prevailing whole of the common context; Jesus changed Levi’s condition to belong (as a function of relationship, not merely membership) in God’s whole.

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

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

²¹ 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.

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

These two important issues apply equally to service, and the term sacrifice can be replaced by service in the above for the same application. This relational clarity and relational significance are crucial to grasp 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 formulating a complete Christology, specifically a sanctified Christology. Sanctified Christology embraces the whole of Jesus' person functioning in sanctified life and practice as the intrinsic qualitative distinction from common function.

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

In his relational work of grace, Jesus made evident the importance of Levi's whole person and his need to be reconciled to the primary relationships necessary to be whole, 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 grasp the essence 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.

This 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,” *hapes*, denotes a strong positive attraction for) the relational involvement of love in the intimate relationship together necessary to understand the whole of God. In other words, this is God's deepest desire and priority over anything else done *for* God. Sacrifice and service never supersede relationship (cf. Jn 12:26). For his followers to get reduced in life and practice to sacrifice or service is to stop following Jesus in the

relational progression to the whole of God. Such reductionism needs to be redeemed for the relationship to progress.

In what would be an irony of conventional thought, what Levi experienced was extended to Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector who was rich. Yet the significance of this was the design of Jesus' tactical shift, which made more evident his qualitative distinction from common function. The improbable with Levi seems to become even more improbable with Zacchaeus (see Lk 19:1-10).

To become rich in this ancient community required power to accumulate wealth at the expense of others.²² Chief tax collectors (Levi's boss) in particular became rich often by their greedy management of a system which depended on imposing unjust taxes and tolls for greater profit. Low-level tax collectors like Levi merely did their dirty work. 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, come down immediately. 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 went beyond the table fellowship of shared community or friendship. This relational shift of God's thematic action was only for deeper involvement in the relational progression, which Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to constitute in the new creation of God's family.

Given Jesus' practice of observing purity as prescribed by the law, he was not ignoring covenant practice in this interaction. Yet he functioned in clear distinction from the common function of covenant practices, which became 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. 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. This explicit or implicit stratification reduces the importance of the whole person and fragments the primary relationships necessary to be whole. The consequence, even unintentionally among God's people, is reinforcing the human condition “to be apart” from God's whole.

Though Zacchaeus certainly was not lacking economically, he lacked by any other measurement. Most importantly, he lacked the wholeness of belonging to the whole of God. This was the only issue Jesus paid attention to—in demonstration of his perceptual-interpretive framework. By this qualitative lens, he didn't see a short rich sinner up in a tree but Zacchaeus' whole person needing to be redefined, transformed and made whole. Zacchaeus also becomes a metaphor for all such persons, whom Jesus must (*dei*) unavoidably pursue by the nature of God's thematic action. This metaphor for such persons, whom Jesus must “dwell with” (*meno*) by intimate relational involvement, also

²² 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.

signifies the relational significance necessary for the gospel. Yet these are persons who will not be paid attention to, and thus not understood, without this qualitative lens. This is a metaphor which will not be understood, and thus ignored, without the new perceptual-interpretive framework.

The reality of this new creation of God's family is made evident in the experiential truth of the relational progression, which God's relational work of grace initiates, Jesus' relational work of grace constitutes and the Spirit's completes. This was neither a response warranted by Zacchaeus nor an experience he could cause to happen. While Zacchaeus declared (in the Greek present tense) that he was already making restitution and helping to restore equity (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 this man, too, is a son of Abraham" (v.9). This was not the result of what Zacchaeus did, however honorable or repentant. This was only the relational outcome of Jesus' relational work of grace: "For [*gar*, because] the Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost" (v.10). This verse determined the outcome in the previous verse.

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

Jesus' whole person was vulnerably present and intimately involved with Zacchaeus for the relationship necessary to be saved. Jesus didn't come merely to bring salvation into existence but to engage Zacchaeus for the distinct relationship to be saved "to the degree that he is a son of Abraham." If this "degree" meant to the extent that Zacchaeus demonstrated adherence to the code of Judaism, then this was salvation coming into existence based on what Zacchaeus did to be identified with the lineage of Abraham. If "degree" involved to the extent that 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 to dwell at Zacchaeus' house only for the latter, which will be made more evident in another interaction (viz. Jn 8:31-42, to be discussed shortly).

What does it mean to be saved and what is this salvation that is not truncated? Limiting our discussion to the term "to save," *sozo* denotes to deliver, to make whole. In Jesus' relational work "to save," *sozo* includes both and thus necessarily involves a twofold process: first, to deliver from sin and its consequence of death, and secondly to make whole in the relationship necessary together with the whole of God. Salvation (*soteria*) is a function of *sozo*. Soteriology then is truncated when it is only a function of the process "to deliver"—that is, only what we are saved *from*. A full soteriology necessarily is a function of *sozo*'s twofold process, which then must by its nature also involve "to make whole"—that is, including 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, and thus also redefines the evangelism necessary to fulfill Jesus’ commission (to be discussed in chapter seven).

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

The relational progression began with the call to “Follow me”—the call to be redefined, transformed and made whole. Relationship with Jesus as a disciple (*mathetes*) was a function of an adherent, the terms of which were only determined by Jesus.²³ This relationship went further than the common function of traditional rabbinic students as learners preparing for the role of teachers themselves some day. Jesus’ disciples served others (*diakoneo*) in various ways, yet with the paradigm making relational involvement with him the primary priority, not the work of serving (Jn 12:26, cf. 21:15-22). Disciples functioned as servants, ministers, deacons (*diakonos*), which tended to be perceived as the role of servant. Disciples became servants (cf. Mt 20:26-28), though with no fixed distinction between these identities.

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

Friendship in the ancient world was not loosely defined, as we experience it in the modern West. 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.²⁴ 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

²³ 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).

²⁴ Craig S. Keener reports this information on friendship in *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 302.

him; Jesus demonstrated the first (Jn 15:13), the third (Jn 15:9,11; 16:14-15) and the fourth (Jn 15:15; 16:12-13), with (4) notably signifying the nature of their relationship as Jesus shared above. The disciples were inconsistent with (4) in their response, with Peter apparently the most open to share.

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

Yet, friends together is not what we are saved *to*. Though the function of friends is necessary in the relational progression, it is insufficient for the relationship necessary together to make us whole. The relational progression does not conclude in friendship with Jesus, which has become another contemporary misperception of Jesus shaped by 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 in effect relational connection as a son of Abraham, just as Jesus declared (Lk 19:9). That is, “to the degree that” (*kathoti*) Zacchaeus' whole person was intimately involved with Jesus on the basis of God's grace, Jesus redeemed him from the *old* (of the common's function) and transformed him to the *new* as a son belonging in the family of God represented by Abraham. Thus in their intimate involvement together, Zacchaeus was constituted in Jesus' very own relational context, the trinitarian relational context of family. In other words, the Son's Father would also become Zacchaeus' Father and they would effectively be brothers, as Jesus indicated after the resurrection (Jn 20:17, cf. Mt 12:50). This was what Zacchaeus was saved to, and this was the relationship necessary by nature to make him whole together in God's whole—the relational progression to the whole of God, the Trinity qua family.

The whole of God is constituted in the life of the Trinity. Yet the wholeness of the Trinity's life is not signified 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 neither defines their persons nor determines the basis for their relationship together—that is, how they relate to and are involved with each other. Their whole persons (not modes, nor tritheism) are neither ontologically apart from the others nor functionally independent, but always by the nature of God are relationally involved in

intimate relationship together as One (perichoresis) by the relational process of love, functional family love (Jn 10:38; 14:9-11,31; 15:26; 17:10-11, Mt 3:17; 17:5). This is the whole of God, the wholeness of the Trinity's life, which Jesus vulnerably shared for his followers to belong to and experience in likeness of the Trinity in order to be whole (Jn 17:21-26).

Yet, belonging to God's family is both a position and a function. As a position, this cannot be experienced by a servant (or a slave)—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, this cannot be fulfilled by a disciple, no matter how dedicated to serving or devoted to Jesus. Disciple and servant in effect become roles to occupy which 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 relationship together with the Trinity in the position as God's very own family.

It is this relational function of family which Jesus made evident by the trinitarian relational process of family love. This points to the functional shift of Jesus' relational work of grace to constitute his followers fully in the relational progression.

Functional Shift

In God's strategic and tactical shifts, God's thematic action coheres in Jesus' relational work of grace in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love. This coherence of action is fulfilled by Jesus' whole person in sanctified life and practice, who vulnerably functioned by this process of family love. With this relational function of family love, Jesus demonstrated his functional shift for the deepest involvement in the relational progression in order to bring it (and his followers) to relational conclusion (not full completion). 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 as orphans" (Jn 14:18). While Jesus' physical presence was soon to conclude, his intimate relational involvement with them will continue—namely through his relational replacement, the Spirit. This ongoing intimate relational involvement is clearly the dynamic function of the trinitarian relational process of family love, which directly involves all the trinitarian persons (Jn 14:16-18,23). Yet, the full significance (particularly as experiential truth) of this is not understood until we grasp the relational significance of Jesus' use of the term "orphans" and his related concern.

In their social context orphans were powerless and had little or no recourse to provide for themselves, which was the reason God made specific provisions for them in the OT (Dt 14:29, Is 1:17,23, cf. Jam 1:27). This might suggest Jesus was 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 issue: their relational condition. I suggest his disciples' relational condition was Jesus' only concern here.

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. What addresses an orphan's relational condition is the process of adoption. 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; and this defines the relational significance of Jesus' concern for his disciples not to be relational orphans. Without adoption this relational condition remains unresolved, Therefore, Jesus' relational work of grace by the trinitarian relational process of family love enacted the process of adoption, together with the Spirit (Jn 1:12-13, cf. Rom 8:15-16, Gal 4:4-7).

Whether adoption is viewed as a distinct salvific act or merely a metaphor, the qualitative relational outcome from Jesus' intimate involvement of family love constitutes his followers in relationship together with the whole of God as family, so that Jesus' Father becomes their Father and they become "siblings" (cf. Is 63:16). If the functional significance of adoption is diminished or minimalized, the relational consequence for our life and practice is to function in effect as relational orphans. In the absence of his physical presence, Jesus' only concern was for his followers to experience the ongoing intimate relational involvement of the whole of God—which the functional shift of his relational work of grace made permanent by adoption. This relational action constituted them fully in the relational progression as family together, never to be "let go from the Trinity as orphans" (*aphiemi*, as Jesus said).

Functional and relational orphans suffer in the human condition "to be apart" from God's whole, consequently they lack wholeness. While this is a pandemic relational condition, it can also become an undetected endemic functional condition among his followers and in church practice. 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 and membership, yet without the functional involvement of the whole person and without the relational involvement together in family love. When Christian life and practice is without this 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 churches today (particularly in the global North) function more like orphanages than family (to be discussed in chapter eight). This makes evident the need to be redeemed further, which the relational function of family love directly and ongoingly addresses for relationship together as family in likeness of the Trinity.

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

The Father sent out his Son, followed by the Spirit, to pursue those who suffered being apart from God's whole, reaching out to them with relational involvement, making provision for their release from any constraints or payments to redeem them from any enslavement; then with this relational connection, taking these persons back home to the Father, not to be mere house guests nor to become household servants, but to be adopted by the Father and thus permanently belong in his family as his very own daughters and sons.

This is the essence of the Trinity's family love, which makes evident both the relational significance of God's relational work of grace as well as the qualitative distinction of Jesus' relational involvement from common function.

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 which constitutes God's family. That is, family love is always constituting and maturing God's family, thus family love always: *pursues the whole person, attends to redeeming persons, and addresses the involvement necessary in relationships to be whole as family together in likeness of the Trinity*. In other words, family love functionally acts on and with the importance of the whole person to be involved in the primacy of intimate relationships together of those belonging to God's family. When the trinitarian relational process of family love is applied to the church and becomes functional in church practice, any church functioning as an orphanage can be redeemed to truly function as God's family together. Then its members will not only occupy a position in God's family but also take up and experience the relational function necessarily involved in belonging to God's family.

In this functional shift, Jesus' relational function of family love vulnerably engaged his followers for the deepest involvement in the relational progression to the whole of God's family. This necessarily involved: being redefined (and redeemed) and being transformed (and reconciled) in order to be made whole together as family in likeness of the Trinity. This redefined-transformed (redeemed-reconciled) relational dynamic of family love must (*dei*) by nature be an experiential truth for this wholeness to be a reality of authentic belonging to God's family. This was made further evident by Jesus when his family love exposed the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of family, along with its counter-relational work (see Jn 8:31-47).

The trinitarian relational process of family love always functions for the relationship of God's family, thus always both matures as well as constitutes God's family. Family love also then necessarily involves clarifying what is not a function of God's family, even contending with what is not authentically God's family. The issue of authenticity is an ongoing concern of family love. Jesus' relational involvement demonstrated this necessary function in the context of his well-known saying, which loses its relational meaning and significance apart from this context.

When Jesus said "you will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32), it is important to understand that these words have both a structural contingency and a contextual contingency. Both contingencies are interconnected by relationship, the outcome of which by necessity involves the relational process of the relational progression.

This well-known saying of Jesus is structurally contingent on the previous verse, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples" (v.31). The term for "teaching" (*logos*) involves the essence of Jesus' whole person, not merely his principles, directives and propositions; "my teaching" cannot be disembodied. The term for "hold" (*meno*) is the same word Jesus told Zacchaeus ("must stay," Lk 19:5) and the rest of his disciples ("remain," Jn 15:4-11), which involves the relational act of abiding, dwelling. Jesus was making evident the dynamic reciprocal relational process of intimate involvement together. Each time he identified their part in the relationship with the word "remain" (in Jn 15:4-11) a relational outcome was also identified. This relational outcome reflected the authenticity of being his disciples (15:8), which is the structural contingency of Jesus' well-known saying. Yet, disciples are authentic (*alethes*, Jn 8:31) not by having a title or status, nor by occupying an identity or fulfilling a role, but only by deep involvement in the reciprocal relational process with Jesus' whole person in relational progression—the relational significance of "Follow me" (cf. Jn 12:26).

The relational process of the structural contingency connects it to the contextual contingency. Deep involvement with Jesus' whole person engages the embodied Truth, which results in the intimate experience of knowing him. Truth is only for this relationship, the outcome of which makes evident the contextual contingency. When the embodied Truth is known by the reciprocal relational process of intimate involvement together, the embodied Truth functions in the relational involvement of family love to "set you free" (*eleutheroo*, liberate, Jn 8:32). The redemption Jesus pointed to, however, has a contextual contingency.

The embodied Truth is the fulfillment of God's thematic action, the strategic shift of God's relational work of grace. God's self-disclosure as the Truth is only for this relational outcome. Liberation (redemption, *padah*) was initially enacted by God for the Israelites as partial fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant for the purpose of life together (Ex 29:46). To be redeemed was never merely to be set free; it was always for relationship together. Moreover, redemption was relationship-specific to the whole of God's family together only on God's terms.

In this well-known text Jesus made evident that the holy God is accessible for relationship together as the triune God's family only to those who respond in Jesus' relational context and process. His words must be understood in the context of God's thematic action as well as this immediate context. By the strategic, tactical and functional shifts of God's relational work of grace, Jesus fulfilled God's thematic action, thus also defining the contextual contingency of his well-known words. The embodied Truth is the relational means necessary by which his followers are liberated from their enslavements (or released from an undesirable relational condition) for the specific relational purpose and outcome, so that they can be adopted as the Father's very own daughters and sons, thus intimately belonging to his family permanently (*meno*, Jn 8:34-36).

As the immediate context further defines in contrast, an indentured servant (*doulos*) is not free to experience God as Father and participate (*meno*, abide) in his family as his own child; such a servant must be redeemed first, then must be adopted to belong. This combined context makes evident the contingency of adoption. Redemption is never an end in itself but a relational process always connected to the vital relational outcome of adoption. And this contextual contingency is not fulfilled without the structural contingency of deep relational involvement with Jesus' whole person in the relational progression. These contingencies interact in this relational process of the relational progression to effect this relational outcome.

In this context, Jesus' family love also addressed ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of family. The Jews, who had believed Jesus (8:31), objected to Jesus' well-known saying with a question, which is implied by many of us today in one way or another: "We have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" (v.33). They claimed two conditions about themselves: one, membership in God's family as Abraham's descendents; and, two, never having been a slave to disqualify them from belonging to God's family. Authenticity is the issue of debate here. While there was no argument from Jesus about their position as biological descendents of Abraham (*sperma*, v.37a), that was insufficient basis for belonging to God's family. The polemic implications: they were merely functioning in an ontological simulation of family because they never knew *who* they truly were, and thus how they defined their identity and practiced relationships by reductionist substitutes (vv.38-42); also, their self-

understanding of their second condition (no enslavement) suffered from an epistemological illusion of family because their self-knowledge was never aware of *what* they truly were, and thus how their reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework predisposed and biased them in counter-relational work rejecting God's relational work of grace vulnerably before them (vv.43-47). Consequently, they demonstrated their own need to be redeemed.

The human relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole is pandemic (and enslaving, v.34), and critically endemic to those who labor in ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of God's family. Whatever form these may have in church practice today (including an orphanage), these persons have no position of significance nor belong with relational function in God's family as long as the adoption process is not complete. Without the relational reality of adoption, a church functions in a reductionist substitute, at most, and engages in counter-relational work, at least (the implications of vv.43-44). And without experiencing redemption in intimate relationship with the embodied Truth, there is no other relational means for the outcome of adoption.

In the functional shift of Jesus' relational work of grace, his family love wholly constituted his followers—by the relational progression to the whole of God—in the relationships necessary to be whole together as the triune God's very own family. This is the only relational outcome that is congruent with God's thematic action, which 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. This is the only relational significance the authentic gospel of Jesus the Christ has—nothing less and no substitutes. And without this relational significance, the gospel is reduced to a truncated soteriology only about what we are saved *from*.

Functional Implications

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

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). The Son communicated the Father's words (Jn 12:49-50) and functioned only for the Father (Jn 14:31) and his family (Jn 17:6-8); and the Father expressed his affection for his family and directed the attention to his Son for the purpose of their family. These vulnerable assertions are conjoined in their mutual relational context and process for the same relational outcome. And their conjoint function was made evident by the relational significance of God's thematic action in the incarnation of Jesus' relational work of grace and his relational involvement in the relational progression (as a complete Christology), which constitutes his followers in the relationships necessary to be the whole of God's family (as a full soteriology).

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

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

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

While a church may still struggle or strain to make connection with the transcendent God, its most important struggle or challenge is to maintain a compatible connection with the holy God. The holy God, who is qualitatively distinct from common function, is the whole of God Jesus made vulnerably accessible. And this holy God is not only vulnerably present but also intimately involved. However, since Jesus’ sanctified life and practice functioned in this qualitative distinction from common function, this made much of his life and practice distinct from what prevailed in the surrounding context—or improbable from what we’re accustomed to. This is a functional issue for the church: the tension between the improbable face of Jesus and our desire (or even need) for more probable practices, that is, which effectively are compatible with our prevailing

function. To be distinct from prevailing function has personal implications, not the least of which involves being redefined and thus *different*.

Though he was in the common's context, Jesus vulnerably disclosed the presence of the holy God only in the trinitarian context; and the whole of God is present and involved only by the trinitarian relational process. Relational connection with the holy God must by nature be on terms distinct from common function and compatible with the holy God's terms. In other words, the functional implication is that Jesus' whole person reshaped the bell curve of probable practices. The experiential truth is that to follow his person in the relational progression reshapes the curve of probable church practices. The functional issue (maybe even theological) then becomes: do we allow Jesus to reshape the curve to change our practices to the more improbable range, or do we reduce Jesus' whole person by disembodied his teachings and examples, while selectively paying attention to them or even ignoring them, in order to maintain a probable range of practice?

God's thematic action (metanarrative) and the narratives of Jesus make evident: The transcendent and holy God was embodied in Jesus' whole person, who "came from" and went "back to" the Father in an unaltered relational dynamic, which was conjoined in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love; Jesus the Truth *came* to constitute his followers in the relational progression *back to* the whole of God. While revisionism of these narratives can be attempted, this improbable action by God cannot be reduced. And while revisionism of its functional implications can be achieved, following Jesus' whole person in the relational progression to the whole of God as family together can never be a common function and will always remain in the improbable range of the curve.

Thus, the unavoidable issue for all of us is: what are we going to do with the relational progression, individually and together as church? Any type of disengagement (in the form of revision, substitutes, resistance, omission, avoidance or any relational distance) from this relational progression by Jesus' followers diminishes the experiential truth: of God's thematic relational action for human wholeness; of the covenant kingdom of God's people; of God's vulnerable relational work of grace in the incarnation and the emergence of the new creation of God's family; and of the Spirit's ongoing relational presence and function to bring this to completion at the eschatological conclusion of the whole of God's desires. Whatever gospel is leftover, both to experience together and to share with others, strains for lack of theological and functional clarity and/or suffers from lack of relational significance, both of which cannot be resolved apart from the full relational progression.

Any alternative to relational involvement in the relational progression becomes in effect counter-relational work reducing the relationships necessary to be whole. The functional opposite of being whole is sin. For those unsettled by the improbable, it is a discomfiting truth to grasp: sin is 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. The church needs to pay attention to sin, in particular in the practice of and service to church. The bad news shaping the gospel today is the function of sin as reductionism pervading our churches, including the Christian academy.

These are matters which either reflect change or require change from prevailing practice. This change can only be the outcome of redemptive change; that is, these

matters (and their common function) need to be redeemed in order to change. Yet, they must first be acknowledged for this redemptive process to happen. This is the importance of truth and the honesty of our hearts—a necessary basis for function in our life and practice with God, which the Father seeks. Whatever truth we claim and proclaim only has significance for this relationship, the relationship of the whole of God. Until we theologically and functionally grasp the relational significance of the triune God vulnerably disclosed in the incarnation, and thus account for the functional involvement of the whole person in the primacy of intimate relationships together necessary to be whole as God’s family, whatever truth we have will lack the experiential truth of *by what* and *how* the Trinity only does relationships.

“Listen to him” for a complete Christology. “Hear the word of the Father, and relationally respond” for a full soteriology. The gospel we claim and proclaim depends on it—nothing less and no substitutes.

Chapter 4 The Individual Person and the Whole

When Jesus saw a widow at her only son's funeral procession, his heart felt compassion for her (Lk 7:11-16). This was characteristic of his relational involvement with those who were not whole and unable to function in wholeness, which Jesus made evident with Levi in the significance of Hosea 6:6. Without her son, this widow in the ancient Mediterranean world lacked value and would suffer social illness (*kakos*, as Jesus implied about Levi and Zacchaeus). Jesus responded to her by restoring her son.

In this seemingly limited moment, Jesus demonstrated more than his power over illness and death; and by this act, he demonstrated more than the limitations of a messianic role. The witnesses of this miracle were convinced that God had come to fulfill the covenant and messianic promise (vv.16-17). Yet, the relational significance of what Jesus demonstrated with this widow appears to be lost in their covenant and messianic expectations shaped by human terms, rather than the meaning of the covenant in God's thematic relational action.

In the creation narrative, human ontology was never about one's self (or the individual) nor designed "to be apart" from the whole (Gen 2:18). The person was never created to function as if in a vacuum, thus the individual has neither the functional freedom for self-determination nor the relational autonomy to determine meaning in life and practice and to constitute wholeness. The ontology of the person is only a function of relationship in likeness of the triune God—in whose image the human person is created and apart from whom there is no determination of self, meaning and wholeness. Since creation, God's thematic action throughout human history has been to respond to the human relational condition "to be apart." While widows and orphans were at risk in their situations and circumstances, it was their relational condition apart from God's whole to which Jesus responded as fulfillment of God's thematic relational action.

When Jesus' vulnerable response is shaped by human terms (as with the witnesses above), God's thematic action is reduced to what God does in situations and circumstances, without relational significance and coherence. Increasingly, then, the human relational condition is redefined (or ignored), thus functionally displacing God's prominence and redefining the individual person with freedom and autonomy. The implication of this shift is the increasing prominence (functional, if not also theological) given to the individual, which, on the one hand, also comes with greater responsibility while, on the other, reduces the whole of human function to manage this responsibility. Reductionism influences the individual to function in an ontological simulation (virtual reality, if you wish) of self-determination and an epistemological illusion of meaning and wholeness, which underlie the function of individualism. This reduced ontology of the person effectively establishes the individual as the primary determiner of self, meaning and wholeness. If the individual person(s) determines these—for example, meaning in interpretive practice or communication—what does this imply for God's self-revelation, God's communicative act in the incarnation and Jesus' vulnerable relational work of grace (as with the widow)?

This involves issues currently facing biblical and theological studies, notably raised by postmodernism. This has specific implications for the study of Christology and the significance of the individual as reader “in front of” the canonical text of Jesus’ narratives.²⁵ The current chapter involves this tension of the ontology of the person, and the importance and place of the individual person in the whole of Jesus’ sanctified life and practice.

“How Do You Read It?”

The freedom and autonomy of the individual are a Western phenomenon, with roots in ancient Greek philosophy. While the individual person appears to have far less prominence (even gets lost) in Eastern contexts, the individual’s function to determine (discover or uncover) its own meaning and wholeness (however virtual) still operates—even if only as a collective characteristic. This suggests that the ontology of the individual person as main determinant has deeper roots, namely in reductionism, and thus functions even in a context deemphasizing the individual for a collective function.

The significance of a Western individual is generally measured only by what one does and has, albeit in a comparative process with what other individuals do and have; in this process, an individual’s self-determination never happens in a vacuum. The significance of a person in a collective context, however, is a function of relationship with others, not the individual compared to others. Yet, though a collective context may determine the quantitative basis for relationships (e.g., their structure and roles), the individual persons determine the qualitative function of those relationships. And how relationships function is a direct outcome of how the person defines oneself. Thus, for example, the lack of qualitative depth of relationship individuals engage in a collective context makes evident the presence of reductionism and its subtle counter-relational work—relationships for which individuals are ultimately accountable.

In any process of reductionism, despite the presence (Eastern contexts) or absence (Western contexts) of a collective structure, the consequence for the individual person as main determinant is the relational condition “to be apart” from the whole. This consequence may not be apparent in a collective context, yet its practice of any whole is a virtual reality, an ontological simulation, to which the individual necessarily contributes. And though the individual person cannot determine all of one’s situations and circumstances, that person is accountable “to be apart” from God’s whole.

This tension of the person’s ontology, even in a collective context, was not ignored by Jesus but vitally addressed for the individual person to be whole.

When a “lawyer” challenged Jesus with the question to inherit eternal life (see Lk 10:25-37, cf. rich ruler asking the same question, Mk 10:17), Jesus refocused him on the Torah. Yet, Jesus was addressing something further than the descriptive content of the law or deeper than the interpretive framework of the collective tradition of Judaism (particularly, Second Temple Judaism). As Jesus refocused the lawyer to the law and asked also “How do you read it?” (v.26), he was not merely asking for the lawyer’s legal

²⁵ For a discussion of this hermeneutical issue, see Anthony C. Thiselton, “‘Behind’ and ‘In Front of’ the Text: Language, Reference and Indeterminacy,” in Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, Karl Moller, eds., *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 97-120.

opinion but more importantly giving him the opportunity as an individual person to express his reader-response position. This is the ongoing opportunity we all have with the whole of the biblical text, notably Jesus' narrative life and practice, for which we are accountable as readers.

After Jesus affirmed the lawyer's answer of a summary account of the law, this individual expressed his reader-response position (albeit in the collective character of Judaism) by asking "who is my neighbor?" (v.29). This suggests what he depended on to define his *self* in this collective context. By focusing on defining the details of what would be required "to justify himself" (*dikaioo*, to demonstrate to be righteous) for eternal life, he made evident his reader-response position: displacing the functional (not necessarily theological) prominence of God by reduction of the law to a mere code book of behavior to follow for self-determination and justification. Despite asking Jesus for this information, this lawyer-reader would be the main determiner of its meaning by his interpretive practice (as in "intentional fallacy"), which also involved the communication directly from Jesus in this relational interaction. This made further evident his individual prominence over the priority of relationship, even in this well-defined collective context.

His reader-response position was in direct contrast with another teacher of the law (see Mk 12:28-34). Given their common collective context, comparing their differences helps us understand the importance and place of the individual person as defined by Jesus.

This scribe asked Jesus what the priority was in the commandments. Jesus responded with the exact summary as the first lawyer in the above account (Mk 12:29-31), except Jesus included the Shema (Dt 6:4). Perhaps an oversight by the first lawyer, yet it points to the difference between his quantitative focus on a behavioral code and Jesus' qualitative focus on relationship. By beginning with the Shema, Jesus clarified two important issues: (1) only the Lord God is prominent (functionally as well as theologically), thus irreducible by human shaping, irreplaceable by human displacement, and nonnegotiable to human terms; and (2) the Shema provided the commandments with both their relational clarity as God's desires (not a mere code, cf. Dt 7:9) and the relational significance necessary to respond to God's desires—not as the quantitative measure of what to do but as the qualitative function of how to be involved in relationship together.

As Jesus communicated with this scribe, he received Jesus in this face-to-face relational context and also affirmed him at face value (cf. authorial intention) without determining Jesus' meaning for him—that is, he listened to Jesus without reinterpretation (vv.32-33). Though all communication involves some interpretation by the listener/reader, he demonstrated that meaning came only from the communicator, Jesus. In other words, he didn't take on the function of an individual person as main determinant, which prevailed in his context, thus he was able to understand the qualitative relational meaning of what Jesus said. He made evident a different listener/reader-response position: God alone is prominent, which relieved him of that responsibility and freed him from a behavioral code of secondary practice (such as "all burnt offerings and sacrifices") for self-determination and justification, and thus able to focus on the primary importance of the relational involvement of love, without reductionism of the whole person and the relationships important to God. This scribe

learned the meaning of Hosea 6:6, which Jesus earlier made requisite to understand his sanctified life and practice (Mt 9:13).

How he read the law was qualitatively different from the first lawyer. Jesus affirmed his position because he had answered “wisely” (*nounechos*, possessing discernment, v.34), not merely “correctly” as the lawyer did (*orthos*, rightly, properly, Lk 10:28). Yet, the scribe’s reader-response was in contrast to “the wise and learned” (Lk 10: 21) who depended on reason to interpret meaning about God. This suggests the scribe engaged a relational epistemic process which listened to God’s communicative act (in the law and the incarnation), contrary to what pervaded his collective context. This is a summary of how the scribe and the lawyer compared:

Scribe	Lawyer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Read the law from a qualitative interpretive framework which gave importance to the whole person and the primacy of relationships. ▪ Saw the law as God’s desires for relationships; knowing the meaning of Hosea 6:6 made this evident. ▪ Engaged a relational epistemic process to understand what Jesus said and made the connections with the law and Hosea 6:6, thus suggesting his involvement in the relational progression “not far from the kingdom of God” (v.34). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Read the law from a reductionist interpretive framework which focused on what to do without seeing the importance of the whole person and the primacy of relationships. ▪ Saw the law as a behavioral code to follow without relational involvement; asking about “my neighbor” made this evident. ▪ Used a quantitative epistemic process for information about eternal life, thus made an epistemological error (as did the rich ruler) by reducing the relational meaning of eternal life (Jn 17:3) to knowing merely information without engaging the deeper epistemology necessary to truly know God (cf. Jn 14:9); this suggests he saw eternal life as something to possess rather than as having God to experience in intimate relationship.

The lawyer’s question about what to do for eternal life must be connected both to Jesus defining eternal life as knowing the Trinity (Jn 17:3), and to the issue between merely knowing something about God and truly knowing God. The latter is a function only of intimate relationship, which involves the relational progression of belonging to God’s family (kingdom) as his very own constituted by Jesus in what he saves *to*.

As these connections are made, they will distinguish the individual person as created in the image of the whole of God, not as main determinant to displace the prominence of God. This likeness of the Trinity is the function of the whole person only for the purpose of relationship together, as vulnerably disclosed in Jesus’ sanctified life and practice “who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). Conjointly, these connections will distinguish God’s whole, to which the individual person must by nature belong to be whole. Moreover, they will distinguish the relationships necessary to be whole—just as those two summary commandments and the Good Samaritan signify, not as codes to

accomplish by the individual but as persons involved and constituted in relationship together as the whole of God.

When the lawyer asked who his neighbor was, he revealed not only his reductionist approach to the law. He also exposed being embedded in the human relational condition “to be apart” from God’s whole. Jesus’ account of the Good Samaritan is focused on this human relational condition and how we partition persons, create stratified structures and relationships, or generally live apart in degrees of functional relational distance. While “neighbor” (*plesion*) in this context signifies anyone within close proximity, regardless of sociocultural, religious, racial-ethnic, economic or political differences, “my neighbor” is not a category defining what to do. That would be reductionism, which would only reinforce the human relational condition, even with good intentions of Christian service. Jesus defined “my neighbor” as a metaphor for *the whole* created in the image of God, and “mercy” (*eleos*, compassion, Lk 10:37, cf. Mt 9:13) is the relational involvement in the relationships necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity.

The function of “person as neighbor” conflicts with any prominence assumed by the individual for self-determination and justification (to demonstrate to be righteous). The latter was an ontology of the person reducing the primacy of relationships, by which the lawyer functioned. The reductionist function of this individual person is defined by what can be considered a metaphor of “sacrifice” (from Hos 6:6). In conflict with the metaphor of “my neighbor,” the “sacrifice” metaphor describes the reductionist substitute for the law, and thus the epistemological illusion of knowing God apart from relational involvement and the ontological simulation of God’s desires (in the law) without relational significance. This was what the lawyer was embedded in, likely functionally enslaved to (cf. Jn 8:33ff), thus keeping him relationally apart. Yet, his listener-response to “my neighbor” indicated some openness to perceive the meaning of Hosea 6:6 in the Good Samaritan (v.37).²⁶ Whether this included understanding its relational significance depended on his further vulnerable listener-response to Jesus’ imperative to him to “Go and do likewise” (*homoios*, like in nature, v.37)—that is, function in likeness of the whole of God.

The functional ontology of the individual person and the listener/reader-response issue are vital matters to address. They are conjoined in the ongoing function of our life and practice, thus inseparable and inescapable, with direct implications for how we function in relationships and practice church.

As the scribe strongly contrasted with the lawyer, there is a commonality between the lawyer and the rich ruler (Mk 10:17-23). Characteristic of reductionism, both made the epistemological error of reducing the qualitative relational significance of eternal life to quantitative information to define what they would need to do. This reader-response reinterpretation can be made even with good intentions, yet the best of intentions can never compensate for reducing the relational significance of God’s authorial intentions. Seminaries and seminarians make this epistemological error; many Christians make this same mistake in ongoing life and practice.

Moreover, the lawyer and rich ruler made the ontological error of assuming they could experience what is by nature qualitatively relational (namely, eternal life) from a

²⁶ If the source for Luke’s account of this interaction was available to Matthew’s Gospel, it is curious why this is not included since it has direct implication to Hosea 6:6.

position of mere quantitative involvement (notably constrained or enslaved by what they did and had). The ontological condition of the person directly involves a relational condition, the nature of which is either a relational consequence (i.e., functions as a slave who doesn't belong to the whole) or a relational outcome (i.e., functions as a son/daughter belonging to the whole of God's very own family). In other words, the significance of human experience is only a qualitative function of relationship, the terms of which are neither determined nor negotiated by the individual person. The qualitative gap in Christian experience today directly corresponds with this ontological error and the relational consequence of redefining the terms of relationship together.

Both of these individuals were influenced and controlled by reductionism, and thus engaged in self-determination and justification: the rich ruler by what he achieved and accumulated; the lawyer by reduction of the law to a behavioral code to achieve. And Jesus' response to each was to challenge their reductionism and to provide the way out of their enslavement: for the rich ruler to sell all of his reductionist substitutes in order to follow Jesus for relationship together; for the lawyer to let go of his reduction of the law and make his person vulnerable for relational involvement in the relationships necessary to be God's whole.

Since Jesus' sanctified life and practice constituted the relational context and process necessary for us to be whole as the whole of God constituted by the Trinity, sanctified life and practice in likeness must (*dei*) by nature always confront reductionism and expose its ontological simulations and epistemological illusions—and thus not allow anything less or any substitutes from the common function, notably involving counter-relational work. Jesus continued to confront and to clarify the issues involved for the individual person and the role of wholeness.

The Person: Outside-In or Inside-Out

One of the main points of contention some Pharisees, scribes and lawyers had with Jesus and his disciples was about not washing their hands before eating (Lk 11:37-38,45, Mk 7:1-5). Washing the hands was a key purification practice, which was not found in the OT but established by the tradition of their elders (Mk 7:3,5). The polemics here appears to be about the place and validity of religious tradition, yet it further involves the issue of who determines the functional terms for sanctified life and practice: the words from God or their own traditions, assuming they are incompatible (Mk 7:8-9,13). The deeper implications involve the issue of who determines in actual function the terms for relationship with God, and thus what this means for the ontology of the person and persons' relationships. Jesus clarifies this for us.

The determination of self, meaning and wholeness has been ongoingly the most consequential human practice ever since the first humans took up the challenge in the primordial garden (Gen 3:2-6). This becomes even more problematic when it is a theological practice functioning in a religious context supposedly in relation to God. Jesus called this practice hypocrisy (*hypokrisis*, "the leaven of the Pharisees," Lk 12:1) and those who practiced it hypocrites (*hypokrites*, Mk 7:6, Mt 23:13ff). *Hypokrites* denotes a pretentious person who is not truthful about the person presented—besides all the added connotations associated with the term; hypocrisy was also one of the chief sins

denounced in Judaism, of which the Pharisees were often guilty.²⁷ Yet, what better serves our purpose in this discussion is denoted by the metaphorical sense of *hypokrisis* taken from the world of Greek theatre: the action of a person which is similar to a stage performance as an actor. Deceit is not necessarily the intention of a *hypokrites*, though that is certainly a common issue. The main issue reflected by *hypokrisis*, however, involves the ontology of the person and its consequence for relationships. This sense of *hypokrisis* addresses the individual person's functional determination and the underlying human ontology, which Jesus confronted and clarified.

Hypokritai (pl) make a presentation of self (even unintentionally) which does not correspond to or represent their whole person (signified by the function of the heart). Jesus exposed the worship practice of Pharisees and scribes to make their hypocrisy evident (Mk 7:6, cf. Jer 12:2); later, in his list of woes, he confronted them on their duplicity (Lk 11:39, Mt 23:25). The person presented was the measured (scripted if you will) expression of the outer, more quantitative and distinctly observable aspects of the person (Mt 23:5-7) purposely for a process of self-determination and justification (Mt 23:27-28). This outside-in approach to the person to define, constitute, and distinguish one's sanctified life and practice was confronted by Jesus in his woes against them and clarified for us not to engage in similar practice. Why was this approach and practice neither sufficient nor compatible for determining self, meaning and wholeness?

This directly involves the issue of who determines the functional terms of sanctified life and practice, and more importantly who functionally determines the terms for relationship with God. These Pharisees' and scribes' listener/reader response to God's words was to reinterpret his meaning based on "the tradition of the elders" or, as Jesus said, "their teachings [the corpus of rabbinic tradition] are but rules taught by men" (Mk 7:7). The term for "rules" (*entalma*) denotes specific directives of a quantitative character, such as the code of behavior characteristic of rabbinic tradition. *Entalma* is distinguished from its synonym *entole* which stresses the qualitative aspect of a directive, not merely its quantitative content as *entalma* does. This distinction is important in relation to God's words because *entole* accounts for a relational aspect, which points to a communication process determining meaning and authority of a directive; to understand a communicative act necessitates by nature a listener/reader to submit to the communicator/author. On the other hand, *entalma* merely focuses on the content aspect of a directive apart from a relational process, the relational distance of which tends increasingly to render a directive to listener/reader reinterpretation—eventually, even to make it unnecessary to reference it, or to "nullify the word of God" as Jesus said (7:13). This listener/reader-response process "in front of the text" and its relational consequence were what Jesus clarified.

Their listener/reader-response position was insufficient because it functionally separated from (not theologically rejected) the *entole* of God and replaced them with their own reinterpretations (Mk 7:8-9,13). This is never adequate for determining meaning for God, even with the best of intentions. Additionally, their reductionist perspective paid attention to secondary matters while ignoring the primary, thus reordering what is important to God (Mt 23:23, Lk 11:39, cf. Mt 23:16-22).

²⁷ Walther Gunther, "Lie, Hypocrisy" in Colin Brown, ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 467-470.

Moreover, their process of determination of self was incompatible because it involved redefining the person by quantitative behaviors and functions without qualitative relational significance, thus reducing the ontology of the person (Lk 11:40, Mt 23:26). Besides Jesus' woes, this redefined person of diminished ontology was made evident in their formulation of *entalma*, which functioned in their quantitative practice of worship (its forms and participation); yet their practice had no qualitative involvement of the whole person (signified by the function of the heart) and thus had no relational significance to God (Mk 7:6-8). The full quote from Isaiah Jesus used here begins with "These people came near to me with their mouth" (Is 29:13). The term for "came near" (*nagas*) essentially denotes coming into proximity to an object. The tension between "came near to me with their mouth" and yet "their hearts are far from me" is not a paradox but clearly makes evident the function of a reductionist human ontology based on the outside in, thus they merely focused on outer quantitative practice. While their practice had the appearance of reality, it essentially was only virtual, not real. That is, they enacted the role of worshippers (or any other practice) as the performance of an actor, even if it neither corresponded to nor represented their whole person—*hypokrites*.

When Jesus said nothing going into a person makes the person unclean (Mk 7:15,18-19), he was not merely disputing the Pharisees and scribes' purification practices; nor was he justifying his and his disciples' practice of not washing their hands. To focus only on the purity issue fails to grasp the deeper issues Jesus addressed and clarified. Jesus prefaced these declarations with the imperative challenge for the listener-response process of relational communication—"Listen to me, everyone, and understand this" (v.14)—which "understands" (*syniemi*), that is, by putting together his words for their meaning. I suggest that Jesus' words were focused on the ontology of the person from the inside out, not from the outside in (Mk 7:20-23); and this person is not determined, though often relatively defined, by surrounding contexts, situations and circumstances—symbolized by what goes into a person.

Jesus' ontology of the person is determined only by the whole person, signified by the importance of the heart (as discussed earlier about *leb*) and constituted by the integrating function of the heart. Surrounding contexts, situations and circumstances may and do indeed shape persons but they cannot determine the ontology of the whole person. As Jesus said, they don't "go into [the person's] heart" (v.19) but only involve a reduced person defined by the quantitative parts of reductionism (as "stomach," "body" and implied excrement represent). His disciples had difficulty understanding this distinction and grasping the whole person (Mk 7:17), apparently due to their own reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework preventing them from "getting it" (*asynetos*, as Jesus said, v.18, thus lacking *syniemi*, cf. Mk 8:17).

Furthermore, in the process to make a person unclean, "make unclean" (*koinoo*) also denotes to make common, which was discussed in the last chapter about the holy God and Jesus' sanctified life and practice. What distinguished Jesus' sanctified life and practice was his function in distinction from the common's function (prevailing even in the religious community), not separation from the common's context by purification practices. When purity practice pays attention to the quantitative outer aspects of a person perceived to "make a person clean," while ignoring the qualitative functions necessary not to "make a person common," its practice is both insufficient and incompatible (cf. Jesus' woes above). Putting together Jesus' words here with his vulnerable sanctified life

and practice provided clarity for our understanding (*syniemi*) of this vital theological and functional issue: the ontology of the person created in the image of the holy whole of God is not common; nor is the created function of persons designed in likeness of the holy Trinity to be of common function.

Jesus' ontology of the person never reduced the person to one's parts (notably quantitative outer aspects characteristic of reductionist substitutes) but necessitates the integrity of the whole person; nor does this ontology sacrifice the person to lose one's importance or to get lost in the whole, as tends to happen in a collective context. In contrast to and in conflict with the common function (constituted by reductionism), Jesus' ontology of the person distinctly affirms the whole person's importance in the primacy of relationships necessary to be whole. In consequential irony, the purification practices of these Pharisees and scribes never made their persons clean but did make them common (cf. Mt 23:27-28)—that is, in common function, by rigorously performing their roles in the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of reductionism (cf. the consequence of a lie, *'iys* in Ps 62:9); these are the quantitative substitutes which also involved reinforcing and promoting reductionism's counter-relational work.

When the individual person assumes in function (not necessarily in theology) the responsibility for self-determination and/or self-justification, then the person becomes primarily attentive to the affects on self, thus self-centered—even as part of a collective context. This has critical consequences both for relationships with others and for the relationships necessary to be whole. This was further evidenced in these Pharisees and scribes.

Conjointly, along with their insufficient determination of meaning and their incompatible self-determination, their process of determining wholeness (and the whole) was also incompatible for three reasons: (1) they reduced the primacy of relationships by reordering secondary matters to be more important in function (Mt 23:23, Mk 7:10-12), and they obstructed the relationships necessary to be God's whole (Mt 23:13); (2) the implication of this was that it functionally reduced the ontology of the whole of God and the relational nature of the Trinity—in whose image the human person is created and in whose likeness human persons together are created to function, which thus also implied their reduction of human ontology; and (3) therefore they “nullify the word of God” (*akyroo*, to make void, Mk 7:13), that is, they, in listener/reader-response function, effectively voided out God's communication—including Jesus as the hermeneutical and functional keys (Lk 11:52)—which relationally disclosed the whole of God's thematic relational action in response to the human relational condition “to be apart” from God's whole.

Further incompatible with God's whole was the repercussion of their purity code on the Judaic collective context. Their purification practices, requisite for self-determination and justification, was essentially an elitist system which very few (if any, cf. Jesus' comment in Mt 23:3b) were able to practically observe. For example, field workers and fishermen could not readily wash their hands. While such a system might have had good intentions to promote Jewish national identity formation in post-exilic Judaism, any results were only a virtual sense of corporate identity—more accurately, an ontological simulation of the whole of God's people (cf. Mt 23:38). The consequence for most in this system was an inequitable burden of demands which they could never fulfill (Mt 23:4, Lk 11:46). This created a stratified system which in actual function relationally

fragmented God's whole, setting persons apart from the whole under the simulation and illusion of unity.

The inequity from this systemic influence of Judaism even permeated the early church, until it was disputed by Peter at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:8-10). An earlier dramatic "visit" by Jesus precipitated Peter's change from his reductionist perspective and understanding (Acts 10:9-16). Yet, a reformation change in theology does not necessarily mean a functional transformation in practice. Later, Peter had to be confronted by Paul for his own form of duplicity and not functioning in the truth of the gospel but merely outwardly performing in his role as a minister of the gospel, which was hypocrisy in Paul's words (Gal 2:11-14). Thus, in principle, Peter was found in similar function as the Pharisees and scribes—a lesson for church leaders which must be grasped today.

Though this soteriology and pneumatology radically constituted the early church and ecclesiology, reductionism remained problematic in church practice (as it does today), which I will discuss in chapter eight. And, I suggest, a key variable in this ongoing issue and condition is the ontology of the person—from the outside in or the inside out.

Going Beyond Reductionism

When the lawyer earlier made the volitional decision "to justify himself" (*dikaioo*, Lk 10:29), this exercised the functional choice "to demonstrate to be righteous." Yet, merely to be defined as righteous is an issue of interpretation and meaning; to *be* righteous, on the other hand, cannot be a self-determination or be measured by terms of human definition. This is a critical distinction for understanding the difference in actual function between God's terms and our terms for relationship together. Failure to make this distinction leaves us susceptible to the influence of reductionism. The subtlety of reductionism is evident both in the shift of prominence to the individual person and in the person's effort to fulfill the responsibility to demonstrate one's righteousness. The latter necessarily occurs in order to quantify some result, however virtual.

While Jesus said "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Mt 5:6), he clearly taught his disciples that their righteousness must "surpass the Pharisees and scribes" (*perisseuo*, to go beyond, Mt 5:20)—that is, must go beyond the reductionists. This issue of righteousness was addressed in whole by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount—his major discourse with his disciples and his summary teachings (*didache*) for all his followers, the primer for discipleship (Mt 5-7)—in order to constitute our life and practice beyond reductionism.

The pivotal section in his major discourse is Jesus' declarative position on the Torah and the Prophets (Mt 5:17-20). Together with the Writings, they constitute the collective word of God in the OT, to which his coming (the embodiment of the gospel) adhered and cohered. The Sermon on the Mount was framed in this larger context of the OT and, therefore, in the full context of God's thematic action. Jesus' purpose was not "to abolish" (*katalyo*, to dissolve, demolish, destroy) but "to fulfill" (*pleroo*, to complete) "until everything is accomplished" (*ginomai*, to be, comes into existence). Yet, what the incarnation adhered to and cohered with was not a mere list of demands of the law, nor a

system of ethics and moral obligations. The law is God's terms for covenant relationship together. What Jesus focused on was not merely the oral and written word of God but those words from God—that is, the communication from God. And God's communicative action is not merely informative but has distinct authorial intention (as communicator/author) to which the incarnation adhered and cohered: namely, God's thematic relational action to respond to the human condition “to be apart” from God's whole.

Katalyo is an intensive action of *lyo* (to dissolve, demolish, destroy), which I will render simply as “to reduce” to better understand the whole of Jesus' discourse. At issue here is the determination of righteousness and the reduction of God's communicated intention, which the embodiment of God's communicative action in the incarnation clarifies, constitutes and makes whole. Jesus never engaged in reducing (*katalyo*) God's communicative action, whether in the person he presented, by the quality of his own communicative action and with the level of his relational involvement. To the theological and functional contrary, by vulnerably embodying God's communicative action of grace, Jesus both extended and fulfilled God's authorial intentions since creation. The whole of God's thematic communicative action is purely for relationship in the qualitatively distinct relational context and process of the Trinity, as Jesus vulnerably disclosed. The implication of reducing (*lyo*) any one of these words from God (5:19) is “to dissolve” (“to nullify” in Mk 7:13) communication from God, and thus to disembody God's Word to a code of behavior, a tradition, doctrine, propositions, and so on, without the qualitative significance of the whole of God's relational intentions.²⁸ For this critical reason, Jesus closed this pivotal section of his discourse with the theological and functional necessity for the righteousness of his followers to go beyond reductionism.

When Jesus definitively said our righteousness needs to go beyond the Pharisees and scribes, it is important for us to think in contrary terms, not comparative terms. That is, we have to think in terms of the qualitative distinction from what is common function—the significance of being holy. Their righteousness was a product of reductionism based on the quantitative indicators of what they did in their behavioral code. While most Christians likely do not formulate or perceive of righteousness as an explicit product of reductionism, nevertheless they have a tendency to associate righteousness with certain outward behavior. The presence or absence of that behavior becomes the dependent variable in the determination to be righteous. Contrary to this is the righteousness of God in which Jesus' discourse seeks to constitute the righteousness of his followers.

Righteousness (Heb. *saddiyq*, Gk. *dikaiosyne*) is the essence of that which is just or of one who is just, righteous (Heb. *sadaq*, Gk. *dikaios*). *Saddiyq* (just, lawful, honest, right) signifies God's character “in all his ways” or actions (Ps 145:17). *Sadaq* (to be right in a moral or forensic sense, be just, be true) is essentially a legal term, which defines the laws of God (Ps 19:9). Yet, the laws of God cannot validly be separated from God's ways or actions—that is, disembodied from the righteous God who authored those laws—and still have the qualitative significance of God's laws. Separated from its author, the practice of the law becomes centered on what the individual does, not about the qualitative involvement (righteousness) with others intended by God for its practice.

²⁸ Anthony Thiselton comments on how author intentions tend to be overlooked by individualism in *The Promise of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 133-239.

Being *dikaïos* means to conform in actions to one's constitutionally just character; yet, the actions are not in a vacuum and are only significant in relation to others. The Hebrew derivative *sedakah* is a legal term used for relationships to stress that the parties involved should be faithful to the expectations of one another. To be *dikaïos* has no theological meaning without being conjoined to this functional significance. To diminish or ignore this functional involvement for the individual's (collective or not) practice to be righteous becomes an ontological simulation of reductionism; to ascribe theological meaning to the individual's practice without having this functional significance becomes an epistemological illusion of reductionism. Therefore, to be righteous always involves these actions which others can expect, and what can be counted on from the righteous to function in relationship.

"God is righteous" essentially means the whole of God is in conformity with what, who and how God is in relationship; and the experiential truth of God's covenant is the ultimate functional expression of his righteousness in relationship. While righteousness is intrinsic to the ontology of what, who and how God is, righteousness is not a mere static attribute or quality of God but always a dynamic relational function. It is readily apparent that God acts on his covenant according to the relational dynamic of the righteous (or just) God in his ongoing involvement with his people; that is, they can count on God to function in conformity with what, who and how he is (cf. Ps 89:33-37). By the nature of being righteous, this is the only way God acts in relationship—nothing less and no substitutes. And by the nature of being righteous, this ongoing relational involvement is the only way God functions—the transcendent and holy God vulnerably present, accessible and involved for relationship. This provides the functional understanding of righteousness which is definitive for our righteousness. As Jesus' discourse will make evident, anything less or any substitutes are reductionism.

While the righteous God and his covenant are conjoined, God is not the covenant—that is, disembodied in a covenant framework whom we can shape in our likeness. Yet, the covenant is God—that is, the embodied relational promise authored by the righteous God which we cannot shape on our terms; at the same time, this covenant is only a partial expression of what, who and how God is. Likewise, though the righteous God and his laws are inseparable, relationship with God cannot be reduced to mere relationship with the law, which would disembody the law functionally apart from its author's purpose. Moreover, the law is not the covenant either; it is only the charter for the covenant defining God's desires and terms for relationship together. The law communicates God's desires of how to be involved in the relationships for the covenant. When we observe the law (or forms of it) in order to define us (as righteous) or to measure up (to God's expectations for righteousness), we functionally fall into legalism and thus make the law the covenant. This is reductionism, which effectively diminishes our ontology and enslaves us to what we do. This approach to the law also fails to understand the relational process central to the law for the relational purpose of the covenant: intimate relationship together with God.

Whenever we inadvertently reduce the whole of God and disembody God's thematic communicative action, all that remains are codes of behavior, standards of ethics, teachings of what to do, propositions of belief to sustain, examples to emulate, to which to conform for righteousness. These are quantitative substitutes from reductionism in lieu of the qualitative difference of relational involvement with the whole of God,

including displacing function in likeness of the Trinity. This qualitative significance is the only process that gets us beyond reductionism to the authentic righteousness which functions in likeness to what, who and how God is in relationship.

Going beyond reductionism necessitates the shift in righteousness from merely displaying character traits (an issue of integrity) and practicing an ethic of right and wrong (an issue of being upright) distinctly deeper to the qualitative involvement of what, who and how to be in relationship—relationship both with God and with others. This is the significance of righteousness which is in qualitative distinction from common function, and thus is contrary to and goes beyond those who reduce righteousness, the law, the covenant, God and his communicative action to disembodied quantitative terms.

Moreover, this righteousness of what, who and how we are in function is never realized by the individual person in isolation but only as a relational function both with God and with others in sociocultural context. Thus this involves our identity as participants in a broader context. The implication is: righteousness is the process that makes functional our identity as Jesus' followers; and identity formation is integrated with the process to be righteous, the extent and depth of which is constituted by God.

From this pivotal section in his major discourse, we turn to the corresponding previous section in which Jesus addressed the interrelated issue of identity (Mt 5:13-16).

Identity and Its Formation

Our identity serves to inform us about who and what we are, and thus how to be. While identity is certainly not routinely singular, from this primary identity we can present that person to others. No moment in time, not one situation or association adequately defines an identity; identity formation is an ongoing process of trial and error, change, development and maturation. Just as the early disciples struggled with their identity—vacillating between what they were in the broader collective context and who they were as Jesus' followers—the formation of our identity is critical for following Jesus in order both to establish qualitative distinction from common function and to distinguish who, what and how we are with others in a broader context.

Despite the identity crises which seem to be a routine part of identity formation, Jesus focused on two major issues making our identity problematic. These directly interrelate to what has been discussed in this chapter. The two major issues are:

1. The first issue is *ambiguity* in not presenting ourselves in our true identity as “light” (5:14-15). Identity becomes ambiguous when what we present of ourselves is different from what and who we truly are. Or this ambiguity occurs when what we present is a variable mixture of two or more competing identities. Light may vary in its intensity but there is no ambiguity about its presence. Identity is problematic when it does not have this functional distinction or clarity in relational involvement with others in the surrounding context (v.16).
2. The second issue is *shallowness* in our identity. This identity, for example, may have the correct appearance in our presentation but not the substance, qualitative significance—just like the salt without its substantive quality (v.13). This lack of depth is both an ontological issue and a functional issue. Salt is always salt; unlike

dimming a light, salt cannot be reduced in its saline property and still be salt. Merely the correct appearance of an identity neither signifies the qualitative function nor constitutes the ontological substance of the person presented. Shallowness is guaranteed when we define ourselves by an outer-in approach as opposed to an inner-out process; subtle examples of this approach include defining ourselves merely by the roles we perform, the titles we have, even by the spiritual gifts we have and/or exercise.

Christian identity, namely as Jesus' followers, must have both *clarity* and *depth* to establish qualitative distinction from common function (notably from reductionism) and to distinguish the qualitative significance of our whole person (what, who and how we are) in relationship with others. These two identity issues of ambiguity and shallowness, therefore, need our honest attention and have to be addressed in our ongoing practice, if our righteousness is going to function beyond reductionism.

In these metaphors of the light and the salt, Jesus was unequivocal about the identity of his followers: that "you are..." (*eimi*, the verb of existence), and thus all his followers are accountable *to be* (not merely to do) "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth." Other than as a preservative in the ancient world, it is not clear what specific function the salt metaphor serves—perhaps as peace (cf. Mk 9:50). But as a seasoning ("becomes tasteless," *moraine*, v.13, cf. Col 4:6), this metaphor better suggests simply the distinct identity of Jesus' followers which cannot be reduced and still be "salt," and, in further distinction, which cannot be uninvolved with others and still qualitatively reflect the vulnerable Jesus (the Truth and Life) and illuminate the relational Way as "light." This is not an optional identity, and perhaps not an identity of choice, but it is unmistakably the identity which comes with the relationship with Jesus and the function as his followers.

Yet, in function identity formation can either become ambiguous or have clarity, can remain shallow or have depth—the process of which will be discussed in the next section. The identity formation from following a popular Jesus, for example, becomes ambiguous because the Christology lacks the qualitative significance of the whole of God and also lacks the qualitative distinction from common function. Consequently, the Christian subculture this generates becomes shallow, without the depth of the whole person in the image of the whole of God nor the primacy of intimate relationships together in likeness of the Trinity; this is not only a functional issue but affects human ontology.

Authentic identity as Jesus' followers is a relationship-specific process engaged in the practice of the contrary culture clearly distinguished from prevailing cultures (including popular Christian subcultures), which Jesus made definitive in his sanctified life and practice and outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. Clarity and depth of his followers' identity is rooted in: *what* we are in the progression of functional relationship with Jesus, and thus *who* we become intimately with the Father in his family together, as we cooperatively work with the Spirit in *how* we ongoingly function.

The clarity of the light and the depth of the salt are the relational outcome of this ongoing intimate relationship with the Trinity. Any identity formed while distant from this relationship (which happens even in church) or in competition with this relationship (which happens even in Christian subcultures) diminishes the basic identity of being the

whole of God's very own ("the light") as well as deteriorates its qualitative substance ("the salt"). Certainly, then, the authentic presentation of self to others is crucial to the identity of Jesus' followers. This makes evident the importance of Jesus interrelating identity with righteousness in conjoint function. While identity informs us of who, what and how we are, righteousness is the functional process which authentically practices what, who and how we are. Identity and righteousness are conjoined to present a whole person in congruence (ontologically and functionally) to what, who and how that person is—not only in Christ but in the whole of God, the Trinity. Righteousness is necessary so that his followers can be counted on to be those authentic persons—nothing less and no substitutes.

Christian identity without righteousness is problematic, rendered by Jesus as insignificant and useless (5:13). Yet, righteousness without wholeness of identity is equally problematic, which Jesus made a necessity to go beyond reductionism (6:1). The latter often is an issue unknowingly or inadvertently by how "the light" and "the salt" are interpreted. "You are the salt...the light" tend to be perceived merely as missional statements from Jesus of what to do. While this has certainly challenged many Christians historically to serve in missions, it has promoted practices and an identity which do not go beyond reductionism. By taking Jesus' words out of the context of the vital whole of his major discourse, they fail to grasp the significance of Jesus' call to his followers—the extent and depth of which Jesus summarized in this major discourse and increasingly made evident in his sanctified life and practice.

The seriousness of the issues of clarity and depth in our life and practice cannot be overstated. The alternative common in Christian practices of essentially obscuring our identity as "the light" is a critical issue directly related to Jesus' warning to be acutely aware of functioning with the perceptual-interpretive framework of the reductionists (Lk 12:1, cf. Mt 16:6). This approach (alternative *didache*, Mt 16:12) involved presenting a performance of a role (*viz. hypokrisis*), that is, essentially the process of taking on an identity lacking clarity of who, what and how one truly is—which in his discourse Jesus addressed, for example, in the practice of the law and relationships with others (5:21-48; 7:1-5). Yet, as noted earlier of *hypokrisis*, this practice does not preclude the subtlety of a process which could be engaged with good intentions, even inadvertently. Dual identities (e.g., one for different contexts at church and at work) and composite identities (subordinating "the light") are commonly accepted Christian practices which demonstrate the mindset of reductionism.

Moreover, any identity rooted only in the practice of propositional truth and the content of the law, without being relationally connected with the Truth (cf. "the vine and the branches") and without ongoing intimate involvement with his whole person ("remain in me," Jn 15), also is not an authentic identity of Jesus' followers. Such disembodied identity lacks depth, despite correct appearances. Any identity of "the salt" without its substantive quality is directly interrelated to another critical issue of persons basically undergoing only limited change in the practice of their faith (*viz. metaschematizo*, outward change), which was addressed by Jesus (e.g., in 6:1-18) and continues to be a current problem for conversion-sanctification issues. No amount of effort in this outer-in approach to what and who we are will be formative of the qualitative change of substance (i.e., *metamorphoo*, transformation) of the whole person because that is the nature of *metaschematizo* and a shallow identity. This distinction of *metamorphoo* from

metaschematizo is vital for identity formation (cf. Rom 12:2). Where reductionism prevails, there is no depth of identity and relationship with God, despite even considerable identification and involvement with his truth, law and gospel, all of which have been disembodied.

This reductionism further involves functionally substituting for the whole person, which has crucial consequences for the ontology of the person. Whenever the perceived ontology of the human person (created in the image of God) is functionally different qualitatively from the whole of God (whose image the person supposedly bears), there is reductionism of the human ontology. This reduced ontology is made evident when the person functions relationally apart (or at some distance) from others (even when serving them), without the primacy of intimate relationships necessary to be whole, thus reflecting a person disembodied from the relational nature of God and from God's whole as signified in the Trinity. In other words, who, what and how this person is never goes beyond reductionism—remaining within the limits of its ontological simulation and epistemological illusion.

Jesus' declarative statements about the clarity of the light and the depth of the salt are definitive for our identity. Yet, they are not a challenge about what to do; such a challenge would not help us go beyond reductionism but further embed us in it. His definitive statements of our identity are an ontological call about *what* and *who* to be; that is, the call to be redefined, transformed and made whole in the ontology of the person created in the image of the whole of God, thus also as *whose* we are. Conjointly, his definitive statements are a functional call about *how* to be, that is, called as whole persons to function together in the relationships necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity.

For the wholeness of his followers, Jesus made definitive the process of identity formation necessary for the clarity and depth of identity to emerge, develop and mature. The outline of this process was made clearly definitive in the beginning of his major discourse: the beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12).

The Process of Identity Formation

When our identity adequately informs us of who, what and how we are, there is opportunity to experience wholeness and the satisfaction to be whole—which Jesus points to in the beatitudes with “blessed” (*makarios*, fully satisfied). The problem, however, with most identities in general and Christian identities in particular is that these identities only inform us of who and what we *should* be, and thus how we should act. This merely defines what we need to do in order to be associated with that identity without defining our definitive ontology; this then becomes a process of trying to measure up to that identity so that we can achieve definition for our self. The theological and functional implications of such a process for Christian identity are twofold: First, it counters and thus nullifies God's relational work of grace, and in its place, it in effect constructs human ontology from self-determination.

As we discuss identity formation, it seems necessary to distinguish “identity construction” from identity formation. Identity construction describes the human process of quantifying an identity for uniformity, while the identity formation involves a qualitative growth and maturation in a cooperative relational process with God for

wholeness. It is problematic if any identity constructions substitute for or are imposed on identity formation. Since the ontology of the whole person is a vital necessity for the identity of Jesus' followers, it may require identity deconstruction of many Christian identities to get to this ontology. While any identity deconstruction would not be on the basis of postmodernist assumptions, it has a similar purpose to discredit ontological simulation and epistemological illusion. Yet, this would not be merely to expose reductionism but to go beyond it for the relational whole of God. This describes Jesus' discourse with his disciples.

Identity formation involves the necessary functional convergence of identity with righteousness and human ontology in a dynamic process based on God's grace: To go beyond reductionism, our righteousness necessitates an identity of clarity and depth, which requires the ontology of the whole person; and, in reflexive action, the significance of this process necessitates righteousness to make it functional, which needs wholeness of identity for our righteousness to go beyond reductionism, which must by nature involve the human ontology created in the image and likeness of the whole of God—all of which are constituted by the whole of God's relational work of grace, functionally signifying the relational basis of whose we are. This process of conjoint function is crucial for our understanding and practice, which Jesus makes evident in the beatitudes to establish his followers in his call to be redefined, transformed and made whole.

The beatitudes taken together establish the authentic identity of his followers. I suggest, rather than each beatitude understood independently, they constitute interdependent functional characteristics of the basic identity for what, who and how his followers are. Joined together in dynamic function, the beatitudes form the outline of the process of identity formation. Not surprisingly, Jesus began the process by focusing immediately on the ontology of the person and giving us no basis to define our self by what we do or have.

Though Jesus was not explicit in the beginning of his discourse about the irreducible importance of the heart, the function of the heart underlies everything he said and all that we do (e.g., Mt 5:28; 6:21). The inner person (signified by the heart) constitutes the qualitative distinction of the person, and we cannot assess what and who a person is based merely on the outer person—notably what we do and have (cf. our earlier discussion of Mt 15:10-20). Yet, since the latter perception is a prevailing perceptual-interpretive framework for human ontology, authentic Christian identity forms essentially by beginning with the process of redefinition of the person from the inside out. When we functionally address redefining our own person from the inside out, however, we encounter a major difficulty. Once we get past any resistance, what is it that we honestly see of our person as we look inside? This can become an issue we may rather dance around.

In the first three beatitudes (Mt 5:3-5) Jesus provides us with the *critical steps* in the process of identity formation, that is, to functionally establish his followers in his call to be redefined, transformed and made whole.

First Beatitude: When we honestly look inside at our person, Jesus said the natural effect would be realization of the condition signified by “poor in spirit” (v.13). “Poor” (*ptochos*) denotes abject poverty and utter helplessness; therefore this person's only recourse is to beg. Just to be poor (*penes*) is a different condition from *ptochos* because

this person can still, for example, go out to work for food. *Penēs* may have little but *ptochos* has nothing at all. *Ptochos*, Jesus immediately identifies, is the true condition of our humanity, which precludes self-determination and justification. This is human ontology after the Fall, yet not the full ontology of the whole person which still includes the viable image of God. Without the latter, *ptochos* would be a worthless person, and this is not Jesus' focus on the ontology of the person. Nevertheless, *ptochos* does prevail in human ontology, which clearly makes evident the need for God's relational work of grace. This is what we need to accept both about our person and from God—not only theologically but functionally because anything less than *ptochos* counters God's grace. By necessity, however, the *ptochos* person ongoingly appropriates God's relational work of grace to relationally belong to the whole of God's family, as Jesus said, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Yet, *ptochos* only begins the process of forming this identity.

Most of us are resistant to operate with this self-definition, especially if we define ourselves by what we do or have. We may be able to accept this "spiritually" in an isolated identity but for practical everyday function in the real world, to live with this self-definition is problematic. While any alternatives and substitutes masking this truth may make us feel less vulnerable, we will never be able to dance completely around the truth of our condition and this reality of human ontology.

In this first critical step in the formation of our identity, Jesus provided no place or option for self-determination. Who and what we are as his followers is determined only by the function of relationship with him as whose we are; and how we are in relationship together is only on his terms, which constitutes the relationship and thus our identity in God's grace. By this, Jesus makes definitive that God's grace demands *ptochos* of our person (the honesty of heart) for ongoing relationship together.

Second Beatitude: Since the ontology of the person (from inside out) is never static, Jesus extends its dynamic function in this next critical step. When we are indeed *ptochos*, our honest response to our condition is to "mourn" (*pentheo*, lament, grieve, deep sadness, v.4). If we accept our condition as *ptochos*—and not merely perceive it as *penēs*—then mourning would be the natural response of our heart. Yet, too often we insulate ourselves from such experience, though unknowingly we may get depressed. The tension involves issues of self-worth, which revolve around *ptochos* in terms of how we see and feel about ourselves. We tend not to recognize this matter because our heart is unaware of experiencing *pentheo*, likely only feeling insecure.

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

The ironic influence of reductionism on human ontology is the simulation and illusion to be strong, self-determined, self-sufficient. In contrast and conflict, persons who *pentheo* address reality without reducing the person, yet not in self-pity but by vulnerably opening their person to God. In this vulnerable relational process, their whole person is presented to God for comfort, healing, cleansing, forgiveness, and deeper

involvement, so they can experience God’s intimate response—as Jesus assured “they will be comforted” (*parakaleo*, term used for every kind of call to a person which is intended to produce a particular effect). As Jesus further made evident throughout his sanctified life and practice, the whole of God is ongoingly vulnerable to our humanity, and we must (*dei*) relationally reciprocate in likeness with what and who we are. Functional intimacy in relationship involves hearts open to each other and coming together. Intimacy with God, therefore, necessitates by nature that our heart functions in its true humanity (cf. “in spirit and truth”)—nothing less and no substitutes. The process from the first beatitude to the second engages this qualitative relational involvement. And these two critical steps involve the relational moments we extend our person to God the most openly and thus give him the best opportunity to be with us.

Since identity is rooted in whose we are, its formation is contingent on the ongoing function of this relationship—its further and deeper growth. While *pentheo* defines only a degree of experience relative to each person—no set quantity of sackcloth and ashes—God does not let us remain in a state of gloom and perhaps fall into depression or despair. God’s thematic action never allows for human ontology to remain in reductionism but only functions to make us whole. As Jesus did with tax collectors, a prostitute and others lacking wholeness, he extended God’s relational work of grace to us in our helplessness, pursued us vulnerably in the poverty of our humanity, redeemed us (notably from the common’s enslavement of reductionism) back to his family (on the terms of the Uncommon), thus transformed our whole person for intimate relationship with the Father, and formally by covenant (through adoption) constituted us as his very own children permanently belonging to the whole of God’s family. As discussed earlier, this relational process defines God’s thematic action only as family love—a process based on the whole of God’s relational work of grace, which continues as the basis for God’s family to experience now even further and deeper in relationship together as the church until eschatological completion of God’s whole. This operationalizes the relational progression constituted by Jesus, the ongoing function of which he summarized in this major discourse.

Third Beatitude: The experiential truth of this relational reality is not usually in function a linear process as it is reflexive (back and forth). God’s thematic action and ongoing vulnerability to our humanity, notably evidenced in the incarnation, demonstrate the faithfulness and righteousness of the whole of God whom we can count on to trust intimately in reciprocal relational process. As we go up and down, in and out in our *ptochos* and *pentheo*, the initial relational experiences of God’s family love rightfully conclude with only one understanding of our person. This understanding forms *the core characteristic* of the redefined self, the identity of the transformed in Christ.

In the interrelated critical steps involved in this process of self-understanding, Jesus defined the core characteristic forming the identity of his followers: “the meek” (*praus*, v.5). While the sense of meekness should not be separated from *ptochos*, *praus* (*prautes*, noun) denotes to be gentle—that is, not hard or resistant to live as one truly is. *Praus* involves heart function conjoined with overt behavior to demonstrate what and who one is. Contrary to most perceptions of “meek,” this function is not timid weakness but humble strength and truth of character based on one’s true condition. How this specifically would be demonstrated or expressed can be defined best by the various

behaviors of Jesus with others. Whatever its form in a particular situation, the most significant issue is that there is no lie or illusion about one's person in being meek (including being humble).

Yet, meekness is not so much a characteristic of the Christian person, especially by which to be defined and thus to behave. The latter only simulates humility. Rather it is, most importantly for the whole person, a function of relationship both with God and with others. Being meek is a core function in relationship with God for two reasons: (1) with no illusions about self-determination and justification (*ptochos*) and with response to one's *pentheo*, the only basis and ongoing functional base for the person's life and practice is the whole of God's relational work of grace; and (2) on this basis, relationship together is only on God's terms, thus irreducible and nonnegotiable by human persons. God does not work by any human agenda, notably for self-determination and justification. Being meek is this core function involving the relational process of turning away from the falsehood in self-autonomy and entrusting one's whole person to the grace of God; this is basic not only for conversion but for ongoing sanctification.

Furthermore, who and what this meek-humble person is and how this person functions also must by nature be involved in relationship with others in two qualitatively distinct ways: (1) with God's grace the basis for the person, there is no basis for comparison with others, for climbing any human ladder or one-upmanship, and thus no basis for stratified relationships which reduce the whole person, but rather a qualitative loving involvement with others (without employing reductionist distinctions) in the relationships necessary for wholeness; and (2) therefore this relational involvement allows no basis for the function of individualism which gives priority to the individual agenda and reduces the primacy of the intimate relationships necessary to be God's whole.

Meekness is a direct relational outcome of the first two critical steps (beatitudes) signifying the above functions of relationships. There is no theological or functional basis for any other self-assessment, regardless of how much one does, has or accomplishes. Yet, we encounter difficulty when lies or illusions keep us from facing our *ptochos* or experiencing our *pentheo*. Intentionally or unintentionally, we make relational substitutes with God and others, and thus act out some role or lie; or we settle for reductionism and live in some illusion. Such lies or illusions both in effect involve some enslavement. In strong contrast, being meek also signifies a functional admission of one's enslavement—that is, not being free from some form of self-sufficiency (even in a collective context), self-determination (even with a theology of grace), or self-centeredness (even in acts of service)—and one's need for redemption.

Jesus said the meek “will inherit the earth.” This is not a result of what they do but only a relational outcome constituted in relationship with Jesus and by his relational work of grace. These beatitudes have roots in the promise from the OT covenant, yet Jesus was not taking us back into that context but extending and fulfilling God's thematic action. The meek's inheritance is not the earth per se (or land, cf. Ps 37:11), with a sense of redistribution for the poor and dispossessed. This inheritance is not about a place, situations or circumstances. This is about a context of God's whole and dwelling, thus a relational context in which their inheritance is the whole of God for relationship—just as it was for the OT priests and Levites (Nu 18:20, Dt 10:9). The meek (as the poor in spirit, and so forth) are “blessed” (*makarioi*), that is, fully satisfied, because God is present and

intimately involved in their life. This is about well-being and wholeness experienced as the relational outcome of God's covenant love and faithfulness, Jesus' vulnerable grace and truth, that is, with the Trinity who is intimately involved together in their "spirit and truth"—nothing less and no substitutes. This blessed relational condition cannot be reduced merely to happiness about one's situation and circumstances; everyday life is not reduced to our situations and circumstances. In this redefinition of self, the irreducible importance of our whole person (from inside out) and the nonnegotiable priority of intimate relationship together become the perceptual-interpretive framework for what we pay attention to. And the full relational significance of being *makarioi* is the ongoing relational outcome of these and the rest of the beatitudes and the process of identity formation.

Reductionism is an ongoing challenge to this process, from which we cannot underestimate our need for redemption. The issue of inheritance makes this evident, as was discussed earlier in this chapter about the lawyer (Lk 10:25), and before about the rich ruler (Mk 10:17), raising the question of inheriting eternal life. Inheritance was not possible in the ancient world from a position of enslavement. Redemption (payment made for one's release) was necessary to change this relational condition, which was the critical error of relationship made by the rich ruler. Merely being freed, however, was insufficient to establish a relational position necessary for inheritance, which was the critical error of relationship likely made by the lawyer. The redemptive history of the whole of God's thematic action has had a singular trajectory, which Jesus' vulnerable redemptive work constitutes and the Spirit brings to completion. This purpose is the trinitarian relational process of family love constituting a new covenant (by fulfilling both the charter of the original covenant and its relational significance): relationship together as the whole of God's family, in which we permanently belong as God's very own children through adoption (Jn 1:12-13; 8:31-36, Gal 4:4-5, Eph 1:3-5). This is the relational outcome of the relational progression fulfilling Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26), and the full soteriology of what he saved us *to*. Without the process of adoption—however this process is interpreted that constitutes the relational reality of becoming the sons and daughters of God (cf. 2 Cor 6:18)—we would be in a relational position of enslavement, or merely redeemed for no relational purpose and outcome, thus leaving unresolved the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole.

While reductionism may not discount the theology of adoption, it either separates the purpose of redemption from it, thus using the concept of redemption merely to promote the freedom and autonomy of individualism, which becomes functionally enslaving. Or reductionism creates an illusion of being free to mask any enslavement. Meekness (in process with *ptochos* and *pentheo*), however, by signifying a vulnerable admission of one's enslavement and need for redemption, becomes *the functional clarity of the relational posture necessary for submission to the God* who can redeem us from our enslavement and make us whole. The alternative is a false sense of strength or freedom, or the lack of humility, exhibited by those who don't acknowledge their enslavement, and thus think they are free (e.g., Jn 8:33). Without meekness there is no relational involvement with God's relational work of grace; without God's relational work of grace there is no adoption; without adoption there is no relational position in the whole of God's family, much less an inheritance.

Yet, adoption is not a mere doctrinal truth in which to secure our faith. Adoption must by its nature be an experiential truth, which is an ongoing function of relationship together with relational responsibilities that the Spirit cooperatively brings to wholeness (cf. Ro 8:15-16). And even functional enslavement practiced by Jesus' followers counters this experience of intimate relationship together as family. Therefore, the function of adoption is the very heart of the relational significance for our ontology, and thus our identity—who and what we are, and whose we are—which makes evident *the relational posture of meekness as the core characteristic*. Further implications of adoption will be discussed in later chapters.

Fourth Beatitude: Identity formation is an ongoing process of growth and maturation, which is implied in this beatitude. The relational progression for Jesus' followers implicit in the beatitudes leads us to the next identity characteristic: “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (v.6). The experience of the first three beatitudes, establishing vulnerable involvement with Jesus who takes us to the Father to become a part of his very own family, provides the relational process and the context of family to understand the fourth beatitude.

As discussed earlier in going beyond reductionism, righteousness is not a mere conformity of actions to a given set of legal and ethical standards but about the relational responsibility which is in keeping with reciprocal relationship between God and his people (viz. his family). Going beyond reductionism necessitates the shift in righteousness from merely exhibiting character traits (integrity) and practicing an ethic of right and wrong (upright) to the distinctly deeper qualitative involvement of what, who and how to be in relationships—both with God and with others. Identity formation of Jesus' followers necessitates this same shift and becomes inexorably integrated with the process to righteousness for the clarity and depth of their identity. Thus, this fourth identity characteristic is not a pursuit about ourselves, though it certainly further and more deeply constitutes our ontology and identity as his family in an essential process of transformation.

Our definitive and functional understanding of righteousness comes from the righteous God's action in the context and process of relationship. Righteousness is no static attribute or quality of God but always a dynamic relational function. Righteousness is the immanent relational function of God which all other persons can invariably count on from and with God. By the nature of being righteous, this is the only way God acts in relationship; moreover, by the nature of being righteous, this ongoing relational involvement is the only way God functions. That is, righteousness is intrinsic to the ontology of what, who and how God is.

“Hunger and thirst” represent the primary acts to sustain life and to help it grow, which is a metaphor for this basic pursuit. To pursue righteousness is to pursue how God is, and thus to pursue what and who God is—that is, the ontology of God. In other words, this ongoing pursuit of righteousness is the basic relational process of pursuing God and of becoming like God, that is, in relational function, not in ontology (by some deification). This involves the process of transformation (cf. Eph 4:24) of our whole person (from inside out) to the image of the Son (*metamorphoo*, cf. Ro 8:29; 12:2), who is the image of the whole of God (cf. 2 Co 4:4); the relational outcome of this process further constitutes our ontology as the *imago Dei* in likeness of the Trinity, the function

of which in relationship together makes us whole. The functional purpose of this process of ongoing transformation is only relational: first, for deeper relationship together with the whole of God as family, and further, for more deeply representing the Father to extend and to build his family with family love (the immediate relational responsibilities of those adopted). This defines the relational significance of Christian identity and makes evident: identity formation must include this process of transformation in order to be whole.

Clearly, as these beatitudes interrelate, to pursue righteousness that goes beyond reductionism involves not seeking character traits or ethical behavior but vulnerably pursuing the very relational essence of God and wanting to participate further and deeper in the whole of God's life (cf. Mt 6:33). Without this qualitative relational significance of righteousness, our identity will merely exhibit shallowness or ambiguity in who, what and how we are in relationships. For those who "hunger and thirst" for the relational righteousness of God, Jesus asserted "they will be filled (*chortazo*, to be filled to satisfaction) because their whole persons will experience deeper intimate relationship with the whole of God as family together. This is *the growth characteristic* of identity formation denoted by the fourth beatitude.

Fifth Beatitude: Jesus' call to his followers to *be* redefined, transformed and made whole is increasingly realized by ongoing involvement in the trinitarian relational context of family and experience of the trinitarian relational process of family love. This ongoing involvement and experience reconstitutes how his followers function. The profound outcome of being the relational object of the Trinity's loving involvement and of experiencing further intimate relationship together cannot remain a private (even within a group) or solely individual matter. If this relational outcome is confined to a private context (personal or collective), it will become ingrown, self-serving, and ambiguous or even shallow. If this outcome is reduced to an individual focus, it will become enslaving, not redeeming and transforming. Thus, as the relational outcome of life together, Jesus necessarily extends the process of identity formation to relationships with others.

With the relational outcome emerging from the previous beatitudes, this next characteristic of identity formation (v.7) is more than a restatement of Levi and Hosea 6:6 (Mt 9:9-13), and of the lawyer and the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). This characteristic is not merely about mission or fulfilling what is rightfully expected of us. This is about the ontology of what persons (his followers) have become (in the relational progression) and about the emerging identity of who they are and whose they are, and thus how they function in relationship—not only with God, not only among themselves but now also with others.

Mercy (*eleos*, compassion) denotes action out of compassion for others which responds to their distress, suffering or misery. Yet, such acts can be performed merely out of missional service or Christian duty—perhaps with paternalism, intentional or inadvertent—without the relational involvement of a person who essentially has been there. With the mercy experienced from God's relational work of grace, Jesus' authentic followers become more than good servants but first and foremost become intimate personal recipients (as adopted children) of compassion. Thus, from this redeemed and transformed ontology, this person functions to extend that compassion in likeness of

relational involvement with others—notably with those lacking wholeness (or value) and suffering the relational condition “to be apart” from the whole.

Reductionism would define this beatitude to promote the act and benefits of mercy, not the relational involvement of persons with other persons; consequently, its practice of mercy would signify either paternalism or a quid pro quo in human relations. Jesus, however, leads the process of identity formation deeper to go beyond reductionism. The relational outcome of vulnerably following Jesus in the relational progression is constituting the ontology of the whole person and the relationships necessary to be whole. It naturally follows then: the compassionate (*eleemon*) is a given characteristic in identity formation, not an option; and those persons are blessed (fully satisfied) because they are functioning with others in qualitative involvement for wholeness and fulfilling God’s relational design and purpose for his creation. In the process these persons ongoingly experience deeper compassion themselves, not suggesting their own future problems but the relational outcome indicated in the next beatitude.

Sixth Beatitude: The deeper compassion the compassionate experience further involves the relational work of God’s grace. These persons, who are being further redeemed and transformed, are engaged in the process of becoming whole by involvement necessarily both from their whole person and in the relationships together constituting the whole. These next two beatitudes outline what is involved in this process to wholeness, and thus the maturation of our identity.

The tendency in a context pervaded by reductionism, even though not enslaved by it, is to pay more attention inadvertently to the behavioral/activity aspects of our life and practice. We readily make assumptions about the qualitative presence and involvement of our person in that behavior or activity. A relational context and process make deeper demands on our person; the trinitarian relational context and process hold us accountable for nothing less and no substitutes than our whole person. Thus, we should never assume the ongoing condition of our heart nor the state of our relationship with the whole of God. Wholeness is contingent on their qualitative function.

A shallow identity lacks depth. A shallow person lacks the presence and involvement of heart. Persons lacking heart in function (even inadvertently) lack wholeness. Intimate involvement with the whole of God (i.e., who is unreduced) necessitates an ongoing process of our hearts open and coming together. Yet, this can only be on God’s terms; as discussed previously about holy, the Uncommon and the common are incompatible for relationship. This further necessitates our ongoing transformation to “the pure in heart” (*katharos*, clean, clear, v.8) to be compatible. This *katharos* is not a static condition we can merely assume from God’s redemption and forgiveness. God’s relational acts of grace are always for relationship, thus “pure in heart” is a dynamic function for deeper relationship to be whole together. This involves a heart functioning clear of any relational barriers or distance, functioning clean of Satan’s reductionist lies, substitutes and illusions—signifying *the catharsis of the old* to be constituted in the whole of the new.

An ambiguous identity lacks clarity. An ambiguous person lacks clarity of one’s ontology. Christians lacking ontological clarity lack the qualitative distinction from the common’s function in the surrounding context, notably from reductionism. This

distinction includes from the mindset, cultural practices and other established ways prevailing in our contexts, which we assume are compatible with God but effectively shift relationship with the holy God to our common terms. When the identity and ontology of the Uncommon cannot be clearly distinguished from this common function (even in a Christian subculture), this generates ambiguity in our identity and counteracts wholeness for our ontology—which increasingly becomes life and practice without the whole person and without the primacy of intimate relationships necessary to be whole. The theological implication is that the Uncommon and common can neither coexist in functional harmony nor can their functions be combined in a hybrid. The functional implication is that the tension between them must by nature always be of conflict, the nature of which is ongoing and, contrary to some thinking, irremediable. Therefore, “pure in heart” also signifies *catharsis of the common* to be constituted in the whole of the Uncommon.

The function of the depth of this person’s heart will have the relational outcome to more deeply “see God.” The significance of “see” (*horao*) implies more than the mere act of seeing but involves more intensively to experience, partake of, or share in something, be in the presence of something and be affected by it. This depth of significance in “seeing” God in the substance of relationship is the intimate process of hearts functionally vulnerable to each other and further coming together in deeper involvement to be whole—the purpose of Jesus’ sanctified life and practice and formative family prayer (Jn 17:19-26). When our ongoing experience (not necessarily continuous) with God is not *horao*, we need to examine honestly where our heart is and address any assumptions. If, for example, we don’t dance around our *ptochos* and *pentheo*, our heart will respond with greater functional trust and vulnerable intimacy—the relational posture of submission to God’s terms signified by meekness. It is only when we assume or ignore this inside-out aspect of our person that we effectively keep relational distance from God, thus impeding the process to be whole.

The early disciples’ struggles were essentially with heart issues, and thus they had difficulty seeing (*horao*) God even in Jesus’ vulnerable presence (Jn14:7-9). Without a clean and clear heart there will be shallowness in our identity formation and ambiguity in the functional ontology of our person (both individually and together) in ongoing relationship with the whole of God. The catharsis of the old and common make the sixth beatitude evident as *the contingency characteristic* in the process to be whole and for the maturation of our identity.

Yet, wholeness is never about only the individual person, nor about just the person with God. The next beatitude extends the process.

Seventh Beatitude: While this beatitude together with the sixth outline the process to wholeness, it is also conjoined with the fifth beatitude for the person made whole to function in the relationships necessary to be whole. As the process engages others in relationship, there is much to discuss about it, which I will limit here and expand on in later chapters.

Peace is generally perceived without its qualitative significance and with a limited understanding of the relational involvement constituting it. As Jesus approached Jerusalem in his triumphant entry, he agonized over its condition: “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace” (Lk 19:41-42). “What would bring

you peace” is a critical issue focused on *what belongs to peace*, and thus for our immediate discussion about those who bring this peace.

In the classical Greek sense peace is perceived as the opposite of war. The NT, however, does not take its meaning of peace from this source; its concept of peace is an extension from the OT and of the Hebrew *shalom*. The opposite of *shalom* is any disturbance to the well-being of the community. That is, biblical peace is not so much the *absence* of any conflict but more importantly the *presence* of a specific condition. Throughout the Bible the primary concept of peace is well-being and wholeness. Peace is a general well-being which has both an individual dimension and a corporate/collective dimension. This wholeness extends to all aspects of human life and by necessity included salvation and the end times but certainly is not limited to the latter. Going beyond the mere absence of negative activity, all of this involves what must be present for peace; this is what belongs to peace.

The gospel is predicated by this peace (cf. Acts 10:36). This is the peace in which Jesus constituted his followers—which is distinguished from conventional peace (Jn 14:27). Thus, it is insufficient to signify the gospel of peace with a truncated soteriology (only what Jesus saved us from) without the relational outcome of what he saved us to. These are the relationships together of the whole of God’s family in which Jesus constituted his followers to be whole as the new creation. Wholeness is intrinsic to this peace, and to be whole is a necessary relational condition for those who bring this peace. Who then are the peacemakers?

Their identity is clearly defined by Jesus as the sons and daughters of God (v.9), that is, not God’s servants but the Father’s very own children (cf. v.44). This tells us not only who and what they are but whose they are and how they are as peacemakers.

The adopted children of God have been made whole in God’s family and partake of communion together with the whole of God. As whole persons receiving the whole of God’s relational work of grace, it is insufficient for God’s children merely to share mercy (compassion) with others. It is also insufficient for them merely to engage in the mission (however dedicated) to reduce violence, stop war or create the absence of conflict. On the basis of the ontology of who they are and whose they are, how they function to clearly reflect the depth of their wholeness—thus the relational responsibility to represent the Father and to continue to extend his family—involves a deeper level of relational involvement. “Peacemakers” (*eirenopoios*) denotes reconcilers, those who seek the well-being and wholeness of others, just as they experience. This means not only to address conflict but to restore relationships necessary to be whole, just as God’s thematic action and the relational work of the Trinity engage.

In the beatitudes Jesus defined the natural relational flow from repentance to redemption to reconciliation to wholeness. Jesus functioned vulnerably in this relational flow and simply engaged the relational work necessary to be whole. While peace describes interpersonal relationships only in a corollary sense, the condition of wholeness and well-being is the new relational order of the new creation as the whole of God’s family (to be discussed in chapter eight).

Each act of reconciliation and peacemaking must function in the same natural relational flow to become whole. This will further the process to wholeness for others and will deepen the wholeness for those engaged, and thus the maturation of the qualitative clarity and depth of their identity.

Eighth Beatitude: The reality for human life and practice is that reductionism prevails; and not everyone is seeking resolution to the human relational condition “to be apart” from the whole. Consequently, in this last characteristic of their basic identity Jesus made evident to his followers the repercussions of being constituted in his call to be redefined, transformed and made whole: the function of this new ontology in relational involvement with others will encounter strong negative reaction “because of righteousness...because of me” (vv.10,11). Identity formation of his followers remains incomplete until they experience this consequence of their ontology functioning in the world, which may include some Christian subcultures.

Along with the benefits and responsibilities of belonging to his family as one of the Father’s very own, this consequence is another given characteristic in their identity. Yet, these repercussions are not the result of being doctrinaire, condescending or otherwise unloving, though Christians certainly have experienced reactions of this kind. Nor are these reactions against merely servants of God, which our notion of prophets often gets reduced to (v.12). These are the relational reactions from others to God’s children who are functioning in their relational responsibility (“because of righteousness”) as the Father’s very own to extend the whole of God’s family (“theirs is the kingdom”) to others in the relational righteousness of family love vulnerably constituted by Jesus (“because of me”).

This last beatitude is the consequence of the qualitative distinction intrinsic to the ontology of God’s people and explicit in their function in the common context. Just as the prophets and Jesus experienced, this is part of the identity of being in God’s family and intimately involved with the whole and holy God (the Uncommon). This may be a difficult identity characteristic to embrace, which we may tend to limit to unique situations for only a minority of Christians. Yet, we need to avoid reducing the truth that not only is the qualitative distinction of the Uncommon incompatible with the common function but in conflict with it also; anything less reduces the ontology of the Uncommon and those who have become uncommon. And relational reactions from the common function will come in all forms and varying degrees as long as the uncommon extend themselves to the common with a critique of hope.

Thus, to avoid those reactions is to reduce our ontology. To function as a peacemaker, for example, merely by being irenic, consensus building and unity forming is insufficient, and tends to become the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of reductionism. This last characteristic in identity formation is about being whole, both individually and together as family, in the human context suffering the relational condition “to be apart” from the whole. Nothing less and no substitutes for this whole define our identity as the whole of God’s family. Anything less and any substitutes for wholeness of our identity lack the clarity and depth for our righteousness to go beyond reductionism. The resulting ambiguity and shallowness will not be fully satisfying (*makarios*, “blessed”), nor be taken seriously in the world.

As *the consequential characteristic* of our identity, this must not be taken lightly or be lost in our identity formation.

The above beatitudes are the interdependent characteristics which together formulate our basic identity in who, what and how we are as Jesus’ followers and whose

we become in the relational progression—thus making evident the ontology of the person and the whole. These beatitudes, however, are only the outline of the process of identity formation. Functionally, this process immediately addresses the whole person by opening our heart to be redefined. In the process, Jesus (in conjoint function with the Spirit) redeems us from the old (and the common) and transforms us to the new (and the uncommon) to be made whole in relationship together with the Trinity, and thus to function whole in likeness of the Trinity. This process is ongoing and its outline is not just linear but reflexive in our identity’s growth and maturation. As identity issues of ambiguity and shallowness become resolved, our identity as Jesus’ followers takes on a distinct qualitative presence with others in the world. This is the basis for Jesus’ definitive declaration that *we are the light and the salt*, in which the ontology of *we* is the definitive understanding of the light and the salt.

The remaining sections of Jesus’ major discourse with his disciples and his summary teachings (*didache*) for all his followers (Mt 5:21ff) address the function of this new identity conjoined with relational righteousness and the ontology of the whole. I will return to these aspects in the Sermon on the Mount at various points in the remainder of this study (notably in chapter seven).

“Who Is the Greatest?”

The surrounding Mediterranean context for Jesus’ disciples functioned according to designated social status, thus one’s significance depended on social ranking (cf. those without value like tax collectors, widows and orphans discussed earlier). This was just the prevailing norm, by which even Jesus’ significance was dismissed in his hometown (Mk 6:1-6). And this conventional practice was part of the common function and was pervasive then and continues to be today. The early disciples were not redeemed from this practice, as they clearly demonstrated by arguing over who was the greatest (Lk 9:46; 22:24) and by even asking Jesus “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (“heaven” used in Matthew for God, kingdom of God, Mt 18:1). Moreover, the request by James and John (Mk 10:35-37), and their mother (Mt 20:20-21), also involved this issue and caused further tension among the disciples (Mt 20:24, Mk10:41).

While the disciples attempted to position themselves for greater significance in Jesus’ context, they functioned from the context both of their *old* and the common. Jesus addressed them directly on this issue from his trinitarian relational context by more deeply differentiating the context of the *new* and the Uncommon (Mt 18:2-4).

When Jesus focused their attention on a little child, this should not be considered with a modern perception which often has children at the center of attention. Jesus was not making such a distinction but rather was illustrating a profound difference. Similar to the beatitudes, Jesus immediately addressed their need to turn around, change (*strepho*, v.3) from two major issues: (1) how they defined themselves, and based on that, (2) how they practiced relationships. Based on their question and arguments, they demonstrated two practices: (1) they defined themselves by the status of what they did and had, and thus, (2) they made distinctions in relationships based on ranking to create a stratified order promoting distance or separation in relationships. However unintended or inadvertent, this was the implication and relational consequence of such practices. Jesus

was not suggesting that their status in his kingdom (family) was in doubt but was clarifying the conflicting nature of their practice.

The little child illustrates this profound difference (cf. earlier discussion on Lk 10:21). The disciples' practice in effect was the effort of self-determination and justification which involved a false human ontology. They needed to turn around, change from that "and become like little children" (*ginomai*, begin to be, enter into a state of being, v.3). That is, with the little child, Jesus was redefining their person commonly based on what they did and had and, similar to the first beatitude, was reconstituting the ontology of their person uncommonly based on what they are without reductionism. By doing so, Jesus also needed to shift them from how they ordered relationships; yet, he neither delegated them to the bottom without value (cf. Mk 9:35), nor did he reverse the order by placing the child at the top (cf. Lk 9:48b). By defining who is the greatest as "whoever humbles himself like this child" (*tapeinoo*, to bring low, v.4), Jesus provided further functional clarity to the relational posture of submission to God's relational work of grace (similar to the third beatitude). The theological implication is: the ontology of the human person has no valid basis for making distinctions between persons, notably based on what one does or has. The functional implication is: the order and practice of relationships have no basis to be stratified, namely to treat persons differently based on social constructs from reductionism.

Jesus did not reverse the relational order of a stratified system but he redeemed the relational order from the old and common and transformed it to the new and uncommon to make it whole. He did this by constituting the ontology of the whole person in the image of the whole of God and into the relationships necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. Though this eradicates false distinctions, it does not eliminate valid differences. Just as among the trinitarian persons, there are some differences among human persons; these are not ontological differences but differences involving function (including spiritual gifts) or secondary characteristics (e.g., physical or some cultural) which do not reorder the relationships of the whole. These are *differences without distinctions* in the relationships of the whole, which is how relationships need to function to be whole. Contrary to making distinctions, these differences serve neither to highlight the individual nor to fragment the whole but rather function to constitute the relational integrity of the whole with its created diversity.

In other words, in the whole of God—whether it is in the Trinity, in the kingdom, family or church of God—no person is the greatest, no person is greater than any other person. In God's whole, such distinctions do not exist. For in the ontology of the whole, the whole is always greater than the persons who together make up the whole. And each of his followers must take their rightful (i.e., righteous) place in the whole in order to be made whole.

To function in the ontology of the person made whole is the relational righteousness that goes beyond reductionism, and thus denotes the wholeness of identity which has the clarity to be the light, and the depth to be the salt. Later, Jesus also addressed the above issues in relation to leadership among his followers, which I will discuss in a later chapter.

Functional Implications

As the modern person gains access to more information and engages in more electronic communication, the function of the person becomes more shallow to accommodate the quantity and activity. As globalization expands to generate dubious connections in the human community, human identity becomes more ambiguous to accommodate the quantitative operation of diverse sectors (notably economic and political) and their interrelated functions reducing the quality of human relationships. Christians and churches locate themselves in this influential surrounding context. If we are unable to function in a distinguishing ontology, we become embedded in this surrounding context and shaped by it. What then is necessary for the authentic identity of Jesus' followers today?

The main issue Christians and churches need to confront is our functional ontology of the person, and thus what, who and how we are in everyday life and practice, not only as persons but persons in relationships. A reduced ontology of the person focuses on the outward change and practice of *metaschematizo*. This outer-in approach distances us from our heart and invariably involves engaging the mere role functions of *hypokrisis*, however unintended or inadvertent. And the functional consequence for relationships is diminished relational involvement, reordering the primacy of intimate relationships and practicing the relational condition "to be apart" from the whole—thus effectively promoting counter-relational work. This is the nature and functional reality of reductionism. What emerges in this process once again makes evident sin as the functional reduction of the whole of God.

The ontology of the whole person resists reductionism by giving functional importance to the heart and the inner-out change and practice of *metamorphoo*. This transformation is basic to the righteousness and identity of "the pure in heart," which churches need ongoingly to nurture for growth and maturation. Moreover, this ontology resists reduction of the primacy of relationships and the intimate involvement necessary to be whole together. This primacy cannot be reordered without altering our functional ontology. Yet, these two qualitative functions are often trade-offs for the efficiency and production of reductionist substitutes in church practice, which net quicker results but lack clarity and depth. Going beyond reductionism is never an issue of pragmatics but only of ontology, which is neither optional nor negotiable for Jesus' followers. This is the ontology churches need to be accountable for in their life and practice.

Modern Christians and churches (free or not) in the West need to rediscover the qualitative whole, the significance of which is only a function of relationship. Eastern churches and most Christians (modern or not) need to rediscover the whole person, the qualitative integration of which is only by the function of the heart. The whole for the West and the whole person for the East are not cultural options. These cannot be made relative to a surrounding context nor shaped by it to serve its interests. God's whole and the person in the image of the whole of God are matters of ontology which cannot be reduced by prevailing church practice (cf. Jesus' critique of churches in Rev 2 & 3, to be discussed in chapter eight). Any such effort by a church (including from the global South, e.g., with the prosperity gospel in Africa) would be in effect to renegotiate God's relational work of grace, and thus to nullify it. This would leave those Christians and that church without the qualitative distinction from common function necessary to go beyond

reductionism for the clarity of the light and the depth of the salt. This raises the question for all of us: Where then is the ongoing function of God's grace in our life and practice, both as a person and together as church, which clearly defines also the depth of whose we are?

Therefore, all churches need to functionally rediscover the Uncommon who is incompatible for relationship with the common. This specifically requires addressing practices which emerge from or are embedded in the common function of a surrounding context. They need to be redeemed and transformed in order to be made whole. This is the "catharsis of the common" necessary for identity formation of "the pure in heart." Moreover, some of these practices are well-established ways of doing things and even some church traditions without relational significance to God. These are necessarily included in the "catharsis of the old" for greater intimacy with the whole of God.

The reality facing church life and practice today is, I suggest, a crisis of its functional ontology of the whole person and the whole it professes to be—an identity crisis which will not resolve itself over time. Thus, churches urgently need to engage the cooperative relational work with the Spirit to discover ways and provide opportunities for further qualitative involvement by the whole person, as well as for deeper relational involvement between persons in the relationships necessary to be whole. This does not necessarily require new forms of church practice—for example, the emerging church or house church movement. In one sense, new forms of worship practice have reinforced shallowness and promoted reductionism, for example, by focusing on form and performance; this has shaped "new rules" which have "come near" to God with broader and louder mouths but still leave the heart (and thus the whole person) distant from God (Is 29:13, Mk 7:6-7). To go beyond reductionism, we have to change further than *metaschematizo* and need to function deeper than *hypokrisis*.

This further change and deeper function involve the practice of Jesus' theology—that is, the functional ontology of the person in the image of the whole of God and of persons together in likeness of the Trinity, which Jesus constituted in the trinitarian relational context of family and by the trinitarian relational process of family love. This may need to be distinguished from practical theology or from what is practical. The latter are often merely accommodations to the common function pervading a surrounding context. In other words, "practical" tends to become a euphemism for reductionism. Jesus' sanctified life and practice made vulnerably evident the incarnation principle of nothing less and no substitutes. This is the ontology of the incarnation of his person and his relational involvement which constituted his followers in the relationship of the whole of God. By this nature then his followers are distinguished in identity simply in the practice of his theology.

Furthermore, if Christians and churches today seriously engage the whole of God's relational work of grace, then we need to take to heart the ontology of family. Even current emphases on the church as community are insufficient for the ontology of family, particularly in their lack of functional understanding of the relational involvement constituting this communion. The ontology of family in likeness of the Trinity defines distinct qualitative relationships necessary to be whole, which cannot be redefined by our terms or reshaped to meet our interests (individual or collective). Such efforts by us merely reflect our functional enslavements, which reduce the ontology of the church as family to the practice of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion. Therefore,

the incarnation principle of nothing less and no substitutes is still necessary, and more urgent, today to make this theological ontology functional in likeness.

This discussion will continue to be developed in later chapters.

Chapter 5 **Identity Crisis, Sanctified Identity and Bifocal Identity**

While the embodied Jesus was distinctly Jewish, and his predominant surrounding context was Jewish Galilee and Judea, the person Jesus presented (who and what) and how he interacted at the various levels of social discourse were a function of a *minority identity*, not the dominant Jewish identity. That is, Jesus functioned in a qualitatively different way than prevailing Judaism, yet he was fully compatible with OT faith and the teaching of Scripture—not as a religious code but as a relational process with God. He was uniquely both part of and apart from the religious mainstream; the latter was reflected in conflicts with certain religious leaders and by tension with would-be followers, as discussed previously.

One advantage of his minority identity was to clearly distinguish his significance from the prevailing majority—including from the broader context pervaded with Greco-Roman influence. A major disadvantage, however, was to be marginalized (viz. considered less, or even ignored if not intrusive) by the majority or dominant sector. This disadvantage is problematic at best for his followers and can precipitate an identity crisis, that is, if his followers are not experiencing the truth of who, what and how they are. Yet, the experiential truth of his followers' identity is a relational outcome of embracing Jesus in his identity, the clarity and depth of which become a christological contingency. In other words, the specific identity of who Jesus is (or perceived to be), by nature of their involvement, will be definitive for who his followers are or become.

The key, and thus the contingency, is who Jesus is. If who Jesus is defines the basis for our identity as his followers, then Jesus by necessity is both the hermeneutical key and the functional key. This, of course, makes our life and practice in discipleship contingent on our working Christology—specifically whether or not it involves the embodied whole of Jesus.

The Making of a Crisis

The consequence of Jesus' minority identity is one issue all his followers must address (cf. the consequential characteristic of the last beatitude, Mt 5:10). At the same time, Jesus' full identity is an interrelated issue inseparable from the minority issue, not only conjoined to it but antecedent to it. Thus, both issues must be addressed for the functional clarity of his followers' identity as well as for the experiential depth of this identity necessary to mitigate an identity crisis.

In a complete Christology, the person presented by Jesus is a function of his whole person—nothing less and no substitutes, thus irreducible in the nature of his incarnation involvement; and Jesus' whole person is a function of relationship in the trinitarian relational context and process—also nothing less and no substitutes, thus nonnegotiable to the terms of any other context and process. In this complete Christology the whole gospel of God's thematic relational action of grace emerges for the experiential

truth of Jesus' full soteriology (saved both from and to), the significance of which is only for relationship together.

An identity crisis begins to emerge when the truth (or identity) of Jesus we follow is incomplete of his whole person—for example, focused on his disembodied teachings or example. This crisis develops when the Jesus as Truth we embrace is not his whole person in relationship together; whatever we then experience is some substitute for his person in a context and process simulating the context and process of intimate relationship as family together. The consequential lack of depth leads to a lack of clarity, that is, not necessarily a lack of clarity of what the object of faith is but a lack of clarity of the significance of Jesus' whole person. Any lack of clarity of who Jesus is also reflects a lack of understanding of what faith involves. These lacks are a relational consequence of functioning in relationship with Jesus without relational significance. Therefore, identity crisis for his followers is a direct function of reductionist relationship, first with Jesus then together with each other.

The development of this relational process to an identity crisis can be observed in his early disciples. After multiple occasions of witnessing Jesus healing various diseases and cast out demons, his disciples had a dramatic experience of Jesus disarming a storm on the Sea of Galilee (Mk 4:35-41). Their collective response was "Who is this?" Their question is to be compared and contrasted to Jesus' query of them later about his identity (Mt 16:15). Both queried the identity of Jesus. Yet, Jesus focused on a relational epistemic process for a deeper epistemology (cf. Mt 16:17) in contrast to an apparent conventional epistemic process the disciples utilized. Their actions suggest a dependence on reason. Rather than pursue this question with Jesus and God's self-revelation, the disciples pondered it among themselves. This was a consistent pattern by them, which cannot be adequately explained by sociocultural practice or by the tradition of rabbinic students because *how* Jesus was with them radically altered both of those constraints. Yet, in numerous situations they either failed to understand what Jesus meant or what was happening to him, and each time they refrained from engaging him in the relational epistemic process (see Mk 8:14-16, Jn 4:32-33, Mk 9:32, Lk 18:34, Jn 12:16, cf. Lk 24:12). Each of these interactions was an opportunity for the disciples to further grasp the identity of who Jesus is, but they failed to pursue deeply their initial query: "Who is this?"

The relational consequence is predictable, though unexpected for his original followers who went through three intensive years with Jesus. Perhaps they assumed they knew Jesus based on their observations and reasoning during this period; yet, their actions consistently made evident a gap in their Christology and a limit to their faith. This was an identity crisis in the making since the identity of the Jesus they followed was incomplete of his whole person. Despite how vulnerable Jesus made his whole person accessible to them, they were consistently predisposed by the limits of their perceptual-interpretive framework which essentially tried to constrain who, what and how Jesus was. Despite how vulnerably involved Jesus was with them in relationship, they did not reciprocate but remained measured in their relational involvement. While they submitted themselves somewhat vulnerably to follow Jesus in a perceived program, mission or lifestyle, they did not submit their whole persons to be relationally vulnerable to his whole person for intimate relationship. In this qualitative relational process they remained effectively at a relational distance.

Surprisingly, for the early disciples, this suggests their lack of understanding both of what is primary in discipleship and of what faith involves. Even after three intensive years with Jesus, the reality was that their Christology was incomplete. Their lacks and identity crisis were clearly demonstrated in two interactions just prior to his crucifixion and after his resurrection, which were discussed previously and need to be revisited.

In Jesus' discourse in the upper room on the eve of his crucifixion, he made this remarkable assertion to his disciples: "If you had known [*ginosko*] me, you would have known [*oida*] my Father also; from now on you know [*ginosko*] him, and have seen [*horao*] him" (Jn 14:7, NASB). This was about the reality of a deeper epistemology, which is not about the mere transmission of knowledge but also what is experienced in relationship together. Yet, the reality of their experience, and thus this deeper epistemology, was qualified by Jesus' use of the Greek indicative mood and perfect tense for the above verbs, which is informative for all his followers. With the indicative mood, Jesus was either making a simple statement of fact or pointing to an assumed reality. The perfect tense accentuates the fact of the disciples understanding (*ginosko*, *oida*) and stresses the outcome (*horao*) for them of God's self-revelation in Jesus. The exact state or existing condition of the disciples depends on how Jesus used the indicative mood.

I suggest Jesus was both making a simple statement of fact about his ontology (the whole of God with the Father) and thus his full identity (who, what and how he was), as well as pointing to an assumed reality for his disciples. This reality was only assumed because there is a relational contingency involving a reciprocal dynamic (cf. the contingency characteristic of the sixth beatitude, Mt 5:8). The disciples had to vulnerably engage Jesus' whole person in the relational epistemic process necessary to know him; and they had to be intimately involved with him in his full identity in the relational progression necessary to experience the Father. Until this reciprocal relational process is ongoingly engaged, this reality can only be assumed. In other words, his followers may have knowledge about Jesus without knowing him. The latter is the deeper epistemology grasped only in the experience of relationship together; more importantly, without knowing Jesus in intimate relationship there is no actual perception (*horao*) and realization (*oida*) of the Father in the experience (*ginosko*) of relationship together as his very own.

Where can the disciples be located in this reciprocal relational process? When Philip spoke for the disciples, "show us the Father" (14:8), he demonstrated that they didn't really know Jesus (though they had much knowledge about him)—much to Jesus' deep disappointment (v.9). "Who is this?" still had not been determined among them, and would remain so until it was resolved not by further observing the events of the next few days, but in relationship. An identity crisis had emerged. Yet, it should be apparent that this was less a theological issue of Christology and more a functional issue of faith, which Jesus alluded to on the Sea of Galilee (Mk 4:40). That is, this is the ongoing relational response and involvement of trust—not blind faith or unwarranted trust but reciprocity with the vulnerable Jesus in full identity and complete Christology. This is the priority, primacy and nature of discipleship (Jn 12:26)—"the pure in heart" who "hunger and thirst for the relational righteousness of God" (the contingency and growth characteristics of identity maturation, Mt 5: 6,8)

As this identity crisis developed in the hours and days ahead, the functional issue of faith was more evident, though always conjoined with the theological issue of

Christology in a reflexive relational dynamic. The post-resurrection scenario on the road to Emmaus demonstrated both the disciples' crisis and that their discipleship was headed in the wrong direction (Lk 24:13-35). This represented much more than excursive action. What this signified for all the disciples is the identity of the Jesus they followed was uncertain. Who is this?" still prevailed, with their focus shifted to events suggesting a further query "How can this happen?" (v.21). Yet, for the early disciples the two queries would be directly interrelated and a direct result of an incomplete Christology for failing to engage Jesus in the relational epistemic process. Conjointly, and most important, their actions clearly made evident a relational gap in their faith (vv.25-26).

As discussed previously, Jesus' confrontation of the disciples with "how slow of heart to believe" meant to be reluctant, unresponsive, that is, to relationally trust Jesus and take him at his word. This involved the trust of submitting their whole persons vulnerably to Jesus' whole person vulnerably involved with them for intimate relationship together as family. By the nature of discipleship, this necessitated the trust of their ongoing relational involvement with Jesus in the relational progression to the Father for life together as the whole of God's family. The disciples' lack of clarity of who Jesus is reflected their lack of understanding the depth of what faith involves as his followers.

Any aspect of identity crisis as followers of Jesus is correlated to their function in relationship with Jesus and its relational significance. In his full identity Jesus is the hermeneutical and functional keys to the whole of God (notably the Father) and for constituting the relationships necessary to be whole together as family. In this relational process, on the one hand, the full identity of who Jesus is constitutes the experiential truth of his followers' identity, which is the basis to mitigate an identity crisis. On the other, embracing Jesus in his full identity will always involve not only being associated with a minority identity but also being constituted in it. The incarnation principle of nothing less and no substitutes does not give his followers latitude to be selective.

The ongoing tension between having a minority identity and other prevailing (and competing) identities in the surrounding context is problematic but not necessarily a crisis issue. The ongoing relational dynamic between Jesus' minority identity and his full identity functions for the qualitative distinction of what I define as Jesus' *sanctified identity*. It is the experiential truth of his sanctified identity which constitutes his followers in the deepest satisfaction signifying *makarios* from their identity formation in the beatitudes—that is, the blessed who intimately participate in the whole of God's life (cf. Jesus' prayer, Jn 17:13).

To lack this *makarios*, in whatever situation or circumstance, is to struggle in the relational condition "to be apart" from the whole of God. Thus, for Jesus' followers, identity crisis is juxtaposed with sanctified identity, which is inherent to a complete Christology.

Jesus' Sanctified Identity

When Jesus said in his formative family prayer "I sanctify myself" (Jn 17:19), this was not about sanctifying his ontology but about sanctifying his identity to function clearly in the whole of his ontology. Since Jesus' ontology was always holy (*hagios*), this was mainly in order that his followers' ontology and identity may be sanctified (*hagiazō*)

in the truth of his full identity (as Jesus prayed). Moreover, since Jesus' embodied identity did not function in a vacuum, it is vital to grasp his sanctified identity for the experiential truth of our identity to be in his likeness and our ontology to be in the image of the whole of God (as Jesus further prayed).

What is Jesus' sanctified identity? As the embodiment of the holy God, Jesus' identity functioned in congruence with the origin or source of his ontology. Earlier in his formative family prayer, he indicated the source of his ontology as "I myself am not of the world" (vv.14,16). "Of" (*ek*) means (here in the negative) out of which his identity is derived and to which he belongs. Yet, this only points to Jesus' full identity. In his prayer he also defined his function as "in the world" (v.13, cf. Jn 13:1). "In" (*en*) means to remain in place, or in the surrounding context, while "out of" the context to which he belongs, thus pointing to his minority identity. It is the dynamic interaction of Jesus' full identity with his minority identity that is necessary for the significance of his sanctified identity. They are conjoined, and if separated our understanding of who, what and how Jesus is is diminished.

The conventional perception of the holy is something sacred thus set apart or separate from ordinary things. This is not incorrect since *hagios* denotes separated from ordinary or common usage. Yet, this tends to limit our understanding of sanctified and to predispose us either to separatist practice or to unattainable practice for function in the world. Jesus' minority identity was not as a separatist but functioned in the surrounding context of the world, that is, in the common's context (*koinos*). His minority identity, however, was a minority not because it was quantitatively unique or different but rather due to his qualitative distinction from the common's function—always while in the common's context. The qualitative distinction of his minority identity could only function as an outcome of the dynamic interaction with his full identity.

As Jesus prayed, without the function of his full identity there is no truth and function of his minority identity; and without the functional truth of his minority identity there is no experiential truth of his full identity. This interaction is a function of relationship, not doctrine or ethics, a function of a relational process not a missional paradigm. Sanctified identity is the relational outcome of this ongoing relational dynamic, the function of which is the ontology of the whole and holy God embodied in Jesus and extended in his followers by the Spirit.

We need to understand further the sanctified identity Jesus embodied in sanctified life and practice. The *functional posture* "in the world" of his minority identity is beyond mere ethics and is more than merely mission. This functional posture emerges from the *relational posture* "not of the world" of his full identity enacted "as you sent me into the world" (v.18). "Into" (*eis*) denotes motion into the common's context as a conjoint function of the *ek-eis* dynamic ("out of"- "into" motion), which both signifies the primary relational context of Jesus' identity with the Father and constitutes the primacy of the relational process between him and his Father.

This relational posture of Jesus defined what, who and how he was. Just as his followers in the common context would, Jesus experienced the ongoing tension to conform to a religious and sociocultural identity, which then would define and shape him. For example, he encountered strong pressure to meet messianic expectations, to practice a reduced variation of Judaism (since the rebuilding of the temple, Second Temple Judaism), to adhere to the existing social structures and norms, all of which would have

limited or reduced what, who, and how he was. While part of Jesus' full identity involved being Messiah, Savior and King, he was not defined by a title, a role or by what he did. What constituted his identity was the function of relationship as the whole of God—in the Gospel narratives, notably with the Father.²⁹

In the midst of pressure and tension from the surrounding context, Jesus neither hid where he was from nor submerged his identity with the Father. The first glimpse of tension about the source of his identity occurred at age twelve with his parents (“your father”-“my Father,” Lk 2:48-49)—apparently inaugurating the public function of his full identity. Later, when challenged in his honor and the source of his teachings, he clearly defined the Father as his source (Jn 7:16,28-29). When asked where his father was, he responded qualitatively to their quantitative question (Jn 8:19); after they asked “Who are you?,” Jesus claimed his identity only with the Father (8:25-29). Moreover, Jesus not only claimed his identity but also his ontology together with the Father (Jn 10:30-38).

In his formative family prayer, Jesus repeatedly discussed being sent by the Father and its direct implications (Jn 17:3,8,18,21,23,25). This made evident the relational context and process for his sanctified identity and its relational posture. Jesus' sanctified identity was his sanctified life and practice fully submitted to the Father, that is, set apart (*hagiazō*) for the whole and holy God. This was who, what and how Jesus was, obedient in the incarnation involvement principle of nothing less and no substitutes signifying the whole of God. Whatever he did, said or taught was due to, from and about the Father (Jn 5:19,30; 7:16-18; 8:28-29; 12:49-50; 14:10,24, cf. Dt 18:18). His only function was to relationally respond to his Father in love and fulfill his desires (Jn 4:34; 8:55; 14:31). The dominant focus of Jesus' identity—notably in the Gospel of John—was on his dynamic function as Son (not as a static title) in ongoing intimate relational involvement with the Father. Thus, his identity was fully set apart for and submitted to the Father; and furthermore his ontology cannot be separated from the Father without reduction of the whole of God. This was the basis for his claim to his disciples that to see him is to see the Father (Jn 14:9), that to know him is to know the Father (14:7).

The qualitative distinction of Jesus' sanctified identity, fully set apart for and submitted to the Father, was made evident at his baptism in a type of “commencement ceremony” (Mt 3:13-17). In the process of baptism, Jesus identified with and shared in the lives of those to whom the Father sent him, and Jesus' identity converges with the relational righteousness of God (v.15) and the ontology of the whole of God (vv.16-17). Thus the Father openly disclosed his love and delight for his Son (v.17). This ongoing relational process of intimate involvement together defined who, what and how Jesus was in the world. From commencement at his baptism, the formation of Jesus' sanctified identity (the relational dynamic between his minority identity and his full identity) can be understood to be “formally embodied” at his transfiguration (Mt 17:12). This appeared to be when his ontology as the whole of God was fully vulnerable, and why the Father said to his followers: “Listen to him!” (v.5).

²⁹ The narratives of Jesus' relationship with the Father give us predominately a binitarian view of God. This is understandable in the context of the whole of God's thematic action because the Spirit's presence and function have yet to be fully identified. Yet, the Spirit was never absent nor rendered temporarily “out of service” (see Lk 4:1,14,18). The ontology of the whole of God is irreducibly trinitarian. And though his main involvement appeared notably with the Father, Jesus' ontology and identity are always trinitarian and functioned in the trinitarian relational context and process.

“Listen to him [as my Son]” has functional significance only in the context and process of relationship together. The relational significance of Son goes beyond listening to Jesus as Messiah, Savior, King, prophet, rabbi or servant. “Listen to my Son,” who became vulnerably embodied to be relationally involved, because the Son’s sanctified life and practice functioned to constitute his followers in the relational progression for their sanctified life and practice to function also fully submitted to the Father and set apart for the whole and holy God in the world.

This was the relational nature and functional significance of Jesus’ sanctified identity. This was the qualitative distinction necessary to vulnerably disclose the whole of God and God’s thematic relational action of grace to the world—Jesus, the hermeneutical key. Therefore, his sanctified identity is definitive for the relational nature and functional significance of all who follow him—Jesus, the functional key as well. Conjointly, sanctified identity is the definitive function both (1) for the experiential truth his followers need in their life and practice, and (2) for the authentic basis necessary to enact their discipleship in the world—for which Jesus prayed (Jn 17:17-19).

The Nature of Discipleship

Since who, what and how Jesus is embodied the whole of God and fulfilled God’s thematic relational response only for relationship together, following the whole of Jesus involves the function of only this relationship together. Just as Jesus’ identity was rooted in, conjoined and relationally involved with, and responsive to the Father, this is how the identity of his followers must (*dei*, by its nature, not out of obligation or compulsion) be both in life together and in the world. This involves more than identification and association with Jesus, and goes beyond involvement with what he did and taught as involvement merely in ethics and mission. Discipleship necessitates congruence of his followers’ whole person with the relational posture of Jesus’ full identity and the functional posture of his minority identity (see his words in Mt 10:24-25, Lk 6:40, Jn 17:18); and he chastened the individual ambition of his followers to construct their own identity (Jn 7:18; 13:16). This congruence is necessary for Jesus followers to have the clarity of his minority identity and the depth of his full identity for the function of the qualitative distinction, and thus significance, of the whole and holy God.

This relational process might have been somewhat confusing for the early disciples when Jesus appeared to make experiencing his and the Father’s love contingent on obeying his commands: “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love” (expressed in the Greek subjunctive mood indicating contingency, Jn 15:10, cf. v.14). Or when Jesus transposed obeying his teaching/commands apparently to prove their love for him: “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching” (subjunctive mood, Jn 14:23, cf. vv.21,24). These can easily be construed as contingencies from Jesus, and thus reduced to obligatory or compulsory behavior focused on what his followers need to do, not the relationship with Jesus. Yet, this would misinterpret Jesus’ purpose by taking his words out of the context and process of the whole, notably the whole of his sanctified life and practice. “Listen to my Son” only has functional significance, and thus understanding, in the context and process of relationship together. Being heard, seen or read in this context and process of the whole of Jesus, his words are not conditional statements but relational

statements. And it is crucial for the nature of discipleship that his followers grasp this distinction.

In his own relationship with the Father, Jesus clearly disclosed: he only spoke the words which the Father commanded him to say (Jn 12:49-50, cf. 8:28; 14:24); moreover, he functioned in the common's context for the purpose (*hina*) to let the world know that he loved the Father and in this manner (*houtos*) did just as (*kathos*) the Father commanded him (Jn 14:31); and having obeyed his Father's commands he ongoingly dwelled (*meno*) in his Father's love (Jn 15:10), just as (*kathos*, indicating congruence) the Father always loves him (in the Greek aorist form indicating without any time or manner of the action, Jn 15:9).

Jesus' last disclosure of his relationship with the Father is critical for our understanding of his earlier statements. Obedience was not a contingency to remain (*meno*) in the Father's love, as if to suggest there was or could be a time when Jesus did not dwell in the Father's love—the ontological and relational mystery of the crucifixion notwithstanding (cf. Mk 15:34). In the dynamics of their relationship, Jesus' last disclosure made evident that the Father's love (*agape*) preceded his obedience. The nature of their relationship is the intimate relational involvement of *agape*; it is not defined by doing the Father's teaching (Jn 8:28), commands (Jn 12:49) or example (Jn 5:19). Merely engaging the relationship with this limited practice of obedience is reductionism. And Jesus conjoined his relationship with the Father to his above statements in order to demonstrate the congruence (“just as,” *kathos*) necessary for his followers to experience intimate relationship with him in likeness (Jn 15:10), and furthermore, the congruence necessary to experience the whole of God together as family in the intimate relational involvement of family love (Jn 14:23). This was not about contingency but relationship.

What then is the function of obedience in this relational process which goes beyond reductionism and contingency statements to the significance of Jesus' relational statements? In Jesus' sanctified identity he was fully submitted to the Father and set apart for the whole and holy God in the world. Part of his purpose was to make clearly evident to the world his love for the Father (Jn 14:31). This can even be considered a priority over showing God's love for the world, contrary to particular ethical and missional efforts which effectively reduce God's love merely to what he and/or Christians do, however good and beneficial. For Jesus, in other words, he didn't come to be a conveyor of information about God or a dispenser of his good deeds but to vulnerably disclose the whole of God. This God was not in a vacuum, nor merely transcendent. In the incarnation, Jesus embodied God vulnerably present and involved: the functional significance of which is only by and for relationship, the nature of which is the intimate involvement of *agape*.

Jesus' obedience neither highlighted what he did (notably sacrifice) nor functioned for a self-serving result (viz. the Father's approval and love)—which often is a hidden agenda of his followers' obedience. Since the process of relationship involves reciprocal participation necessitating relational work by each participant, Jesus' obedience was his relational work of submitting his whole person to be intimately involved with the Father in *agape*. This underlies the incarnation involvement principle of nothing less and no substitutes, and counters any reductionism. The functional significance of obedience in *agape* is relational participation in God's life, the intimate

involvement of which for Jesus both highlighted the Father in his desires and functioned for the whole of God's thematic action in response to the human condition.

This relational-functional posture of his sanctified life and practice was the only obedience that has relational significance to the Father. This is why the Father wants all of Jesus' followers to "Listen to my Son," so they also will be constituted in sanctified life and practice and congruent with his sanctified identity—that is, their whole person fully submitted to the Father and set apart for the whole and holy God in the intimate relational involvement necessary to experience the whole of God together as family in family love. This is the relational nature and functional significance of discipleship, apart from which discipleship has no relational significance to Jesus and the Father.

In his paradigm for serving (discussed previously in Jn 12:26), Jesus made this relationship the antecedent for serving him and the priority for discipleship. Conventional practices of discipleship tend to reverse his paradigm, or substitute acts of service and obedience for the relationship. Even *agape*, which constitutes its relational process, often gets lost in this paradigm, and thus misunderstood in the relationship, by being reduced to merely what we do (notably acts of sacrifice). This becomes a reduction not only of *agape* but also of Jesus and his sanctified life and practice—namely reducing the function of his whole person, both with the Father (as we discussed, e.g., in Jn 14:31) and with his followers (as we discussed, e.g., in Jn 13:1ff). In his paradigm, Jesus made definitive for following him: "where I am, my servant also will be." Where we find his whole person (*ego eimi*) involved both context and function. Jesus' whole person was always relationally involved in the lives of other persons—within the Trinity, among his followers and with those in the surrounding context. This is "where" Jesus was, and no amount of service by his followers can substitute for this relational involvement. His context was only relationship and his function was always relational work.

Yet, reductionism redefines Jesus' identity essentially as further into the common function and promotes a prevailing alternative of discipleship. This has led to two competing approaches to discipleship. On the one hand, there is a reduced Jesus with an incomplete Christology and, on the other, there is the ontology of Jesus' whole person in a complete Christology. Thus, discipleship today has become in function essentially a choice: either conformity to what Jesus did or taught (however selectively negotiated), or the relational process of congruence with who, what, and how Jesus was (nothing less and no substitutes, thus irreducible and nonnegotiable).

Jesus said the most distinguishing characteristic of his disciples—which those in the surrounding context will recognize as relationally belonging to him—is their *agape* for one another (Jn 13:35). That is, this engagement of love will be recognizable as his if it is congruent (*kathos*) with how he loved them (v.34). Yet, contrary to a prevailing perception, love is not merely about the quantity of something we do (or even feel), nor merely about the quality. *Agape* is what we experience in relationship first from Jesus (the relational work of God's grace), and thus what we ongoingly share together in the intimate involvement of relationship, not in activities or occupying space together. In other words, *agape* is how we are to be involved with God, each other and with others. This involvement is a function of relationship and is understood only in a relational context and process; it is not understood from Jesus' disembodied teachings, nor signified by following a code of ethics or behavioral formula.

This involvement was first the relational reality experienced from Jesus in his vulnerable involvement with his disciples, and it is the experiential truth of Jesus' ongoing involvement with all his followers. Without experiencing his involvement of *agape* in ongoing intimate relationship, his followers have no functional basis for congruence with Jesus' whole person. They can only generate "love" by what they do, not by relational involvement based on their own relational experience. This is why servant models and sacrificial modes are inadequate for the function of *agape*. And this is a critical reason it is important to define Jesus' love not merely by what he did on the cross. These are the quantitative reductions of love which diminish the qualitative distinction of Jesus' sanctified identity and minimalize the whole of God's relational work of grace.

Moreover, love is not some substance Jesus gives us and thus we possess it and can dispense it; love is also not something Jesus does as an example and thus we can do. *Agape* is relational involvement, the relational context and process of which is engaged by those who have this relational experience. *Agape* is what his followers ongoingly share together in intimate relationship; and through obedience they submit their whole person to him for this relationship. Just as for Jesus with the Father, obedience for his followers is their ongoing functional posture with him submitted to the Father, and *agape* is their ongoing relational function and experience in relationship together signifying the whole of God's family—thus distinguishing his disciples.

Jesus used the metaphor of the vine and the branches to describe this relational process (Jn 15:1-17, the context for his relational statement earlier). We tend to perceive this metaphor as a static structural arrangement that is necessary for quantitative results ("fruit"). This one-way framework shifts the focus from the dynamic process of intimate relationship together that Jesus is describing. Three times he mentioned the need "to remain" in each other (vv.4,5,7). "Remain" (*meno*) means to dwell, abide, and when applied to another person it denotes relational involvement. With *meno*, Jesus defined the reciprocal effort involved in the relationship necessitating relational work by each participant. Jesus *dwells* in his followers with his ongoing *agape* relational involvement, as he defined about the relational work of the vine's extension (v.9). But conjoined to his relational work is "Now remain in my love." In other words, in the reciprocal function of relationship together, "the vine" (the whole of God) neither does all the relational work nor do "the branches," but his followers have their necessary reciprocal part in the relationship—which is not really about "fruit" as commonly perceived. Our relational work includes obedience, that is, the relational act of submission by our whole person to be *agape* involved with "the vine"—thus having ongoing congruence with the relational posture of his full identity and the functional posture of his minority identity.

When there is this reciprocal relational involvement, there are distinct relational outcomes experienced in this process. One outcome is to know the whole of God intimately, which Jesus noted is not a servant's experience but from the relational involvement of a friend (vv.14-15, cf. 17:3,26). A further relational outcome is the experience of *agape* involvement not only from Jesus but also from the Father as family together (v.9; 14:21,23; 17:26). These experiences are the joy of wholeness directly from the experiential truth of sharing his joy in the relational whole of God (v.11; 17:13). And these relational outcomes underlie the fruit his followers bear. This fruit does not reflect the quantitative results of what we do—in spite of alignment to "the vine." This fruit is

congruent with and witnesses to these relational outcomes of being intimately involved with Jesus in this relational nature and functional significance of discipleship, thus distinguishing his disciples (v.8; 13:34-35).

The relational progression of this significant relational reality makes evident the direct experience of the whole of God's qualitatively distinct *agape* involvement; and this is what clearly distinguishes belonging to "the vine." Fruit, which distinguishes his disciples, is a function of this relationship with Jesus, and thus is significant only as it involves the whole of Jesus, not his disembodied teachings, commands or example. The fruit of the vine, therefore, must by its nature be understood as this *agape* involvement with other persons in congruence with Jesus' relational involvement, which he said clearly distinguishes his disciples (Jn 13:35, cf. Mt 7:20). This is the fruit which, Jesus implied, is signified by the intimate relational involvement of friends (Jn 15:15) and necessarily progresses to the depth of relational involvement together to be the whole of God's family (Jn 17:26). This is the fruit which Jesus constituted (*tithemi*) his followers to bear and clearly defined as "fruit that will *meno*" (15:16).

In addition, earlier Jesus used *meno* to define his authentic (*alethes*) disciples as those intimately involved (*meno* rendered "hold to" or "continue") in "my teaching" (*logos*, word, discourse, that is, as the essence of his person, not disembodied, Jn 8:31). These are his authentic followers in the relational progression to the Father, who are not servants or even merely friends but relationally belong to the whole of God's family as sons and daughters (8:32-36). The nature of discipleship is relationship specific to the ontology of Jesus' whole person. The functional significance of discipleship is the intimate involvement in relationship with Jesus necessary for the relational progression to the Father to become his very own in the whole of God's family; and furthermore, the experience of this reciprocal *agape* involvement is the functional basis for his followers own relationships together necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. This relational function together, moreover, is what those in the surrounding context can recognize, have basis to believe and thus even experience the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love, just as Jesus prayed (Jn 17:20-23).

Thus, discipleship is congruence with the relational nature and functional significance of Jesus' sanctified identity—nothing less and no substitutes, which thus counters reductionism. As the hermeneutical and functional keys, Jesus' sanctified identity is the definitive function for both: the experiential truth his followers need to function in their life and practice, and the authentic basis necessary to be distinguished as his in the world. Such discipleship necessitates congruence of his followers' whole person (not defined by what they do) with both the relational posture of Jesus' full identity and the functional posture of his minority identity.

It is problematic at best when discipleship is reduced by the construction of a composite identity to substitute for this congruence, even if unintended or inadvertent. We need to understand this process of identity construction and its tension with sanctified identity.

Bifocal Identity

When Jesus demonstrated to his disciples the depth of his *agape* involvement by washing their feet, he made this the experiential-relational truth for his followers in order to be congruent with his full identity without constructing a different identity (Jn 13:16). Conjointly, this is not private or separatist congruence with Jesus but further and deeper congruence with Jesus' minority identity in the surrounding context (both local and global). That is, this is the definitive congruence for a *mathetes* who is experiencing in his/her identity being redefined (redeemed), transformed and made whole by Jesus; this experience with Jesus is a process of discipleship he defined by the term *katartizo* (Lk 6:40). *Katartizo* denotes to prepare to completion or to repair for completion, both of which are involved in the process of following Jesus: to repair (redeem) any brokenness or fragmentation (e.g., from sin of reductionism), to restore and transform (reconcile) the person to wholeness and to the relationships necessary to be whole in congruence with the whole of Jesus and his sanctified life and practice in the world (cf. *katartizo* in Eph 4:12-13).

The functional truth is: to be just as (*kathos* and *hos*) Jesus was necessitates discipleship in the process of *katartizo*. The functional reality is: the prevailing practice of discipleship does not involve *katartizo*—and this pervades churches, seminaries and the Christian academy—consequently Christians cannot grow together in the depth of Jesus' full identity to be clearly distinguished in his minority identity as his authentic disciples, both in the church and the world. Without *katartizo*, our identity gets shallow or ambiguous, particularly with the influence of the surrounding context. The alternative identity we tend to practice in place of his sanctified identity (intentionally or unintentionally, often by default) is what I call *bifocal identity*.

Bifocal identity is a process of identity construction in a context in which one is considered (real or perceived) as a minority or part of a subordinate group (even if not a numerical minority). For example, in the United States persons of color have always been minorities; even though they are collectively now the numerical majority, they are still the subordinate group. Minorities are always marginalized. For minority persons to be acceptable in the dominant surrounding context (not accepted into the dominant group) invariably requires assimilation: the practice of dominant values, usually at the cost of relinquishing minority practices. Unless persons of color have essentially denied their minority associations, they negotiate identity construction in a dominant surrounding context with a bifocal process.

Similar to the function of bifocal eyeglasses, a minority person perceives the more provincial, private and intimate aspects of one's life through the "lower reading lens" of one's racial-ethnic identity. All other aspects are seen through the "upper general lens" of the dominant identity. While this appears to be a rather simple either-or operation, the actual perceptions often vacillate between lenses, frequently overlap and at times even seem confused. Using the "correct" lens for the "right" purpose requires ongoing adjustment since neither remains constant for a fixed prescription, similar to being fitted for the proper bifocal eyeglasses. This dynamic process of identity construction and presentation is a familiar phenomenon for minority persons, yet not without its identity conflicts and frustrations—specifically about being fragmented and thus not whole, also embedded in an identity not only of being different but considered as *less*. What is not

apparent, however, to most Christians is how the bifocal process is a common phenomenon for Christian identity in the surrounding context.

When Jesus sanctified himself in life and practice, he established the identity necessary for his followers to be constituted fully submitted to the Father and set apart for the whole and holy God in the world. As his followers function in this sanctified identity, they declare their minority identity in the surrounding context. Whatever prevails in that surrounding context is neither who they are (and what defines them) nor whose they are (and what they belong to); and whatever the pressures and influence of that context, Jesus prayed for his followers not to be separated from it (Jn 17:15). The only context of their commission is in the surrounding context (local and global). Yet Jesus understood in his formative prayer that the integrity of their minority identity necessitates congruence with his sanctified identity (17:17-19). Just as the Father sent him into the world is how Jesus sends his followers into the surrounding context. This congruence involves both context and function (cf. earlier discussion on “where we find Jesus” in Jn 12:26). And Jesus’ function was always made evident by his relational involvement, thus necessitating interrelated congruence of his minority identity conjoined with his full identity—the relational dynamic constituting his sanctified identity.

Identity formation and maintenance as his followers can only be functionally realized as a minority. Nevertheless, the function of this minority identity is incomplete as a bifocal identity. His followers cannot negotiate their identity in a dominant context by a bifocal process and still have the distinction as his *mathetai*. Unless Christians in effect have functionally ceased following Jesus, they have no negotiable option to construct a composite, hybrid or parallel identity with some partial aspect of Jesus’ identity. Just as Jesus addressed his disciples earlier, while a *mathetes* is certainly not “above” Jesus to construct his/her own identity, *mathetai* who are growing in discipleship wholeness (*katartizo*) also are not apart from any aspect of Jesus’ identity to function on their own terms (which would effectively construct their own identity, Lk 6:40).

It is the temptation or tendency of every minority person in a dominant context to: (1) defer to the dominant group and be rendered passive; (2) compromise with the dominant values and be reduced in one’s own significance; (3) be co-opted by the dominant context and lose one’s sense of purpose, and thus value to that context. A bifocal process of identity construction involves any or all of these practices. This is the function of bifocal identity. For the Christian minority in the world, this is what’s at stake.

For Christians to relegate their identity with Jesus to the “lower reading lens” for function in the provincial, private and intimate aspects of their life and practice is to defer to, compromise with and/or be co-opted by the surrounding context. To render the influence of the surrounding context to the “upper general lens” for their function in all other aspects of life and practice is to lose the qualitative distinction unique to Jesus’ followers—and thus, as Jesus prayed, to preclude both their joy shared intimately with the whole of God (Jn 17:13) and their value to the surrounding context (17:21,23). On the other hand, bifocal Christian identity makes evident the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of our identity constructions incongruent with Jesus’ sanctified identity; any such identity is what emerges from reductionism.

If the embodied whole of Jesus is our hermeneutical and functional keys, this perceptual-interpretive framework will “listen to my Son” and result in congruence with

the relational nature and functional significance of his sanctified identity. If we listen to the Son, this will change our perceptual-interpretive framework to understand that the Father meant “listening” not only to the words the Son told us but also to his whole person, and thus to how he functioned. His authentic followers walk together conjointly in the relational posture of his full identity and in the functional posture of his minority identity. The only alternative to this qualitative interaction necessary for congruence is some form of reductionism.

Jesus’ sanctified life and practice made evident two vital issues about this identity interaction necessary for his followers, as he prayed: (1) without the relational function of his full identity, there is no truth and function of his minority identity (cf. some ministers with an incomplete Christology, missionaries with a truncated soteriology, or activist Christians with disembodied ethics or morality; also those who experience primarily outward change [*metaschematizo*] and function merely in role behaviors [*hypokrisis*]); and (2) without the function of the truth of his minority identity, there is no experiential truth of his full identity (e.g., as those with bifocal identity). This qualitative interaction between identities is an ongoing relational dynamic: the relational outcome of which constitutes the sanctified identity of his followers fully submitted to the Father and set apart for the whole and holy God in the world; and the function of which signifies the ontology of his followers together in the relationships necessary to be whole as his family in likeness of the Trinity.

There is a variation of Christian bifocal identity that needs to be discussed. This involves Christians who present a distinct Christian identity in general public or the dominant surrounding context, while functioning with a different identity in private. Basically, this reverses the bifocal process with a reductionist form of Jesus’ minority identity or full identity used as the “upper general lens,” while an alternative identity is used for the “lower reading lens” in private. This is characteristic notably: of ministers serving in the name of Jesus who construct their own identity in effect as if “above” or even apart from Jesus, thus lacking depth of their identity; of missionaries and evangelists who seek to save the lost in the world, while practicing a personal identity incongruent with what Jesus saved us *to*, thus lacking depth in their function; of Christian activists who promote the so-called ethics and morality of Jesus in the surrounding context while having no sense of relational involvement with the person of Jesus in their own life and practice, thus lacking clarity of their identity. This reverse bifocal identity is also characteristic generally of those who present a serious Christian identity in public (albeit sincerely or with good intentions) but have no depth to their identity to signify the ontology of their whole person.

All these persons characterize Christians who lack the clarity and depth of identity to go beyond reductionism, and who are not being redefined (redeemed), transformed from the inside out (*metamorphoo*) and made whole in congruence with Jesus’ sanctified identity. Thus, these bifocal identities are of persons who function in the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of reductionism, and thus who must account for *hypokrisis*—the leaven of reductionism, which Jesus made imperative for all his followers “to pay attention to” (*prosecho*, Lk 12:1).

Yet, what we pay attention to and what we ignore are a direct function of our perceptual-interpretive framework (cf. the early disciples discussed previously in the chapter). Our framework functions as the lens (our “eyes”) through which we perceive

Jesus, read the biblical text, see ourselves and others, and view the world. Reductionism presents a formidable challenge to the relational context and process of Jesus' followers, primarily because we don't pay focused attention to it, or we ignore its presence and influence. What we perceive of God's self-revelation and what we interpret about the whole of God are skewed by the influence of reductionism. The validity of our perceptions and interpretations emerge only from the framework which Jesus made evident upon thanking the Father for his revelations to "little children" (discussed previously in Lk 10:21).

This clearly makes evident the need for our perceptual-interpretive framework to be changed—the redemptive change constituted by listening to the Son, submitting to the Father and cooperatively working relationally with the Spirit. This includes the necessary change of our whole person and the relationships necessary to be whole signifying the ongoing relational involvement of our sanctified identity in who, what and how we are with the whole of God. Such redemptive change necessarily involves a complete Christology with a full soteriology and a functional pneumatology, in coherence with an ecclesiology of the whole and a congruent missiology, all of which together cohere in an eschatology progressing to the relational conclusion (not mere event) of the whole of God's thematic action since creation, thus completing the Trinity's relational work of grace with the whole of the new creation.

This is the sanctified identity in which Jesus constitutes his followers—nothing less and no substitutes.

Functional Implications

The reality for most Christians, at least in the Western church, is to not pay attention to Jesus' minority identity or merely to ignore it, while supposedly focused on his main identity. This raises some questions for all of us. What is the main identity of the Jesus we are connected to? And how do we in function connect with our Jesus?

The unavoidable implication of Jesus' sanctified identity is that he gave us no option or flexibility for an alternative identity. Congruence (*kathos* and *hos*) with his sanctified identity leaves no negotiating room for any other identity, either for us or for our identity of him. This challenges the clarity of our relational context with Jesus and his identity we are connected to, and critiques the depth of our relational process for connecting functionally with this Jesus. We, individually and together as church, have to take up this challenge seriously and have to respond to this critique honestly.

Yet, the underlying issue for this challenge and critique is our working Christology, the extent of which determines our relational context and process. In other words, our relational context with Jesus has clarity only to the extent of the identity of Jesus we are connected to; and our relational process of involvement with Jesus can only have the depth to which our Jesus is involved in relationship. These direct correlations result in nothing more, but certainly only define the upper limits of clarity and depth our working Christology could constitute. They likely would be less when our relational response of faith is factored into the reciprocal relational process.

We cannot underestimate the determining factor of our Christology and the implications of anything less than or any substitute for a complete Christology. For

example, incomplete Christologies today are the basis for formulating discipleship essentially as the conformity to what Jesus did or taught, while selectively negotiating what aspects it pays attention to or ignores, thus making evident the influence of reductionism. In functional contrast and theological conflict, by the nature of a complete Christology, discipleship constitutes: the relational process of congruence with who, what and how the whole of Jesus is, the extent of which is vulnerable involvement based on his incarnation involvement principle of nothing less and no substitutes, and is thus irreducible by any other context for our clarity and nonnegotiable by any other process for our depth. All his followers are accountable for the relational response only to the whole of Jesus.

Every Christian and church must understand their working Christology. Moreover, every church needs to develop the complete christological literacy of its members and nurture their ongoing involvement with Jesus in the relational nature and functional significance of his sanctified identity. Essentially, for any church or any Christian to get to this level of understanding and practice necessitates change, just as Jesus told his disciples earlier (Mt 18:3).

Yet, the underlying issue for this christological understanding and practice is the sin of reductionism, the practice of which the Christian community has not adequately dealt with. Sin as reductionism is our most basic moral issue; and the influence of reductionism as sin has had the most profound affect on our life and practice—making its function in our midst the primary moral problem. These must be fully addressed for the significant change necessary for this degree of clarity of our christological understanding and for this level of depth of our christological practice.

When his early disciples pursued the identity of “who is the greatest” among them, Jesus confronted them with their need for redemptive change (*strepho*, turn about) from their current function to begin to *be* (*ginomai*) congruent (*hos*) in function with “little children” (Mt 18:3). As discussed earlier about Jesus’ joyful outburst of thanksgiving in Luke 10:21, the function of “little children” was analogous to being freed from reductionism. Since this was necessary for the ongoing relational involvement of his first disciples in God’s family, how necessary is this change for us today?

Yet, this change is not the result of self-determination but rather the relational outcome of submission to Jesus’ whole person. To become congruent in function with “little children,” Jesus needs to redefine our person currently based on what we do and have; and, similar to the first beatitude, he needs to reconstitute the ontology of our person, and the ontology of our persons together as church, wholly based on what we are, and whose we are, without reductionism. This also signifies a shift from our identity constructions to identity formation with him. This redemption from the sin of reductionism frees us to be involved with our whole person in his vulnerable relational context and process, which is necessary for the experiential truth of complete christological understanding and practice in ongoing congruence with the relational nature and functional significance of Jesus’ sanctified identity.

This necessarily involves our understanding and practice of faith. A complete Christology is only half of the relational equation. Our response constituted by our faith is the other half necessary to complete the relationship. What then does faith in Jesus really involve?

After their response to Jesus' call to "Follow me," it is difficult to see development in the faith of the early disciples in the narratives of Jesus. We can assume they had faith, and what they did demonstrated faith. But is faith in Jesus what we have or what we do? Based on Jesus frequently pointing out their lack of faith, we certainly cannot conclude this. Once again the function of "little children" informs us what's involved. Little children, who have yet to be conditioned by their experience, don't "have faith" or "do faith" but simply extend their person vulnerably to others in the process of relational trust. This process is the relational response and involvement necessary with Jesus to constitute our ongoing faith (cf. Mk 10:14-15). This relational process of faith is irreducible by any other context and nonnegotiable by any other process—even if that context is a Christian community and if that process is practiced by a church.

The early disciples lacked knowing the whole of Jesus (as discussed in Jn 14:9), which was less a theological issue of Christology and more a functional issue of faith. Even after three faithful years of service with Jesus, they still lacked the ongoing relational response and involvement of trust congruent with the function of "little children." This relational trust is not the blind faith of an innocent child or the unwarranted trust of naiveté; on the contrary, this is the relational reciprocity with the vulnerable whole person Jesus embodied in full identity and with complete Christology. This ongoing relational trust submitted to the whole of God's relational work of grace is the priority, primacy and nature of discipleship. Its lack subjects his followers to identity crisis. Thus, in comparison to the early disciples, where do we locate our identity today?

Identity for Christians and church identity are not necessarily synonymous. Though they are theologically they are not always in function. Increasingly, they tend to be two different identities, which may interact or remain functionally separate, even in a bifocal process. Any separation of identity occurs when Christian life and practice is not well integrated into the life and practice of the church (as local and global); this existing condition is characteristic of Western Christian communities. In this separation, one identity may be perceived in crisis while the other is considered "healthy." The functional truth is, however, that these identities are interrelated, and thus mutually dependent on the other for its function and significance.

Identity crisis exists whenever (or wherever, even in the Eastern church and global South) the christological problem pervades and however the influence of sin as reductionism prevails. What pervades and prevails in many Christian communities suggest an identity crisis, or at least one in the making. Given where this condition may exist, I suggest *our* identity will remain in crisis until it is congruent with the relational nature and functional significance of Jesus' sanctified identity.

Moreover, Christians and churches, notably in the Western church, need to grasp being "minority"; the Western Christian community has for too long assumed the dominant function more congruent with the dominant sociocultural position. And we need the redemptive shift to functioning in our minority identity with the clarity and depth constituted by Jesus' sanctified life and practice.

Lastly, a directly interrelated issue to Christian and church identities, and how they function, is the importance of soteriology. Christology and soteriology are inseparable and need to be understood together. The issue is: In our doctrine of salvation, what is salvation all about? That is, did Jesus just save us *from*: sin, judgment, consequences and death? This would signify a truncated soteriology. Or did he also save

us *to*: transformation to the new creation constituted initially in the present relationships necessary to be the whole of God's family in likeness of the Trinity, the relational process of which will be completed in the eschatological conclusion of God's thematic action? This constitutes the full soteriology integral to a complete Christology.

If how we function only reflects what Jesus "saved us from," then our Christian and church identities will never be whole, nor will our discipleship ever be complete (*katartizo*). If Jesus also "saves us to," then we have necessary relational work to engage in the trinitarian relational context of family to be intimately involved with the Trinity and the whole of God's family in the trinitarian relational process of family love.

Chapter 6

Soteriology in Full Context and Process and The Qualitative Shape of the Kingdom

We must always be aware of unintentionally placing Jesus in a vacuum, as if to sanitize his life of its humanity and his function in the social world. This would not define his sanctified identity. In addition, we need to be circumspect in the formulation of doctrine related to Jesus, so as neither to disembodify the doctrine from the whole of Jesus nor to reduce the doctrine from the whole of God's thematic relational action. This absence would define doctrine in fragments without coherence, as if doctrines do not need to fully cohere to the whole of God's thematic relational work of grace; this characterizes many systematic theologies.

This has been the case for soteriology (the doctrine of salvation) down through church history, despite its major shift to grace established by the Reformation. This has been also true for ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church), which, in much of its history since Constantine, consistently has not fully grasped the whole, whether involving Jesus or the Trinity. Thus, there has been a need for ecclesiology's reformation also, which the magisterial Reformers never really attended to. This chapter will initially address soteriology and the emergence of the kingdom of God, while ecclesiology more specifically will be discussed in chapter eight.

Establishing the Context and Process of Soteriology

The incarnation positioned Jesus, theologically and functionally, in a specific context, apart from which is only an assumed Jesus, not the embodied Jesus. This specific context was the surrounding context of the world, in which his minority identity emerged. The ontology of this embodied Jesus, the Word in the flesh, constituted the whole of Jesus in a quantitatively further and deeper qualitative context: the relational context of the Trinity.

In this trinitarian relational context, Jesus' whole person is defined, belongs and functions, thus signifying his full identity. This relational context conjointly involves a relational process, the trinitarian relational process, by which the embodied Jesus was vulnerably involved relationally in the surrounding context specific to the world, signifying his minority identity. This is the functional significance of God's relational work of grace. Therefore, this relational context and process of Jesus are inseparable as well as irreducible—in other words, nothing less and no substitutes. They involve the ongoing relational dynamic of interaction between his full identity and his minority identity that constitutes his sanctified identity, as discussed in the last chapter.

Moreover, Jesus' relational context and process are also inseparable and irreducible from the Trinity's thematic action since creation in response to the human

condition “to be apart” from the whole of God. As the Word (*Logos*) who became flesh (Jn 1:1-2,14) and the Creator who lived in our context (Jn 1:3,10,14), Jesus vulnerably disclosed, extended and fulfilled the Trinity’s thematic relational action of grace (Jn 1:10-13,16-18). The course of salvation history is a relational course of the Trinity’s thematic action, the ongoing context and process of which Jesus intimately functioned in as “the One and Only” (*monogenes*). Whatever was previously understood and experienced of deliverance/salvation is made definitive by the whole of Jesus, whose context and process are nonnegotiable. John’s Gospel provides this view of the big picture of God’s eschatological plan.

From his trinitarian relational context and by his trinitarian relational process, Jesus vulnerably engaged the surrounding context to make functional not only the significance of God’s grace but also of *agape* involvement (cf. “the covenant of love,” Dt 7:9,12). His ongoing relational involvement of grace and *agape* functioned in what can be defined as intrusive action, even invasive action. Contrary to a static doctrine of grace and a politically correct posture of *agape*, such relational intrusion is the nature of Jesus’ minority identity; this is the kind of action most Christians tend to deflect to certain situations or special circumstances—consequently, not really pay attention to or merely ignore. Yet, intrusive action is definitive for the dynamic nature of God’s grace and *agape* involvement, which we often functionally redefine with diminished vulnerability and relational involvement—for example, with servant models and sacrifice modes. Nevertheless, this is “where” (from Jn 12:26) we find Jesus’ whole person in the biblical narratives; and this is *where* his followers, by the nature of discipleship, must be involved to be *with him*.

This involvement with Jesus, however, is less about what he did and more about how his whole person functioned ongoingly as who and what he was. How he lived in the world has been the focus of Christian/biblical ethics and missions (discussed in the next chapter). Yet, I suggest, this has been essentially a limited discussion because these fields have focused primarily on what Jesus did, not how his person functioned. This framework has reduced the context and process of the whole of Jesus’ sanctified life and practice, and thus has fragmented Christian life and practice without the coherence of the whole of God—that is, in the incarnation and/or the Trinity’s thematic action in salvation history. This reduction certainly has consequences for soteriology, the most notable of which is the relational consequence not only for the future but also for the present.

We need to extend the significance of this discussion by taking Jesus’ context and process in the world further and deeper, not only beyond reductionism but also beyond ethics and missions as conventionally perceived. This necessitates examining soteriology and our working doctrine of salvation. No Christology is complete without a full soteriology. And a full soteriology involves the vulnerable relational context and process of Jesus, who conjointly saved us *from* and saved us *to*.

Getting to the Heart of Soteriology

A full soteriology is the relational outcome of the relational progression in the Trinity’s thematic action, notably 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), namely 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 God's thematic action and the covenant relationship, the whole 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 the relationship (Dt 32:9, cf. Ex 34:9, Dt 9:29).

Their divergence suggests a renegotiation of the covenant relationship, plus a reinterpretation of God's words (promises and desires defining the terms of relationship). These alternative terms represented the quantitative shift of 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 grasp the heart of soteriology.

There is an ongoing dynamic that is the lowest common denominator in God's story:

At the heart of the whole of God's ontology is relationship, inter-person relationship, as constituted in the Trinity and by the relational involvement of the trinitarian persons within the Godhead. At the heart of creation is this relationship, and God made human ontology in the Trinity's image. 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 the whole, the ongoing heart underlying all of God's thematic action is restored relationship together. Thus, the heart of the incarnation is the convergence of the divine 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, the relational outcome of which is salvation effected by the embodied heart of the ontology of God.

This makes evident that at the heart of soteriology is relationship together, the relationship of the whole of God, the Trinity, the full context and process of which Jesus saves us *to*.

This ongoing dynamic of relationship must by nature also become the function of our perceptual-interpretive framework, or we can quite easily be found diverging in our own practice—namely by reinterpreting the intention of God's words and renegotiating the terms for our relationship with God. As we continue to pursue God's self-disclosure in Jesus, our deeper understanding of God and God's action emerges only from a distinct interpretive process. This process (1) engages God in self-disclosure as an act of communication, and (2) engages God's communication in its full context, both in the social context of the world and in the relational context of the Trinity, as narrated in the biblical texts. This relational dynamic involves us in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit. This is a crucial relational involvement because only the Spirit transforms our perceptual-interpretive framework to have the eyes to "see" the whole of God "face-to-face" (in the distinction of qualitative relational involvement), and to have the ears to

“hear” and “Listen to my Son” in his whole person (in the relational process of intimate involvement, Jn 14:26; 16:13-15, cf. Mt 13:15-17).

In God’s communicative action, Jesus embodied the Word as God’s thematic relational action, and thus he disclosed the vulnerable relational work of God’s grace in response to the human relational condition “to be apart” from God’s whole. The language Jesus used (both verbal content and nonverbal relational messages) in self-disclosure of God and God’s action needs to be understood in the whole of God’s relational context and, in that relational nature, must be engaged (both received and responded to) as relational language for its full meaning.

That is to say, the person Jesus presented in the incarnation and the intent of his communication were only to engage relationship—nothing less. It is this relational process, initiated by God’s grace, which necessitates a reciprocal depth of relational involvement (with no substitutes) 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 (cf. Mt 13:17). In this incompatible relational position, Jesus’ discourses can seem unreasonable or can lack coherence, thus be disjointed into essentially unrelated words without the functional significance of the whole—namely the whole of God’s thematic action in salvation history. For example, how the Sermon on the Mount tends to be perceived and interpreted is a prime illustration of this relational position; this discourse will be addressed further in the next chapter.

Two other discourses of Jesus in particular evidence this difficulty of engaging his relational language. They appear consecutively toward the beginning of the Gospel of John for the evangelist’s purpose to identify Jesus with the Jews and the nation of Israel, yet to also distinguish him from them for God’s eschatological big picture.

The first discourse occurred at the Temple of Jerusalem (Jn 2:13-22). The temple was central to Jewish religious life in all its variations; more importantly, the temple was the heart of their faith, where God’s presence dwelled to signify ongoing involvement (2 Ch 5:14, cf. Ex 40:34). Jesus observed their faith-practice by involvement in the temple, but he neither accepted their aspect of religious life reducing their practice to a purification code nor tolerated the inequitable system this code generated for its adherence. Thus, he drove out those who exploited the less resourceful for profit and who created barriers to access “my Father’s house” (*oikos*, dwelling, v.16). That is, the temple was no mere center of religious activity (cf. church today) but only the context where his Father dwelled for communion together for all peoples (cf. Mk11:17). Jesus’ words and action communicated relational language making definitive the relational context of God.

Moreover, when his honor was challenged to demonstrate the basis for his action, Jesus only responded with the words: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (v.19). His challengers were only focused on the quantitative aspect of the temple, thus could not understand his relational language. Yet, Jesus was not playing word-games with them. He was disclosing the strategic shift in God’s thematic action. In this strategic shift, he was constituting the transition of the contextual location of the temple from a place of God’s dwelling directly to the persons of the Trinity (cf. Jn 4:21,23), who will now be present in direct relationship and be ongoingly involved intimately together in the full relational context of family and relational process of family love.

The transition of the temple to the full relational context and process of the Trinity 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 14:23a); this is, by nature of the ontology of the Trinity, the relational outcome for both individual persons and those persons by necessity together in 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); in Pauline 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); 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.

Jesus’ disclosure of God’s strategic shift vulnerably evidences that the heart of the ontology of the whole of God is relationship, the full context and process of which continues to develop in John’s Gospel. Jesus took this transition further and deeper in his next discourse, a communication which essentially jolted the status quo of the prevailing perception, interpretation and expectation of salvation.

Salvation Comes with a Jolt in the Night

Jesus’ next critical disclosure occurred vulnerably with Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21, whether or not it was supplemented by the evangelist’s reflections after v.15). In order to establish this interaction’s larger context, it seems reasonable to assume some matters about Nicodemus. He came to Jesus that night for answers to questions which were framed by his Jewish identity, by his involvement as a ruling member (Sanhedrin) in Israel (v.1) and as one of her teachers (v.10); thus he came with the expectations associated with their Scripture, which were shaped likely by an interpretive framework from Second Temple Judaism and no doubt by a perceptual framework sociopolitically sensitized to Roman rule. While Nicodemus came to Jesus as an individual person, his query was as the collective identity of Israel and the corporate life and practice of a Pharisee’s (of whatever variation) Judaism.

Apparently stimulated by Jesus’ actions and perhaps stirred by the presence of “a teacher who has come from God” (v.2), he engaged Jesus. Yet, he likely engaged Jesus while in the category that Jesus described elsewhere as “the wise and learned” (Lk 10:21, discussed previously in the Introduction). This would be crucial for Nicodemus. Though his position represented the educated elite of Israel, his own posture was about to be changed.

Jesus understood Nicodemus' query and anticipated his questions certainly related to God's promises for Israel's deliverance (salvation), the Messiah and God's kingship in the Mediterranean world. Therefore, Jesus immediately focused on "the kingdom of God" (v.3), the OT eschatological hope, about which Nicodemus was probably more concerned in the present than the future. Yet, the whole of God's kingship and sovereign rule is integral to the OT, and thus a primary focus of Nicodemus' query, however provincial. And he was concerned about it strongly enough (and maybe inwardly conflicted) to make himself vulnerable to initiate this interaction with Jesus; his query appeared genuine and for more than information or didactic reasons.

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

The notion of membership and participation in the kingdom of God being contingent on a concept "born again" was taken incredulously by this "wise and learned" leader, whose sophisticated reason was unable to process and explain (v.4); and then to be told "you [pl] must by its nature" (*dei*, v.7), not out of obligation or compulsion, as if to address all Jews, was beyond the grasp of his reason. Even after Jesus made definitive ("I tell you the truth") *gennaō anōthen* as "born from above," that is "born of the Spirit" (*ek*, indicating the primary, direct source, vv.5,8), Nicodemus was still unable to process it (v.9). Why? This brings us back to the position of "the wise and the learned." He was unable to grasp Jesus' language because the words were heard from an insufficient perceptual-interpretive framework.

Jesus exposed this as the discourse continues: "You are Israel's teacher and do you not understand these things?" (v.10). How are these connected since "born again" (or from above) is not in the OT? With this rhetorical question, Jesus implied that from a valid OT perspective (namely "the covenant of love," Dt 7:7-9) the thematic action of God's covenant relationship would be understood. Jesus was vulnerably extending this covenant relationship of love directly to Nicodemus (and, by implication, to all Jews) by communicating openly what he, himself, knew intimately by witnessing as a participant (*martyreo*, not merely by observation, v.11) in the life of God (v.13, cf. Jn 1:18). His communication was not with ethereal (*epouranios*) language but discourse (*lego*) in the human context (*epigeios*, v.12), yet with relational language. It was the qualitative nature of relational language that Nicodemus was unable to grasp with his perceptual-interpretive framework. Something was incompatible for connection.

The movement of God's thematic action in the covenant relationship of love had been consistently reduced to quantitative situations and circumstances throughout Israel's history—despite the fact that "the Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you" on a quantitative basis (Dt 7:7). In functional similarity, Nicodemus paid attention to the quantitative limits of human biology while ignoring the qualitative issue of human ontology, thus he demonstrated the framework focused on the quantitative situations and circumstances of the covenant. Jesus focused on the ontology of the whole person and the qualitative relationship signifying the covenant of love. The establishment of nation and

national identity formation were the prevailing quantitative expectations of any messianic hope in the kingdom, with which, most certainly, Nicodemus came to Jesus in that night. Jesus focused on the whole persons necessary in covenant relationship to constitute the kingdom—nothing less and no substitutes.

Their perceptual-interpretive framework made some critical assumptions about the kingdom besides the quantitative situations and circumstances. The two most critical assumptions were:

1. Membership in the kingdom was based on generational descent and natural birth; to grasp the qualitative functional significance of Jesus' relational language, his discourse (v.7) must be conjoined with the incarnation's fulfillment of God's thematic action in the covenant relationship of love (as summarized by the evangelist in Jn 1:10-13, cf. his discourse on those redeemed in Jn 8:31-36,41);
2. Moreover, participation in the kingdom was based on what one did, thus adherence to a purification code of behavior was imperative, especially for national identity maintenance; to grasp the full relational context and process of Jesus' relational language, his discourse (v.6) needs to be embodied in the vulnerable relational context and process of his whole person intimately disclosing the whole of God (made evident in his further discourse in Jn 6:54,63).

In this latter discourse, would-be followers came to a similar conclusion as Nicodemus: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (Jn 6:52) and "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (Jn 6:60), compared with Nicodemus' "How can this be?" (v.9)—all of which reflected these assumptions.

What Nicodemus and the others were predisposed to by their perceptual-interpretive framework, and also were embedded in as their practice and expectation, was essentially a *salvation of the old*—a quantitative outcome of reductionism. What Jesus vulnerably engaged them in and with was *salvation of the new*—the qualitative relational outcome of the whole of God. God's thematic relational work of grace embodied in Jesus for covenant relationship of love was constituting deeply the new covenant, the relationship of which was now directly and intimately involved together with the Trinity to be the whole of God's family (kingdom of those born of the Spirit, of the Father, of the Son). This is the gospel vulnerably disclosed by Jesus in relational language which jolted the status quo of *the old* represented in Nicodemus that night.

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

7:50-52), then to relationally respond to God in qualitative involvement (Lk 18:17, cf. his involvement in Jn 19:39-42).

John's Gospel evidences the relational process of salvation from old to new in Nicodemus. In this relational context, the evangelist almost seems to give a metaphorical sense to Nicodemus. Certainly, for all who follow, it is the relational context and process, necessary by the nature of salvation, to which to respond and by which to be involved in order to belong to the whole of God's family. Unfortunately, we never hear if Nicodemus became one of the teachers of the old covenant and new, who relationally experienced following Jesus in the relational progression to the family (kingdom) of God, as Jesus defined in Mt 13:52. Nevertheless, the transition of God's thematic relational work of grace emerges further and deeper in this discourse. The strategic shift to the qualitative relational significance of *the new* was present and vulnerably disclosed; this would be disclosed further and deeper not only as present but also as vulnerably involved, as he did in his discourse with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-30, discussed previously).

The Trinitarian Shape of Soteriology

Salvation in the OT always involved deliverance by God, which involved situations and circumstances but was always about the covenant relationship together (Ex 15:2, Is 12:2; 43:3,11, Hos 2:19,20,23) in the covenant of love (Dt 7:9). God's liberation (redeeming the chosen people) from Egypt epitomized the covenant of love enacted by the whole of God (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, God always intended to be the people's portion (Jer 51:19, La 3:24, Ps 119:57) and, conversely, God's people were expected to be God'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. *Salvation of the old* 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 broader and deeper theological significance (cf. Is 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.

In his discourse with Nicodemus, Jesus evidenced the primacy of the relationship over situations and circumstances by referencing Moses making a bronze snake to save the people for complaining against God about their situation and circumstance (Jn 3:14, Nu 21:4-9). Their complaint was taken by God as only relational, the consequence of which was sin, just as they eventually understood and confessed (Nu 21:7) In addition, Jesus used the snake as an analogy (*kathos*) to his pending death on the cross to save persons from the relational consequences of sin. Equally important, however, was that Jesus also pointed to what he saved persons *to* (v.15). "Born again or from above" involves the relational process of the new covenant constituting the new creation—born of the Father (Jn 1:13), born of the Spirit (Jn 3:5,8), born of the Son (Jn 1:12; 3:15), that is, by the relational work of grace "of" (*ek*, indicating source) the Trinity, whose relational involvement together constitute the whole of God and the whole of God's family (kingdom).

“To save” (*sozo*) in the NT denotes also to make whole, which necessitates not only being saved *from* but also saved *to* what is necessary to be whole. “To be apart” from this whole is the human condition, to which 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 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 family of God”—in the new covenant relationship together necessary to be whole in the ontological image and the functional likeness of the whole of God.

In Jesus’ discourse, *sozo* was directly conjoined to eternal life (Jn 3:14-17). Just as with “born again,” eternal life must be understood also as relational language, or else it gets reduced to quantitative aspects about the future—as pervades much Christian practice today. That is, the relational outcome of “born again or from above” is eternal life, thus eternal life must remain in the same relational context and process to grasp its significance. More importantly, both born again and eternal life must by nature function in this relational context and process in order to have significance—relational significance to God and experiential significance for God’s family.

The notion of eternal life points to a Jewish view of the life of the age or world to come. John’s Gospel seems to give “eternal life” the prominence that the Synoptic Gospels hold for “the kingdom of God.” This would be understandable since John’s Gospel narrates further and deeper God’s thematic action in the big picture. Yet, this narrative is integrated by relational language, which communicates the integrating motif of relationship together in the new covenant. For the evangelist, eternal life points to more than the life to come (and overcoming death), and it involves going deeper than the traditional parameters of the kingdom of God.

As the relational outcome of being born of God in a new creation, eternal life is not about the quantitative aspects of life signified in a Greek term for life, *bios* (from which biography is derived). Nor is eternal life about the longevity of life denoted by a Greek term for time, *chronos*. *Chronos* and *bios* cannot constitute eternal life but are prevailing notions of it signifying its reduction. This is the consequence of removing eternal life from, or ignoring, its relational context and process.

Rather than aspects of *bios*, eternal life is only about the qualitative whole of life, the element of life in the spirit denoted by another term for life, *zoe*. The element of *zoe* is the very life that God has. Thus, eternal life constitutes engaging this *zoe* life, that is to say, participating in the very *zoe* of God. Engage how, participate how? This is not about metaphysics but about relationship and the primacy of intimate relationship constituting the relational ontology of the Trinity. This involves, therefore, the irreducible and nonnegotiable response necessary by its nature (*dei*), to engage the relational context and to participate in the relational process vulnerably disclosed by Jesus, who embodied the relational ontology of the whole of God only for this relationship together. So, for example, when the rich young ruler approached Jesus for information to inherit eternal life, Jesus made it imperative to him to “follow me” (Mk 10:17-21)—thus, pointing him

to the involvement in relationship together in the relational context and process of Jesus' whole person.

Jesus made eternal life definitive in his formative family prayer (insufficiently called his high priestly prayer). "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). "To know" (*ginosko*) seems to point to a cognitive dimension of salvation (cf. Jer 31:34). Yet, this should not be reduced to gaining information and knowing things *about* God (cf. Jn 5:39). *Ginosko* in this context points to a deeper epistemology (Jn 17:6,25-26, cf. 1:18). Eternal life is a function of relationship and thus involves the relational epistemic process (cf. Jn 5:39-40). God's self-disclosure embodied in Jesus vulnerably engaged persons only for this relationship (Jn 17:7-8). *Ginosko* also means "to experience," which necessitates reciprocal intimate involvement (both sharing and receiving) to have this relational outcome (cf. Jesus' frustration and its previous discussion, Jn 14:9). This reciprocal intimate involvement signifies the *zoe* of the Trinity, which all his followers participate in not only to relationally know the Trinity but also to intimately experience together in the relationships necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity, just as Jesus continued to pray (Jn 17:20-26). His prayer was formative of the new covenant family that he saved his followers to—the family of the new creation (born anew) constituted by the Trinity, for both "now" and "not yet."

Thus, salvation can be characterized as the relational response to the revelation that one receives (cf. Jer 31:33, Jn 1:10-12) with the relational trust exercised (as "little children") in the reciprocity of covenant relationship together—covenant signifying only on God's terms and together signifying only intimate involvement. This relational process of salvation involves the "adoption" of "little children" into the whole and holy God's very own family—that is to say, those with the functional posture of "little children" (see the progression in Lk 10:21, Mt 18:3, Lk 18:17, Jn 1:12-13). "The right [*exousia*, authority] to become children of God" (Jn 1:12) points to the adoption process (which Paul later defined, Gal 4:4-7, Ro 8:15-17) initiated by the Trinity's relational work of grace. As a theological construct, adoption is the formative relational process of God's family which signifies two necessary actions in the relational process to family: first, redemption from the old, for example, from any enslavement (cf. Levi, prostitute), or release from previous family liability (cf. Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus), and, secondly, transformation to the new, that is, reconstituting the person's ontology, redefining their identity and transferring membership/establishing belonging in the whole of God's family. Redemption is never merely about liberating the person for Christian freedom but only for this relational process necessary to constitute relationship together as family.

Adoption, as the formative relational process of God's family, makes evident therefore the trinitarian shape of soteriology, constituted by the Trinity in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. The whole of this relational work of grace constitutes Jesus' followers in the relational progression to the whole of God, functionally restoring them: in the image of the relational ontology of the Trinity; in the relationships necessary to signify the ecclesiology of the whole in likeness of the Trinity; and in the congruent relational dynamic to signify their function in compatible missiology to extend family love to the world to build the whole of God's

family as the new creation—the eschatological plan of God’s thematic relational action of grace.

The eschaton will bring the new creation family to its relational conclusion, yet its relational outcome is in the present to experience, however incomplete. When Jesus was harassed for healing (*hygies*, well, whole, i.e., to make whole) on the Sabbath (Jn 5:6,14,16), he responded by distinguishing his ongoing trinitarian relational work of grace (v.17ff). The implication is: The qualitative distinction of his work for relationship with those apart from the whole cannot be constrained by the quantitative religious practices, which effectively keep persons in the condition “to be apart” from the whole of God (v.21). For those who relationally respond to his trinitarian work of grace, Jesus made definitive that person “has eternal life” (in Gk present tense, v.24). That is, this person “has crossed over from death to life” (*metabeino*, denotes to go from one state to another, v.24). *Metabeino* is also in the Greek perfect tense, which accentuates the fact of an existing condition and stresses the prevailing effects of an action. In other words, the future brings the relational conclusion of complete overcoming of death (separation from God) to life (endless communion with God); through the same ongoing trinitarian relational work of grace, the present also brings relational outcomes in the intimate involvement of relationship together. These relational outcomes in the present are ongoing experiences of transformation (*metabeino*) from the relational condition “to be apart” from the whole to further participation and deeper involvement in the *zoe* of the Trinity (the fact of a new existing condition); and the Trinity’s past and present relational work is already and ongoingly constituting in those of reciprocal relationship the new creation family of the whole of God (the prevailing effects of the Trinity’s salvific action).

Any notions which relegate salvation and eternal life merely to the future emerge from reductionism and not fully receiving God’s communicative action disclosed in the biblical texts, namely embodied in the whole of the Word. The theological and functional implication is not listening to the Son in his trinitarian relational context and process, thus essentially ignoring the ongoing relational presence and intimate involvement of the Trinity. Whatever future experience salvation and eternal life ultimately bring, their present reality is only a function of relationship together, the nature of which has to be theologically congruent and functionally compatible with the relational ontology of the Trinity. The Trinity not only gives shape to soteriology but makes definitive the relational nature of salvific life and practice in the new creation. This necessitates by its nature, not out of obligation or compulsion, our ongoing reciprocal relational work for further and deeper intimate communion together. Moreover, this involves our life and practice in relationship with others in the daily ethics congruent with the relational work of Jesus’ whole person, who embodied the relational ontology of the Trinity for all relationships to be restored to the qualitative whole of God—both for the distant future and also for the immediate present.

Before our discussion focuses on salvific life and practice in the new creation, we need to grasp the experiential truth of this relationship which historically converged in Jesus’ ultimate discourse.

The Ultimate Salvific Discourse

The whole of soteriology's relational context and process cohered in Jesus' ultimate discourse on the cross, which intimately communicated and vulnerably consummated God's thematic relational action of grace. This discourse is understood as his seven statements conjoined with his actions on the cross, though each of the Gospel narratives provides a different part of the discourse, with Mark and Matthew including only the most important fourth statement to formulate a structure somewhat analogous to an OT chiasm (two halves framing the key point placed between them). Taken together they evidence the thematic relational message of God, and this composite message's theological interpretation constitutes it as the ultimate salvific discourse consummating the whole of God's thematic action for the new covenant relationship together as family. Thus, no aspect of this discourse can be fully understood separated from the context of the whole, nor can any aspect be reduced and still constitute its relational significance in the whole of God's thematic action.

This was Jesus' discourse on the cross, in which the language of his words and actions communicated with the ultimate relational clarity and significance.

First Statement: "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*" (Lk 23:34).³⁰

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

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

Jesus' discourse was interjected with challenges to his salvific claim (Mt 27:40, Mk 15:29-30), as well as with mocking of his salvific authority and power as the Messiah King (Mt 27:42, Mk 15:31-32, Lk 23:35). Another detractor was one of the criminals executed with Jesus, who demonstrated a prevailing messianic expectation of salvation in existing quantitative situations and circumstances (Lk 23:39). His derision was about

³⁰ While some early manuscripts do not include this statement, it is important to include this to establish the relational flow of the discourse.

deliverance from his circumstances, not about relationship together; thus, he represented a majority position of those with a reductionist reaction to Jesus.

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

Second Statement: *"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise"* (Lk 23:43).

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

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

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

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

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

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

Apparently, Mary had been a widow for a while. In the Mediterranean world of biblical times, a widow was in a precarious position (like orphans), and so it was for Mary, particularly when her eldest and thus primary son (culturally speaking) was about to die. Their culture called for the eldest son to make provision for parents when they

could no longer provide for themselves. The kinship family (by blood and law) had this responsibility. Though a widow, in Mary's case she still had other sons and daughters to care for her (Mk 6:3). Why, then, did Jesus delegate this responsibility to someone outside their immediate family?

Though circumstances, culture and family converge on this scene, they do not each exert the same amount of influence. We cannot let contextual considerations limit our understanding of this defining point in the relational progression of his followers. I suggest that Jesus wasn't fulfilling his duty as the eldest son, nor bound by the circumstances. As he had consistently demonstrated throughout the incarnation, Jesus was taking his followers beyond culture and circumstances, even beyond family as we commonly view it. As the embodied whole of God, his sanctified life and practice constituted function beyond reductionism, which he expected also of his followers in order to participate in his new covenant family (Mt 5:20).

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

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

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

Just as Jesus didn't merely see Mary as his earthly mother, a widow, a female, he didn't merely see John as a disciple, a special friend. They were his Father's daughter and son, his sister and brother (cf. Heb 2:11), his family together in the relational progression. And that is how he wants us to be involved with each other, not stopping short at any point on this progression—no matter how well we have been servants together, nor how much we have shared as friends. This deeply touching interaction was Jesus' involvement with and response to *his family*. It was the beautiful outworking of family love in the reciprocal relational process together of *being* family and building it. Nothing less and no

substitutes, just as Jesus lived and went to the cross. This is the function of salvific life and practice in the present.

For this definite reason and unequivocal purpose, Jesus' action was just as much for John's benefit as it was for Mary—both in provision and opportunity. In response to Jesus, John acted beyond being merely a disciple, even a friend, and took Mary into "his own" (*idios*, one's own, denotes special relationship, v.27). He didn't just take her into his house; he embraced Mary as his own mother (or kinship sister). She must have embraced him also as her son (or kinship brother). In response to what each of them let go of in order to follow Jesus, he promised them an even greater family (Mk 10:29-30). True to his words as ever, he partially fulfilled his promise to them. This is the relational outcome in the present for each individual who submits to him to participate in his family. No greater satisfaction of being accepted, no fulfillment of the individual's self-worth, no certainty of one's place and belonging can be experienced by the individual person without the relational significance of the whole of his new covenant family.

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

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

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

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

Familiarity with these words must not predispose us to minimize Jesus' relational language, and thus to diminish the depth of relational significance involved here. Such reductionism can only have a relational consequence of promoting relational distance (however unintentional) from God or of reinforcing the relational condition "to be apart" (however inadvertent) from the whole of God. Moreover, I suggest, nothing will help us understand the distinction between the qualitative (e.g., element of *zoe*) and the quantitative (e.g., aspects of *bios*) than this pivotal relational statement by Jesus.

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

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

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

For this wholeness with God to be experienced, however, the relational barriers “to be apart” have to be removed. When the Son screamed out in relational pain, all those barriers had converged on him to evoke the Father's separation. I suggest, it was also the moment the Father cried, and the Spirit grieved. This was their relational work of grace; and nothing less and no substitutes could have consummated this relational consequence, which was necessary by its nature to overcome the relational consequence of sin. Furthermore, nothing less and no substitutes can constitute the family love involved in the relational process and relational conclusion of salvation. Therefore, though in a figurative sense the whole of God was broken, nevertheless the relational significance of this paradoxical moment was functionally specific to wholeness, that is, in order that we (necessarily both individually and corporately) will be whole in new relationship together.

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

If we grasp the relational significance of the Son's relational pain from being forsaken by the Father, this goes beyond relational rejection to the deeper relational condition of being apart from the whole of God. In this sense, what is taken away from the wholeness of the Trinity affects the wholeness of each trinitarian person. Not only are they no longer *in* each other but they are not one—whole. To be forsaken or to forsake is

to be separated from this fundamental whole. Certainly the mystery of this pivotal moment has no ontological understanding; God never stopped being God. And there is also the paradoxical aspect of the Son declaring he will not forsake us as orphans apart from the whole of God's family (Jn 14:18), who is now himself separated from this whole. Yet, the relational significance of this both signifies the fundamental whole of the Trinity as well as establishes the means for relationship necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. This is *the whole of the relationship of God* that Jesus not only prayed for his followers to have (Jn 17:20-23), but also paid the cost for the redemptive change necessary to truly have it, and further provided his Spirit to help us authentically experience it and ongoingly function in it together.

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

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

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

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

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

Thus, "when he had received the drink, Jesus said...."

Sixth Statement: “*It is finished*” (Jn 19:30).

“Finished” (*teleo*, complete, not merely ending it but fulfilling it to its intended conclusion), that is, his relational work for redemption to free us from the old and its relational significance “to be apart” from the whole of God (ultimate death). With these words, his ultimate salvation discourse was being brought to a close. Essentially all had been said and done, except for the concluding chapter in the history of salvation by the whole of God’s thematic relational action responding to the human relation condition.

As Jesus completed his redemptive work for the original covenant (cf. Ex 24:8 and Mk 14:24), the transition to *the new* conjointly begins. In Luke’s Gospel, the evangelist is concerned about a gospel accessible to all, thus he narrated the temple being redefined for the new covenant (Lk 23:44-45). Mark and Matthew’s Gospels also included the temple curtain event (Mk 15:38, Mt 27:51), yet they appeared to include this only as part of the narrative detail of events during the crucifixion without pointing to its relational significance (cf. Ex 26:31-33, Heb 10:19-20). Luke apparently changed the order of this event to precede and thus directly connect with this closing statement in Jesus’ salvific discourse—no doubt in further emphasis of Luke’s concern for an accessible gospel for all, which the relational significance of the torn temple curtain constitutes and Jesus’ next and last words both point to and will consummate.

Seventh Statement: “*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*” (Lk 23:46).

With his final words in this ultimate salvific discourse, Jesus engaged the furthest and deepest in the trinitarian relational context and process. This relational cry to his Father contrasted with his earlier scream from relational pain (fourth statement), yet these cries for relationship were also conjoined in the mystery of the relational dynamic enacting the Trinity’s salvific work of grace.

Jesus said, “I commit” (*paratithemi*, to entrust, i.e., to relationally entrust) “my spirit” (*pneuma*, signifying the very core of his person), yet his relational language did not constitute a dualism here implying he did not entrust his body; rather, he entrusted his whole person. His last words evidenced the submission of his whole person for relationship together in the transitional journey to complete the redemptive work of the old and to raise up the new. By his intimate involvement in this vulnerably present and ongoingly involved relational context and process of the Trinity, Jesus was fully constituted in the final salvific action necessary for this ultimate relational conclusion: the resurrection and the birth of the new creation in the new covenant relationship together as family constituted in and by the Trinity, which the Spirit ongoingly transforms from the old to the new and brings to eschatological completion.

Immediately after Jesus’ discourse, various responses from those who witnessed his death were recorded (Mk 15:39-40, Mt 27:54-55, Lk 23:47-49). By the nature of his ultimate salvific discourse, however, compatible relational response back to the whole of Jesus is necessary (*dei*) for the experiential truth and relational reality of this new covenant relationship together. This nothing-less-and-no-substitutes relational response is thus irreducible and nonnegotiable, just as Jesus vulnerably embodied and intimately involved his whole person only for this relationship together.

These were the words and actions Jesus communicated on the cross with the ultimate relational clarity and relational significance—which the Father makes imperative not only to “listen to my Son,” but also to relationally respond to the whole of the Word embodied for relationship together as family.

The Enhanced Shape of Soteriology

When Simeon, who was guided by the Spirit, saw the child Jesus in the temple, he praised God for seeing *the* Christ before he died (Lk 2:25-32). His praise expressed the deep satisfaction of having “seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight [*prosopon*, face] of all peoples, a light for revelation” (vv.30-32), stressing Luke’s concern for a gospel accessible to all. Though Jesus embodied vulnerably the gospel relationally accessible to any and all persons, Simeon’s praise also points to an ongoing issue with Jesus’ self-disclosure in general, and salvation in particular, which Simeon alluded to later (vv.34-35). This ongoing issue, even to this day, involves what we pay attention to (or ignore) in “face-to-face” examination of Jesus and his salvific work.

What Simeon saw: was not merely a baby but a person, was not merely a person but the whole person, was not merely the whole person but the whole person in his relational context and process, which involved the conjoint function of his full identity as the whole of God with his minority identity in the surrounding context of the world. Simeon grasped essentially the whole of God’s relational work of salvation, which he received in relational reciprocity with the Spirit. Yet, Simeon’s part in this process was also crucial because what he saw directly involved his perceptual-interpretive framework. That is, Simeon was not predisposed to see the Christ in the baby Jesus (especially in prevailing messianic expectations), but rather Simeon’s person (“my eyes” indicate a link to his heart signifying his person, cf. Mt 6:22) was open to the person presented to him, thus who and what Jesus’ person was. And who and what Simeon saw was critical to constitute a compatible relational response to the whole of God’s self-disclosure in Jesus for salvation and relationship together.

As we come “face to face” with the incarnation of Jesus’ person in the narrative texts, we are accountable for what we see, just as Simeon was. Who and what we see in Jesus’ person is critical to how we see Jesus function, and, conversely, how we see Jesus function is critical to the whole of who and what we see of Jesus’ person. This view certainly involves the lens of our perceptual-interpretive framework and its importance in this epistemic process and theological task. Yet, there is a deeper issue underlying our framework which antecedes its importance: the influence of reductionism. This may appear somewhat like a chicken-and-egg issue due to the reflexive dynamic between them, in which, at one point, what we pay attention to (due to our perceptual-interpretive framework) results in reductionist conclusions, while, at another point, the influence of reductionism determines what we pay attention to or ignore. (For example, did a Jewish perceptual-interpretive framework result in the prevailing messianic expectations in Jesus’ time, or did those prevailing messianic expectations determine their framework?)

Nevertheless, we need to keep in focus that reductionism is always positioned against the whole, countering its presence, and thus engaged in counter-relational work. Our perceptual-interpretive framework, for which we are responsible, emerges from

either the whole or reductionism, never from a combination of both; yet, it can function at different times on the basis of one or the other.

With this in mind, I suggest that the major issue we face about Jesus, and thus soteriology, is: The whole of the Word became flesh and dwelled vulnerably among us, but we have disembodied the Word, fragmented the whole of the Word and selectively received the Word on our terms. There are two implications or consequences from this which are of major importance:

1. By disembodiment of the Word (at least functionally, if not also theologically), we separate Jesus' whole person from his teachings (words) and example (actions); by fragmenting the whole of the Word, we fail to grasp the principle of the incarnation of nothing less and no substitutes than the whole of God and God's thematic relational action of grace; and thus by selectively receiving (or interpreting) the Word on our terms, in the epistemic process we cannot fully receive (or interpret) the relational significance of God's vulnerably present and intimately involved self-disclosure in Jesus only for covenant relationship together.
2. By disembodiment of Jesus' teachings and action, fragmenting the whole of Jesus and selectively defining Jesus and our relationship on our terms, in the theological task we formulate doctrines in general, and soteriology in particular, apart from the relational context and process of Jesus (necessary for a complete Christology) and the whole of God's thematic relational action of grace (necessary for a full soteriology). This results in artificial and false distinctions for soteriology between the future and the present, between what Jesus saved us from and save us to, leading to, I suggest, a false distinction in ecclesiology between the church and the kingdom, involving the function of an incompatible missiology with a false distinction between the call to discipleship and the Great Commission, which further leads to a false distinction in eschatology between present (realized) and future (only at the end times).

(And what gets lost in this epistemic process and theological task is pneumatology, that is, neglecting the presence and relational work of the Spirit, which would disconcert Simeon but more importantly relationally grieves the Spirit, discussed further in chapter nine).

This is illustrated in various narrative accounts of Jesus' salvific work, in which he made these consequences evident. When his salvific work (part of which involved healing to make whole, *sozo*, cf. Lk 17:19) was condemned for being engaged on the Sabbath, Jesus responded with a discourse on who, what and how he was, thus why he was engaged, in his salvific work (Jn 5:16-47, Jn's Gospel emphasizes the big picture of the whole of God). Rather than redefine the importance of the Sabbath, in this discourse Jesus challenged those who identified with the Jewish Scriptures but in effect "disembodied" them of their relational significance (vv.37-38,46-47). How so? After disclosing his relational ontology with the Father, he defined their position: "nor does [the Father's] word dwell in you" because you don't receive the embodied whole of the Word vulnerably disclosing the Father's communicative action for salvation (v.38), whose word was partially communicated to you earlier (v.46). In other words, they had the written (or oral) words of Scripture apart from the One who communicated those

words, thus words without their relational context and process. How, then, did they relate to the Scriptures?

When the Word of God is disembodied apart from its relational context and process, it becomes a near entity by itself shaped by the reader-user without the author's intention. Jesus described their approach: "You imperatively study [*eraunao*, search, look into, Gk imperative mood] the (disembodied) Scriptures because you think that in [*en*, remain in place, viz. as an end in itself] them you possess eternal life" (v.39); to paraphrase, "even though the embodied Scriptures communicate ('testify,' *martyreo*, to be a relational witness) concerning the whole of the Word vulnerably accessible in his salvific work, you willfully choose (*thelo*, not only willing but pressing on to action) not to relationally respond to me but essentially continue to shape your own salvation" (v.40). Shaping their own salvation is implied in Jesus' description "you think that" (*dokeo*, to seem to oneself, to have an opinion), evidencing their approach to the scriptural text as reader-user "in front of the text" (emphasizing the reader's opinion) over the approach "within the text" (with the primacy of the author's intention).

This process is demonstrated further in another interaction about salvation. A lawyer asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life (Lk 10:25-27, previously discussed in chapter four). Jesus pointed him to the words of the Law and asked him how (or in what way, *pos*) he read them (v.26). The lawyer responded with the two summary commandments of love (Dt 6:5, Lev 19:18), which Jesus also defined as those giving the basic Scriptures their relational significance (Mt 22:40, cf. Dt 7:9,12). Yet, though the lawyer repeated the same words, they did not have the same significance to him as they did for Jesus. Jesus focused on the relational involvement of love, not a code to follow; and if he involved himself in those relationships, it signified the life made whole (Lk 10:28).

In many Jewish practices, the law had been reduced to become a mere code of behavior—whether for national identity, self-justification or simply tradition—without any deeper significance. This is what the lawyer's approach to those vital words appeared to be, since he asked for more specific details for its practice "to justify himself" (v.29). Jesus responded with the story of the compassionate Samaritan, which was not about what to do with "my neighbor"; rather this was about how to be *agape* involved in relationship with others in congruence with God's *agape* involvement for relationship with him.

The first (and greatest) commandment to love (*agape*) the whole of God with our whole person embodied the Law as God's personal desires and establishes its relational context and process only for the purpose to be relationally involved with God. The second (of importance) commandment embodies the Law as God's personal desires for this relationship together to be extended in relationship with others. These are not the main parts of a code to follow for correct behavior. These are the Author's intention for these words, which, as relational language, were communicated only for the purpose of covenant relationship together (covenant signifying on God's terms). Moreover, these are the words which the embodied Word ultimately communicated for new covenant relationship together (together now signifying new direct intimate involvement). By disembodiment of the whole of the Word and the words of God from their relational context and process, the lawyer effectively was shaping his own salvation—as were those earlier who studied the Scriptures. Their approach to the Scriptures is like the reader (listener) of

any story who changes what the author intended in order to meet one's own desires, agenda or needs. Yet, they must be contrasted with the approach of a scribe in a similar interaction, who, Jesus said, was "not far from the kingdom of God" (Mk 12:32-34).

Somewhat analogous to "enhanced reality" created by the effects of modern electronic technology for a virtual sense, human shaping of salvation has the effect of creating "enhanced soteriology." The "enhanced" shape of soteriology—unlike in Jesus' discourse at the temple, with Nicodemus and others during his salvific work—is not basically about misunderstanding Jesus' language about raising the temple, or about born again and eternal life. Rather the issue is about reducing his language apart from this full context and process, thus diminishing or eliminating its relational significance and, therefore, losing its relational function for the experience of relationship together. This process further involves reducing Jesus' words with the consequence of disregarding, discounting or negating God's communicative action in Jesus, thus rendering the biblical text voiceless of God's self-disclosure. Apart from the full relational context and process of God, the door is open to rely on one's own reasoning independent of the text (or "in front of the text" or "behind the text") to presume about God and God's action. With the latitude to substitute one's own independent interpretation and terms for God's authorial intentions, salvation essentially becomes an "enhanced" version, constructed by one's own effort—whether emerging from one's reason directly, or through the assumptions (notably from the Enlightenment) of natural theology, historical criticism or scientific theories.

The enhanced shape of soteriology (whatever its variation) is a human construct from reductionism, which by its nature cannot be whole or involve the process to make whole; moreover, this construct can neither engage nor constitute the relationships necessary to be whole. More specifically, to construct God's kingdom or family on the basis of human means is incompatible, and at best it can only produce an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion (cf. the tower of Babel, Gen 11:1-9). Human effort is contrary to the kingdom's nature, and thus such construction would be functionally divided against itself and will fail. This was clearly made evident by Jesus in another discourse involving his salvific work (see Lk 11:14-32).

When Jesus was challenged about the nature of his power to drive out demons (to make whole) and labeled to the contrary ("by Beelzebub," vv.15-16), he disclosed the whole that is of God and God's thematic action for the human condition to be whole. He made definitive that his power was the function of and congruent with the ontology of God's action (v.20). By framing the issue in a kingdom and household (*oikos*, v.17), he equated his actions of making persons whole with God's thematic relational action responding to the human condition apart from the whole. Thus, his power and action to make whole were salvific power and salvific action (cf. his healing and *sozo*, Lk 17:15-19). Anything less than this power and action would not be able to make whole; likewise, any substitute for this power and action would not be whole, and thus could never make whole. Anything less and any substitute would be reductionism, which by its nature can never be whole. Anything less and any substitute for kingdom or family building will fail because reductionism's counter-relational work always prevents the involvement in relationships necessary to be whole. This is the intent of Satan's work, who generates reductionism and subsidizes counter-relational work.

Jesus made this explicit about his salvific work with the analogy for a kingdom and family to be whole. Reductionism and the whole are functionally incongruent and relationally incompatible. He clearly made this further evident in a key statement in this discourse: “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters” (v.23). The prepositions are important in Jesus’ words. *Meta* (“with me,” in the genitive) denotes in the midst of a close association, relationship, implying companionship, fellowship together (i.e. on his terms), though not as intimate as the preposition *syn*. *Kata* (“against me,” also in the genitive) indicates a motion downward and against, which suggests to reduce an object (in this case a person). Jesus’ person embodied the whole of the Word and disclosed the whole of God for relationship together. The alternative to relationship together *meta* the whole of Jesus is the opposing relational dynamic reducing (*kata*) the whole of Jesus, which is the definitive counter-relational work of reductionism. Jesus clearly made the alternatives either-or, the whole or reductionism, with no neutral position. And this opposing relational dynamic can function in effect even with those who have a relationship with Jesus, yet function in the relationship on their terms, thus reducing Jesus’ person and terms for relationship.

The tension between the whole and reductionism (considering its source) is ongoing, and it will continue until the eschaton. The whole is necessary both to expose and to negate reductionism. Yet, the individual person alone is not sufficient to constitute the whole. His statement goes deeper with the words “gather with me” (*synago meta*). *Syn* implies a closer relational connection than *meta* and also means “including”; combined with *ago* (to lead, bring), *synago* means to lead, bring together, gather together, assemble together inclusively. *Synago* is the root for *synagoge* (synagogue), which is the counterpart to *ekklesia* (church). Yet, to lead, bring, gather and assemble together is neither about collective activity together nor about collectively occupying the same space together. *Synago meta* Jesus is a function of relationship—the relationships necessary to be whole together. This involves the trinitarian relational process of family love to reach out, lead, bring and gather together to include all in the whole of God’s family—making definitive the function of the church as whole family in likeness of the Trinity. Thus, *synago* is salvific work to make whole those in the human condition apart from the whole of God (cf. its salvific process of family love in Mt 25:35c).

The alternative, and thus the opposing relational dynamic, to *synago* is from persons who “scatter,” which Jesus further made clearly an either-or alternative. *Skorpizo* (to scatter, disperse) juxtaposed and in tension with *synago* points to the tension between reductionism and the whole. That is to say, therefore, *skorpizo* further involves reducing the whole by fragmenting both the whole of persons and relationships together. Any reduction of the person and relationships reinforces the human condition “to be apart” from the whole; and this can be accomplished (1) when the ontology is diminished, for example, by defining the person based on what one does or has, and (2) when relationships are minimalized, for example, by functioning without intimacy. This reduction, then, can and does operate even within a church (cf. churches in Rev 2 & 3). The operation of reductionism in churches today suggests a crisis because the whole is necessary to expose it and then to negate it.

The plenary either-or language Jesus used for these alternatives should not be considered hyperbole. There is no state or condition between that which is whole and less than whole, thus no functional alternative in-between them. This makes the two

metaphors he used in this discourse to frame his key statement, as well as extend the issue of his household family (*oikos*), vital for the salvific work to make whole the church as family. The first metaphor is about a strong man fully capable of guarding his house and possession, who is later overpowered and stripped of his security and possession (vv.21-22). This points to the salvific work of the whole of God prevailing over Satan. At the same time, this metaphor was first introduced in a Markan intercalation (so-called “Markan sandwich”),³¹ in which the definitive whole of the kingdom, household family of God, was framed (sandwiched) between an issue with his biological family and what Jesus made definitive as his family (Mk 3:20-35). Mark’s narrative style not only further distinguishes God’s family (kingdom) but also makes evident the ongoing tension with the whole that Jesus’ biological family represented—that is, reducing the whole of Jesus and his salvific work, and thus his kingdom-family. While his biological family and the scribes were certainly acting with different intentions, they both still had the effect of reductionism.

Neither Luke nor Matthew followed Mark’s narrative style for this discourse, though Matthew included the portion of Jesus with his family (Mt 12:46-50). In Luke’s narrative, the first metaphor still points to the prevailing salvific work of God over Satan. Yet, with Luke’s concern for salvation for all nations (God’s kingdom for all peoples), it seems reasonable to consider a further purpose for Luke’s narrative structure for this discourse and the placement of these two metaphors. With this in mind, and given this discourse’s theme of the tension between reductionism and the whole, I suggest that this metaphor also conversely represents a call from Jesus for his church family not to make assumptions about its life and to be focused: on being whole and what reductionism will do to the whole if allowed to operate—an assumption many from Israel made about its life with such consequences.

The second metaphor is of an evil spirit which comes out of a house only to return to it later to find it cleaned and freed (from its previous condition), and thus more inviting to occupy again, making the condition of the house even worse than the first time (vv.24-26). This points to a relational consequence for a current generation of Jews (see Mt’s context for this metaphor, Mt 12:39-45). Yet, this metaphor in Luke’s narrative, while extending the emphasis of the first metaphor, also suggests an even deeper call from Jesus to his church family for the experiential truth of salvation: That it is not sufficient merely to be saved *from* (cleaned and redeemed from sin) for the whole, but also necessary to be saved *to* in order to be whole—the whole both necessary and sufficient to negate reductionism. This relational outcome is necessary to preclude the relational consequence pointed to.

Both of these metaphors functionally pivot on Jesus’ key statement (v.23) in this discourse. This is crucial to grasp for church function. The church as the household (*oikos*) of God “will fall” (*pipto*, to fall down, v.17), that is, essentially be reduced in its qualitative significance by operating with means and practices incongruent with family—for example, as an institutional system, by business organization models, or simply as a voluntary association. The church as family is only a function of relationships, intimate interdependent relationships together, and thus is incompatible with practices operating without the primacy of these relationships together. If church gatherings, activities and

³¹ For a description of intercalation in Mark, see Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Doubleday: New York, 1997), 130-131.

programs are allowed to operate with such incompatible practices, it “will fall”—be reduced in its relational significance both to God and to each other, even while operating very productively (cf. church at Ephesus, Rev 2:2-4) or very successfully (cf. church at Sardis, Rev 3:1-2).

The whole of this discourse in Luke’s Gospel speaks to the wholeness of God’s salvific action (partially overviewed in vv.29-32), which Jesus embodied as “the finger of God” in the relational work of grace necessary to constitute the experiential truth that “the kingdom of God has come to you” (v.20). His functional juxtaposition of kingdom and household supports their congruence. That is, the whole of God’s salvific action fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus was solely for the new covenant relationship together as God’s very own family. Therefore, his above statement constitutes the ultimate of God’s thematic action and can be rendered: “Since I embody the whole of the relational ontology of God, the whole of the family of God has come to you in the whole of who, what and how I am”—the nature of which is irreducible and nonnegotiable. Apart from his trinitarian relational context of family and trinitarian relational process of family love, there is no salvation; and any human effort to shape its own will fall—no matter how enhanced.

In a parenthetical statement in this discourse, Jesus responded to a reductionist comment praising a human shaping of his ontology and identity (discussed previously). Instead, he blessed those who listen to the embodied whole of the Word of God and relationally respond on his terms (vv.27-28). This is the only conclusion of relational significance for this discourse, indeed for any and all of Jesus’ discourses.

The Qualitative Shape of the Kingdom

What emerges from salvation and being born again (from above), and is synonymous with eternal life and the eschatological hope, is the kingdom of God (or heaven, used by Mt to be indirect in reverence for God for Jewish readers). The primary questions involved in the issue of the kingdom are: (1) what is the kingdom that has come? and (2) when does the kingdom emerge? As much as the imminence of the kingdom has been debated, I suggest this cannot be adequately answered until the kingdom itself is sufficiently defined and understood. When this is grasped, I further suggest the question of its imminence becomes secondary—not unimportant, only less significant in the eschatological plan of God’s thematic action. The following brief initial discussion hopefully will make this clear and be the basis for related discussion in following chapters.

Its Questions and Approach

In his hermeneutical discourse defending his salvific work, Jesus exposed a false eschatological hope of those Jews incorrectly embedded in the Scriptures (Jn 5:39-40, discussed earlier). This eschatological hope was the life to come, or the kingdom of God’s kingship and sovereign rule, which John’s Gospel correctly embodied in the full

relational context and process of the whole of God. Keeping this hermeneutic in mind, we shift to Luke's Gospel, who was concerned for a kingdom for all peoples.

The term "kingdom of God" is not found in the OT, yet the reality and expectation of God's kingship and sovereign rule are embedded in the OT. The issue then and now is how the Scriptures are approached, thus how God's kingdom is perceived and responded to.

When some Pharisees questioned Jesus about the coming of the kingdom of God, he could have replied as he did in the above discourse and with Nicodemus: "You study and teach the Scriptures but do you not understand this?" Yet, the implication of such a reply was there in the response he did give to this query: "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:20-21).

The focus of Jesus' response tends to be on "is within you." Before, however, this can be understood, we need to address the issue Jesus raised about "your careful observation," which includes the implication his reply involves. "Careful observation" (*parateresis*) characterized the rigorous practice of Pharisees observing their covenant code of behavior, which, more importantly, reflected the lens of their perceptual-interpretive framework operating in their approach to the Scriptures and their eschatological hope. Jesus implied (as with those in Jn 5:39) that their careful observations through the lens of their perceptual-interpretive framework only focused on the quantitative aspects of the kingdom—which was a process somewhat analogous to the Enlightenment's scientific method.

Thus, the issue Jesus addressed about the kingdom "within you" (*en*) is less about any measured-temporal sense of the kingdom: that is, "among you collectively," and thus is present (already, realized eschatology), or only "within you," thus merely an inward (spiritual) nature pointing to the future (not yet, future eschatology). More significantly, I suggest, Jesus addressed the issue between reductionism of the kingdom merely to quantitative terms as opposed to the qualitative integrity of the whole of the kingdom's relational significance. This is the major issue of the kingdom in its past, present and future—in Israel's past, in Jesus' present, in the whole of God's thematic action in relational progression to the future—which directly involves how the Scriptures are approached, how God's kingdom is perceived and responded to.

Its Whole and Reductionism

The kingdom of God cannot be reduced to quantitative factors, though it certainly involves them in secondary ways. Nevertheless, the kingdom can only be defined in whole by qualitative terms, which vulnerably involves the whole person (signified by the heart) though the whole of the kingdom is not contained in the individual person; and conjointly, the kingdom can only be determined in function by qualitative relational terms directly involving the relationships together necessary to be whole, the whole of God in likeness of the Trinity.

This was the qualitative significance that the whole of the Word embodied to disclose vulnerably the whole of God for covenant relationship together in "the kingdom of God has come to you" (Lk 11:20). Luke's Gospel narrates Jesus' salvific discourses

and work with the emphasis of the kingdom of God for all peoples. A Jewish bias, particularly in a reductionist hermeneutic of their Scriptures, would reduce the whole of the kingdom and preclude access by all. Thus, it is important in Luke's narrative accounts to interrelate Jesus' discourses about approaching the Scriptures with grasping the relational significance of the kingdom of God.

This necessitates revisiting Jesus' demonstrative joy with the Spirit in praising the Father for "your righteous intent" (*eudokia*) of "disclosing the whole of God and God's thematic action to little children," not to "the wise and learned" (Lk 10:21). Those who represent "little children" are persons vulnerably engaged in qualitative relational involvement with the whole of Jesus—neither distant relationally by engaging a disembodied Word, nor detached relationally by analytically observing the secondary details of the Word and God's action, as "the wise and learned" were incorrectly embedded in the Scriptures. The whole of God's self-disclosure in Jesus involves his relational context and process, in which "little children" relationally respond compatibly for the connection necessary for the relational flow of communication, as Jesus made definitive (Lk 10:22). This has been a hermeneutical issue through Israel's history in search of the eschatological hope (10:23-24).

"The wise and learned" (in Lk 10:21) were directly associated with "your careful observation" (in Lk 17:20). This evidenced both their reductionist interpretive framework imposed on the Scriptures (and God's self-disclosure in the Word embodied), and their reductionist perceptual framework delimiting the kingdom of God to quantitative parameters without the qualitative relational significance of the whole accessible to all "little children." This was earlier summarized in John's Gospel (emphasizing the big picture) with Jesus' disarming words in his hermeneutical discourse of his salvific work: "You diligently study the Scriptures but you depend on your own perceptual interpretation to signify your eternal life, your membership in the kingdom" (Jn 5:39).

The Old and the New

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

ekklesia) the family of God, both signifying and constituting “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (12:28).

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

Yet, the *mysterion* of the kingdom can remain hidden even though they were vulnerably disclosed by Jesus and made directly accessible even to “little children.” This happens for two important reasons, which Jesus identified at the beginning of the above discourse with his disciples (with the parables of the kingdom directed to the crowds, Mt 13:13). First, Jesus the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven were disclosed only for covenant relationship together, not for the quantitative aspects and functional implications of his kingly rule. The latter became the focus determined by a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework, which Jesus identified as an ongoing issue in Israel’s history (vv.13-14). Predisposed by reductionism, what they paid attention to and ignored precluded their understanding (*syniemi*, denotes putting the pieces together into a whole) and prevented them from perceiving deeply (*horaō*, not merely to see but means to pay attention to an object to recognize its significance, encounter its true nature and to experience it). Furthermore, their whole person had been reduced (signified by their “heart has become calloused”) to function without qualitative relational significance, thus biasing what they paid attention to and ignored; this had a direct relational consequence “to be apart” from the whole of God, to which God’s thematic relational work of grace in Jesus would respond if they opened their heart (v.15).

This points to the second important reason the kingdom remains hidden despite Jesus’ vulnerable disclosure and intimate accessibility. Jesus began this discourse saying “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you but not to them” (v.11). This was not a selective bias by Jesus showing preferential treatment to some while denying access to others, which he appeared to embed in a system of inequitable distribution (v.12). This was about relationship and its reciprocity. Jesus was pointing to the terms necessary for the nature of the relational process he was defining, and to the relational outcome (or consequence) of its ongoing experience (or lack thereof). “The knowledge” (*ginosko*, to know, experience) was not the mere information of propositional truths to quantify in a belief (or theological) system. This was experiential truth which “has been given” (*didomi* in Gk perfect tense, passive voice), thus accentuating the fact of Jesus’ relational communication of this kingdom knowledge “to you” and stressing his ongoing relational process for his disciples to respond back to and be involved with him in for their experience of the truth of new covenant relationship together. This reciprocal relational involvement in his relational process is the nothing-less-and-no-substitute terms necessary to grasp the kingdom of heaven—the terms Jesus pointed to, which he affirmed the disciples engaged (however imperfectly) while the others did not (vv.16-17).

These terms for relationship are the terms for adherence Jesus defined for his disciples (*mathetai*). These terms for adherence to Jesus are inherent in *matheteuo*, not only for teachers of the covenant relationship (in his above definitive statement, 13:52) but for all his followers to be functional in the kingdom of God. Matthew's Gospel takes *matheteuo* very seriously, given the evangelist's emphasis on discipleship.³² Moreover, Matthew is the only Gospel to record a specific imperative in Jesus' Great Commission, which is "make disciples (*matheteusate*, imperative of *matheteuo*) of all nations" (Mt 28:19).

These are the terms for relationship together with the whole of God. Without the function of relationship together in Jesus' relational context and process, there is no experiential truth of the kingdom of God, regardless of whether the kingdom is already (present) and/or not yet (future).

The Problem with Kingly Rule

The ongoing discussion, and pervading difficulty, to define the *what* of the kingdom and the *when* appears to suffer from a similar hermeneutical issue keeping the kingdom hidden from Jesus' contemporaries. I suggest that the prevailing working definition of the kingdom focused on God's kingly rule becomes an epistemic problem when approached with a similar perceptual-interpretive framework illustrated by those in the above discourse. A primarily quantitative tendency has difficulty understanding the depth of "God reigns" and the qualitative relational significance involved, thus tends to reduce it merely to the function of sovereign (kingly) rule. This delimits the relational ontology of the whole of God and essentially puts constraints on how God functions in that ontology, notably in the incarnation. For example, if the angel's words to Mary about the child she will birth (Lk 1:30-33) are interpreted apart from the qualitative relational significance of Jesus' whole person and his relational context and process, Jesus can only be a king who rules. This constrains the whole of Jesus and God's thematic action in a "quantitative box" without any further and deeper significance. This certainly has relational consequences receiving the whole of Jesus and responding to "the kingdom of God has come to you."

Moreover, the focus on God's kingly rule implies a predisposition to see God's rule only on certain terms, even tending toward our terms (e.g., see Jn 6:14-15). This predisposition is seen in Israel's history. God's thematic action was epitomized in their redemption from Egypt (Dt 4:32-34). Yet, God's self-disclosure in this redemptive experience was not about showing God's power and rule, rather about perceiving (*ra'ah*) the whole of God ("his Presence [*pane*h, face] and his great strength") and God's ongoing action for relationship together in the covenant of love (4:35-37, cf. 7:8-9). If God's people only focused on a reduced God, that is, on the quantitative aspects of what God did (power and rule), then their focus would always be essentially about "What have you done for me lately?," not on God's whole "person" (being) and relationship together

³² In his study of the term *mathetes* (disciple), Michael J. Wilkins makes a case for calling Matthew's Gospel a manual on discipleship in *Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 126-172.

in the covenant of love. This predisposition characterized their wilderness experience and pervaded their eschatological hope.

The tendency to see God's rule only on such terms is a reductionist consequence from an imbalanced focus on God's kingly rule. Yet, God already sovereignly rules; from the reflection in Psalm 93, as Creator the Lord already and always reigns—that is a given. God does not have to prove it, though at times does demonstrate it. Even when the disciples asked on the sea of Galilee, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him” (Mk 4:41), this was not about Jesus proving he reigns, nor a great display of power for the Creator. God simply reigns—a fact which was insufficient to deeply impact those disciples and change their lives in the days ahead with Jesus (which Mark's Gospel critically portrays of the disciples).

It is also insufficient to make God's kingly rule the purpose of the kingdom and of Jesus' salvific work. God's thematic action since creation is not about ruling, and the incarnation of the Word (the one and only Son) was not to establish a king to rule. This was a discussion Jesus had with Pilate about being a king and his kingdom, which Jesus qualified by his purpose “to testify to the truth” (Jn 18:36-37). John's Gospel provides the overarching picture, that Jesus testified (*martyreo*, witness as a participant, not mere observer) as of the transcendent and thus of the transcendent God (Jn 3:31-36), intimately making vulnerable the whole of God (*exegeomai*, Jn 1:18). His truth was for redemption to be in relationship together as family (Jn 8:31-36). As the Truth to the Father (Jn 14:6), Jesus embodied the truth only for this relationship (Jn 1:14, then 12); at that time of his farewell discourse, the disciples still had difficulty grasping the whole of Jesus because they were predisposed by their lingering quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework (Jn 14:4-9, discussed previously).

Thus, Jesus' salvific work and the kingdom must be understood in this further and deeper relational context and process. The whole of God and God's action are only about relationship, relationship together, covenant relationship together, which certainly then is only on God's terms. And God's terms for relationship may be interpreted only as kingly rule, but this would reduce the qualitative relational significance of Jesus' relational work of grace in *agape* involvement. Relationship, by the nature of the relational ontology of the whole of God, cannot be decreed, legislated, otherwise imposed, nor can it be unilateral.

Its Qualitative Relational Nature and Function

Covenant relationship together necessitates reciprocal relational response and involvement, the function of which needs to be compatible with the whole and holy God. This was the significance of the relational process Jesus both initiated in the incarnation with the strategic shift of God's thematic action and made his whole person vulnerable for with the tactical shift of his salvific work. Not only had the kingdom of God come, most significantly the transcendent, immanent, whole and holy God was present and involved for relationship together. Conjointly, this necessary relational response and involvement are reciprocated only on the basis of the *agape* involvement of family love experienced first from the whole of God's relational work of grace in the functional shift, which constitutes both the whole person and those persons together in the relationships

necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. There is no other relational context and process involving the Trinity's thematic action, and only this relational context and process constitutes what *is* the kingdom of God. That is, the kingdom (already or not yet) cannot be separated from the embodied whole of Jesus' trinitarian relational context and process; the whole of Jesus' person and action (in word and deed) constituted the whole of "the kingdom of God has come to you."

Until we grasp this qualitative relational nature and function of the kingdom, we cannot adequately address the present-future issue of the kingdom; nor can we fully interpret Jesus' words "has come" (*ephthasen*, Lk 11:20) and "has come near" (*engiken*, Mk 1:15). After John was put in prison, Jesus began "proclaiming the good news of the God... 'The kingdom of God has come near. [Respond to] the good news'" (Mk 1:14-15). "Proclaim" (*kerysso*) is also rendered "preach"—conventionally perceived in a role of preaching. We can either disembody Jesus' words about the kingdom to merely words (preached), which is the pervasive practice preaching has come to signify. Or, we can interpret those words of the kingdom as the embodied whole of the Word in relational language.

Engiken and *ephthasen* have an abstract sense (a reduced sense) if *what* has come near, or has come, involves merely words (even if it includes deeds) about the kingdom; mere words would not likely constitute good news to evoke your response, especially if you expect more than words (even if they speak truth and hope). On the other hand, *engiken* and *ephthasen* have a distinct whole sense when *what* is *who* has come near, and has come, to embody the very kingdom of God itself. *Who* becomes good news indeed, which persons can receive (not merely hear words) and relationally respond back to ("Repent and trust the good news"). Words by themselves are not good news (or bad); embodied words become the gospel to relationally respond back to, or the threat from "bad" news to relationally react against—both of which are played out in the Gospels' narratives. The hermeneutical issue, then, for *engiken* and *ephthasen* becomes if Jesus' relational context and process embodying the kingdom has relational significance for the present or only the future.

Furthermore, the epistemic problem of the kingdom involves not only disembodiment of Jesus' words but also reducing his person merely to his deeds. Jesus' deeds (or his ministry) were certainly quantified in history, and this historical aspect is valid and necessary. Ladd aligned the two to render *ephthasen* as a fulfillment of the kingdom of God in history (i.e. in Jesus' ministry) as well as the kingdom's full consummation at the end of history (Jesus' second coming, parousia).³³ This makes the kingdom of God both present and future, which is certainly good news. Yet, this emerges from a reduction of Jesus' person to his deeds, thus becomes too quantitative and conceptual for the kingdom of God. This is insufficient to grasp the significance of Jesus' words, which was relational language, and his actions, which were salvific as God's thematic relational action—the function of which constitutes the kingdom of God. Disembodiment of Jesus' words and reducing his person to his deeds both create an epistemic problem to grasp the relational significance of the whole of Jesus' salvific action, and thus the experiential truth of what Jesus saved us to: that is, to experience the kingdom of God's present relational outcome embodied with Jesus in new relationship together, the relational progression of which comes to completion in the relational conclusion at the eschaton.

³³ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 54-78.

The shape of the kingdom of God cannot emerge from reductionism. Reductionism always counters the relationships of the whole, separating or distancing persons in the relationships to be whole—for example, by stratifying relationships in a system of inequality, which Jesus found operating in the temple and throughout the surrounding context. Revisiting the disciples' dispute about which of them was greatest, Jesus redefined the significance of ruling in relationship together in his kingdom by constituting their relationships in unstratified intimate involvement together (Lk 22:24-30), which pointed them back to the function of "little children" and the need for redemptive change for the new relationship together in God's kingdom (Mt 18:1-4). This was the kingdom Jesus embodied and conferred on his followers, which was incompatible with reductionism.

Yet, reductionism reshapes the kingdom of God into ontological simulations, and even distorts its shape with epistemological illusions. Consequently, we need to grasp Jesus' relational context and process for the *whole* of his kingdom to expose the presence and influence of reductionism. The only shape constituting the kingdom of God emerges from the whole of Jesus embodied for new relationship together fulfilling God's thematic action in response to the human relational condition "to be apart" from the whole, God's whole.

The kingdom of God had come near even before the beginning of Jesus' ministry proclaiming the good news; Luke's Gospel provides its biographical roots. Mary's song and Zechariah's song pointed to him in their summation of God's thematic action of grace fulfilling the covenant promise of salvation (Lk 1:46-55; 67-79). As Simeon received the child Jesus into his arms, he confirmed that God's salvation and kingdom for all had come near (Lk 2:28-32), which the prophetess Anna also affirmed upon meeting the child (Lk 2:38). Then, at age twelve, Jesus took action to initiate the function for the kingdom of God that had come near (Lk 2:49).

As Jesus began to proclaim the good news with the whole of his person and action, the kingdom of God had come nearer. As he functioned in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love, and his salvific work relationally progressed, Jesus increasingly gave shape to the kingdom of God until it had come—wholly embodied for new relationship together. This qualitative relational shape is the experiential truth of the kingdom of God accessible to all for compatible relational response to the good news of the embodied whole and holy, transcendent God vulnerably present and intimately involved for this covenant relationship together.

Indeed, "The kingdom of God has come to you. Relationally respond to the good news."

Clarification and Summary Issues

There are some matters to clarify about the qualitative relational shape of the kingdom and some summary issues to address about its significance.

The kingdom of God still signifies God's sovereign rule, though as a dynamic rule without involving a geographical realm, as well as signifies God's eschatological rule with the *new* realm. In the previous salvific discourse, Jesus clearly identified driving out demons with the kingdom of God (Mt 12:28, Lk 11:20). This was certainly about the

Christ's authority and kingly rule. Yet, driving out demons, along with his other healing (cf. Lk 7:20-23), was also the deeper part of his salvific relational work to *sozo*, that is, to make whole those apart from the whole. Thus, the function of God's reign with this action was not in relation to those made whole but God's reign over Satan in general, and over Satan's counter-relational work of reductionism in particular. Even though reductionism's struggle with God's whole is ongoing, God's rule prevails—that is a given, which even the demons understood (cf. Mk 1:24, Mt 8:29-31). To give primary focus for the kingdom to God's reign is to reduce the relational significance of those made whole for relationship together as the kingdom of God (cf. the inclusive table fellowship of those made whole in the kingdom of God, Lk 13:29-30).

When the appointed seventy-two followers returned to Jesus joyfully to report that the demons were subjugated to them in his name, Jesus clearly put his authority and rule into this further and deeper perspective: "I have given you authority to rule (*exousia*)...over the enemy; nothing will harm (*adikeo*) you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Lk 10:17-20). Jesus shifted them from the quantitative focus of his kingly rule to the qualitative focus on relationship together, with future relational implications. This was the purpose of the whole of God's thematic action and the significance of God's strategic shift. Salvation and the kingdom of God are not about the primacy of God's rule but about the primacy of belonging to God's kingdom in relationship together in the covenant of love. *Adikeo* essentially involves violating, and thus reducing, the whole of covenant relationship together, against which Jesus' reign over Satan will always prevail.

I suggest, therefore, that God's present dynamic reign is relationship-specific to Satan, to rule ongoingly over him and his counter-relational work of reductionism; as such, God's rule is not the primary functional focus of the kingdom with those in covenant relationship together. Though by prevailing over Satan's struggle against God's whole, God's reign is certainly relationally significant ongoingly for those in the kingdom (cf. Mt 16:18). Furthermore, God's present rule continues until God's eschatological rule will conclude Satan's ultimate defeat and the *new* realm (new heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem) for God's people will commence. This, I suggest, is the significance of God's reign and its function in the kingdom, both present and future.

With this focus for the kingdom, we can grasp its deeper shape, which foremost involves defining Jesus' person and the whole of God by a deeper significance than merely what they do, namely kingly rule. This helps us understand the direct interrelation between the kingdom and the ontology of the whole of Jesus. Jesus' whole person constitutes his relational involvement in the incarnation to make *whole* the human condition in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love; his embodied function signified the relational ontology of the whole of God, the Trinity qua family. Therefore, the kingdom of God is the direct relational outcome (experienced in the relational progression of the present) and relational conclusion (completed in the future) of the whole of Jesus' salvific relational presence and involvement, nothing less and no substitutes. This means that the functional significance of the kingdom of God must (*dei*) by this nature conjointly be about being God's whole and also involve the relationships together necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. The kingdom, then, in this specific relational context and process can only

be on God's terms, never human, consequently irreducible and nonnegotiable in the new covenant relationship together.

When Jesus initiated the Lord's supper for the ultimate table fellowship, the cup was "the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (Lk 22:20). The disciples had not yet grasped the significance of the new covenant for relationship together in the kingdom, since immediately after the supper was their dispute about which of them was the greatest (Lk 22:24-30, cf. 13:29-30). While Jesus exposed their reductionism and constituted their relationships in the relational whole of his kingdom, the disciples evidenced their need to be changed (cf. Mt 18:1-4)—that is, the process of redemptive change in which the old dies so the new rises. Earlier Jesus pointed to the significance of the *new* with the parable of new wine (Lk 5:33-39). This tends to be used incorrectly to emphasize new forms and practices, but the new is about changed persons experiencing new relationship together (the focus in vv.34-35). Perhaps, at that stage, the disciples only practiced ontological simulation of the new by following only Jesus' example without relational involvement with his whole person. Yet, redemptive change was soon available for them when Jesus fulfilled his salvific work, as the Lord's supper pointed to.

The process to the new is what Jesus' salvific work saved us to: the kingdom of God, or its equivalence in John's Gospel, eternal life. John's Gospel replaces "kingdom" language with eternal life, possibly in part to avoid any conflicts such language could create with Gentiles, yet more importantly to provide the further and deeper significance of the kingdom in the relational context and process of the whole of Jesus. The kingdom that had come came embodied *in* Jesus, the whole of the Word. As he told Nicodemus, the qualitative relational shape of the whole of God's kingdom was "born from above," not by human shaping: born new by the Spirit as the new creation in the image of the relational ontology of the whole of God, thus made whole in new relationship together in likeness of the Trinity—just as Jesus asked the Father in his formative family prayer (Jn 17). Therefore, the kingdom of God indeed signifies more than God's kingly rule; and Jesus embodied that significance and constituted the kingdom in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love for this new covenant relationship together—functioning beyond the quantitative limits of the old to intimate relationship together in the relational ontology (*zoe*) of the Trinity.

Matthew's Gospel clearly focused on the kingdom of heaven in continuity with the OT, yet also affirmed its relational process to the new. After Jesus disclosed the significance of the parables of the kingdom to his disciples, only Matthew recorded Jesus' analogy for them as leaders which made necessary the experiential truth of the new of the kingdom (Mt 13:52). The new of the kingdom, however, has its strongest identity in Luke's Gospel (and developed in his second volume, Acts), whose concern for the Gentiles was an accessible gospel signifying the kingdom of God for all. While there is no shortage of kingdom language to maintain continuity with the OT, Luke conjoined the kingdom with a feast constituted by all people groups to ensure the new (Lk 13:29-30). Thus, it is helpful to connect various accounts of table fellowship in Luke to further grasp the qualitative relational significance of the kingdom and its process to the new.

We can start with Jesus' surprising statement to Zacchaeus that he must (*dei*) by the nature of his salvific work have table fellowship at Zacchaeus' house, and thus the relational outcome of that experience (Lk 19:5,9-10). Next, Jesus was anointed by a

prostitute during table fellowship at a Pharisee's house to disclose both the *agape* involvement of his salvific work and the reciprocal relational response by a person made whole (*sozo*) having received him (Lk 7:36-50). These narrative accounts evidence the table fellowship of the new wine involving changed persons experiencing new relationship together, persons who were not stuck in, constrained by or satisfied with the old but had embraced the New (Lk 5:34-39, cf. table fellowship with Martha and Mary, Lk 10:38-42). Thus, the new wine table fellowship is a function of the new creation, the relational reality of which was constituted by the experiential truth of the blood of the new covenant initiating in the present the ultimate table fellowship (Lk 22:20). And this all has the relational conclusion at the eternal ultimate table fellowship of the kingdom of God for all in new covenant relationship together as God's whole without reductionism (Lk 13:29-30).

Each of the canonical Gospels provides the evangelist's unique portrait of Jesus and his shaping of the kingdom of God. Yet, none of them alone is definitive of the whole of Jesus or of the kingdom. Together, however, the whole of God in Jesus wholly emerges and the kingdom becomes definitive in the whole of God's thematic action embodied by Jesus for this new relationship together. Grasping this in Jesus is receiving the qualitative presence of the whole of God and the relational involvement of the whole of God as Trinity, the experiential truth of which suggests that artificial and false distinctions are made about "the kingdom of God has come to you." These distinctions have no functional significance to God's intentions in response to the human condition, or to God's desires for relationship together.

An ongoing issue about the kingdom of God is the tension between "already" and "not yet" (whether present or future), yet this conversation has been about a quantitative tension, not a qualitative matter. This tension involves the temporal focus of *chronos*: the quantitative perception of time denoting a period measured by the successive passing of moments (or events). Despite various references Jesus made to temporal aspects of the kingdom, he was not focused on *chronos* (cf. his Olivet discourse on end times, Mt 24:36). Having been asked when the kingdom of God would come, he made definitive that it cannot be determined by a quantitative focus (Lk 17:20). Why? Because by its nature, as he embodied, "the kingdom of God is within (or among) you" (Lk 17:21). That is to say, not that the kingdom is spiritual (in the sense of being only subjective and esoteric), but rather the ontology of the kingdom is qualitative; "the kingdom is" (*eimi*, verb of existence, also a copula) conjoined "within you (pl)" as qualitative whole persons and "among you" in qualitative relational significance.

The ontology of the kingdom of God is suggested further in Jesus' statement making definitive the kingdom as "little children" in relationship together (Lk 18:16). This cannot be measured in reductionist terms like *chronos* and determined by a quantitative focus, even on the Word. Jesus embodied the kingdom and gave it its qualitative relational shape in *kairos* (qualitative time, season, characterized by the critical importance and decisive influence of something, see Lk 12:56). Though this certainly happened in the history of *chronos*, that is secondary to the primacy of the kingdom's qualitative relational significance in *kairos*—the experiential truth of which is only for new relationship together with those "little children" who relationally respond back in qualitative compatibility (cf. Lk 10:21, Mt 18:3).

Thus, the functional reality of relationship together, I suggest, makes the already-not yet issue rather insignificant and an artificial distinction for the kingdom of God; and such notions serve to diminish the whole of Jesus and “the kingdom of God that has come to you.”

Moreover, the whole of God’s strategic shift in the mystery of the incarnation constituted God’s dwelling from a quantitative sanctuary (mountain, tabernacle, temple, cf. Jn 4:21) directly to the qualitative sanctuary both “within you” and “among you” as whole persons in the relationships necessary to be whole together with God. This was the purpose Jesus vulnerably disclosed to the Samaritan woman that the whole of God seeks new relationship together with persons only “in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:21-24, discussed previously). It is an artificial distinction to separate the kingdom as God’s kingly rule and realm to the future from the present reality of the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of God for new relationship together as God’s family.

Likewise, it is a false distinction to separate out any notion of the kingdom in the present from the present reality of God’s life and action within and among God’s people. This fragments God into kingly rule and *agape* involvement as family, which includes the affectionate expression of *phileo*. In addition, this reduces the relational ontology of the whole of God and constrains God and God’s action to the quantitative aspects of *bios*, as opposed to the qualitative element of *zoe*. This then shapes the kingdom differently from the qualitative relational “kingdom of God that has come to you”; furthermore, in that same discourse Jesus made clear his position against reductionism, indicating that the kingdom and family were equivalent (Lk 11:17-26).

What Jesus embodied cannot be limited to *bios*. The life Jesus embodied, and in which he constituted his followers, only has significance in *zoe*—that is, the qualitative life of the whole of God, the *zoe* of the Trinity. The whole of Jesus is the qualitative nature of those together born by the Spirit as the new creation. The whole of Jesus’ action in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love is the qualitative relational shape and significance of the new creation. Jesus functioned only for relationship together as his family and ongoingly constituted his followers as God’s family, even while on the cross. His kingdom cannot be distinguished from his family without reductionism. This signifies “the kingdom of God that has come” not merely as kingly rule but, more importantly, as the function of new relationship together as family. This new relational function is relationship-specific to the whole of relationships Jesus constitutes his followers both in and for: his family, his family in the present as the church, thus the church as God’s family in which the whole of God ongoingly dwells in family love (Jn 14:23; 17:26, cf. Eph 2:19-22).

Therefore, it is a false distinction to say that the kingdom of God is God’s kingly rule and the church is the fellowship of those who have experienced God’s rule, and to maintain the church is not the kingdom.³⁴ There is no basis to separate them other than reductionism. The kingdom of God is quite humbly this family of “little children” vulnerably enacted to us in love by the whole of Jesus, through whom we become God’s very own family in new covenant relationship together—however incomplete in the present, nevertheless in the relational progression with the Son by the Spirit to the Father for the complete whole of God in ultimate communion together. This is the new creation, which in function is the church as family today and the presence of God’s kingdom in the

³⁴ For a discussion of this notion, see Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 103-117.

world—however imperfect, yet in the reciprocal relational process with the whole of God for redemptive change to perfection.

Understandably, a purpose to separate out the kingdom from the church is to not associate it with imperfection. Yet, while this may have human purpose, it has no basis in terms of the whole and holy God. The original creation was made whole in the image and likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity, yet created with human will and thus the volition “to be apart” from the whole of relationships together—consequently, the human condition. God’s grace responded to restore the whole of relationship together. In the new creation, human volition remains necessary by the reciprocal nature of relationships together as family by family love, which cannot be decreed, legislated, or otherwise imposed. Thus, the choice to be whole or “to be apart” is present and will presently remain in tension with reductionism, notably susceptible to its ontological simulations and epistemological illusions in the life and practice of the church.

At the same time, the new creation has been redeemed to belong to the whole of God’s family, thus never to be orphaned but in ongoing reciprocal intimate relational involvement with the Spirit, who will complete the relational process to the perfection of the whole as family in new relationship together with the whole and holy God. In other words, even in the present function the new creation goes qualitatively well beyond original creation, human volition notwithstanding; and God’s grace in the function of reciprocal relationship indeed is sufficient basis to ongoingly meet its relational needs. It is this qualitative relational shape and significance of the new creation (and the kingdom of God) which will always meet the need in the human condition for wholeness, and thus will emerge as the light in whatever situation and circumstance “to be apart” it may find itself or may encounter in the world.

A closing summary issue is made in summation. The theological implication of the above discussion is that our understanding of the kingdom of God must by nature cohere with the whole of Jesus and his salvific action in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. The functional implication is that without this coherence, we have no experiential truth of the kingdom of God on which to base in function our relational belonging to God’s whole (not merely as a belief), or even the eschatological hope of belonging. This tends to leave Christians in the emotional condition (often unknowingly) of relational orphans, of which many Christians experience the relational distance, especially as members of churches.

Functional Implications

All doctrine must be functional dynamically to be of qualitative significance. If doctrine properly functions dynamically in qualitative significance, it functions in the trinitarian relational context and with the trinitarian relational process. This is vital, notably for the doctrine of salvation, soteriology.

A well-known hymn points to an existing problem about the function of soteriology. The hymn is “Jesus Saves,”³⁵ which tends to be a rally cry for missions. Some of the words are noted below:

³⁵ Written by Priscilla J. Owens (1829-1907) and arranged by William J. Kirkpatrick (1838-1921).

*We have heard the joyful sound: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Spread the tidings all around: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Bear the news to every land...; Jesus saves! Jesus saves!*

The question becomes: What exactly have we heard that constitutes it as good news so compelling it has to be communicated to everyone?

Today, in a prevailing Christian culture, we use a language to talk about Jesus which essentially communicates what I would call “gospelspeak” and “salvationspeak.” The dedicated repetition of this language, essentially constructed with partial and even misleading truths, has become increasingly a new form of orthodoxy used pervasively in Christian culture to define, determine as well as confirm Christian life and practice. Yet, this language is not the relational language with which Jesus communicated—even though the words may be equivalent to Jesus’ words, for example, as the lawyer with the right words (Lk 10:25-28). The words of this language are enhanced versions of the gospel and of salvation (including eternal life and the kingdom of God), which are constituted by disembodied words apart from the relational context and process of the whole of Jesus and God’s thematic relational action of grace. And though disembodied, they also tend to be overly christocentric.

“Born again,” for example, in gospelspeak and salvationspeak language tends to be reduced to a conventional function of what an individual does (starting with a decision), not focused so much on what God enacts in the relational process of “born from above” with a definitive relational outcome. Born again has become a notion somewhat analogous to a purification code of behavior, the practice of which results in spiritual status and kingdom identity. In Jesus’ relational language, born again (*gennaō anōthen*) is definitive of the relational process and outcome of our response and ongoing involvement in reciprocal relationship together (necessarily, both individually and corporately). In other words, born again is only what God creates in relationship together as family—not individual relationships, nor relationships on our terms. The function of those born from above in this new creation is only in new covenant relationship together—only on God’s terms in the relational context and process of the Trinity, which must (*dei*) by its nature function in the relational progression now, not suspended until the future.

As the song continues:

*Tell to sinners far and wide: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
...Shout salvation full and free..., Jesus saves! Jesus saves!*

“Jesus saves” needs to be told also to all resident sinners in every church (Western, Eastern, global North, global South), so that we can grasp a full soteriology and the ongoing function of grace (“full and free”).

*By His death and endless life, Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
...Sing in triumph o’er the tomb, Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
...This our song of victory, Jesus saves! Jesus saves!*

Everything in this language about Jesus and salvation speaks about the future and life after death. Yet, even this song implies by the words “Sing it softly through the gloom, when the heart for mercy craves,” that there are deep needs in the present which need to be made whole (*sozo*). What happens to them?

With the language of gospel- and salvationspeak, we tend to labor or live virtually in a truncated soteriology (only what Jesus saved us from). The words “Jesus saves from”

has high frequency as the major vocabulary in gospelspeak and salvationspeak, yet communicates little experiential truth of the whole of Jesus. Until we return to the trinitarian shape of soteriology and relationally receive the whole of God which Jesus saved us to (the full significance of the popularly used Jn 1:12-14), we will not experience the Truth who embodied the Way to the whole of God's relational Life, just as the disciples in John 14 had yet to experience despite their extensive knowledge of and intensive training with Jesus.

This suggests we need to deconstruct this language (and related linguistic forms of evangelism and missions) and honestly examine how we "listen to my Son," then return to God's communicative action in his words. When disclosing the secrets of the kingdom of God to the Twelve, Jesus made it clear: "Therefore, watch how you listen. Whoever has relationally received me will grasp even more of my communication; whoever disembodies my words, even what they assess (*dokeo*) of those words will become insignificant, even exposed as an epistemological illusion of reductionism" (Lk 8:18, cf. this context with Jesus' warning to them of reductionism's ontological simulation, Lk 12:1-3).

The presence of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion in church life and practice evidences the influence of reductionism. Furthermore, our willingness to settle for far less than the full qualitative relational significance of the whole of Jesus' salvific action positions Christian life and practice somewhat analogous in function to the first criminal on the cross. The first criminal illustrates the situations and circumstances of sin we tend merely to want to be saved from (Lk 23:39), while suspending or transposing all other aspects of salvation to the heavenly future. This is the reduction of Jesus and salvation, no matter how normative this practice is for Christian culture. Such reductionist practices (as well as others) are not cultural imperatives which can legitimately define us—that is, who, what and how we are in Jesus the Christ. We need to understand and address reductionism as sin. Thus, the sin of reductionism is what Jesus saves us from, and, most urgently, is what we need forgiveness for in order to transition to what Jesus saves us to. This would open up a major domain of Christian-church life and practice which needs to be deconstructed and made whole. And without this process, churches will be in crisis because the whole is necessary to expose and negate reductionism.

What current life and practices, or lack thereof, suggest is that we don't take salvation seriously. That is to say, in actual function we don't take salvation in the present seriously for life and practice, which then should also question the extent of our seriousness about salvation future. Any lack of seriousness implies our life and practice is shaped by reductionism, and thus functions with its ontological simulations and epistemological illusions. Consequently, I would further suggest that the dominant practice which pervades churches today centers on not taking salvation seriously, that is, as it affects conjointly not only the future but also the present. For church practice to be congruent with Jesus' salvific work means the church needs to take seriously and to be accountable to function in new covenant relationship together as family in likeness of the Trinity.

As Jesus did with Nicodemus, we need to be jolted from the status quo of our prevailing perception, interpretation and expectation of salvation. The experiential truth of John 3:16 only has significance in the whole of Jesus' salvific discourse, not in the

words of gospel speak and salvation speak. We need to turn from reductionism and return to nothing less and no substitutes of the incarnation of the whole of Jesus, the Word, and his salvific action in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. This is the irreducible and nonnegotiable shape of soteriology in full context and process, as well as its qualitative relational significance of the kingdom of God.

Jesus saves indeed, that is, when we “Listen, and relationally respond, to the whole of the Word—the kingdom of God has come to you.”

Our discussion narrows its focus on vital issues of ongoing life and practice—issues in our surrounding contexts which necessitate the convergence of sanctified life and practice to be whole and salvific life and practice to make whole. These issues engage culture, ethics and mission.

When God's thematic action in response to the human condition made a strategic shift with the incarnation, the Father sent the Son "into the world." The relational clarity of God's communicative action in the Word made flesh was direct (not mediated), vulnerable (openly disclosed) and embodied (accessible to all). This addressed three major issues for all practice: (1) the significance of the person presented to others, (2) the quality of this person's communication, and (3) the depth level of relationship this person engages.

The truth of the incarnation has significance only in relationship as the experiential truth, which Jesus wholly embodied into the surrounding contexts of the world. Basically, this process is about making functional the theology of God loving the world and sending his Son into the world to love it. Making John 3:16 operational was neither a mere evangelistic program nor a gospel of words; moreover, this was not merely about what Jesus did to signify the propositional truth of salvation. This is about how Jesus lived and functioned in the world because of who he was and whose he was. That is to say, his life and practice operationalized God loving the world by being fully embodied to be vulnerably present and intimately involved with those in it to make it whole.

The relational significance of God's communicative action in the vulnerably embodied whole of Jesus was only for the intimate involvement in relationship—relationship together in the whole of God. The Father sent the Son into the world to make it whole (*sozo*, Jn 3:17), that is, in congruence with the relational significance of the whole of Jesus and compatible with the qualitative distinction of the whole and holy God.

The process of being *sent* is a relational dynamic involving the irreducible qualitative action of God's communication and the nonnegotiable terms of God's relational work of grace. This dynamic further signifies wholeness: the whole of the Word disclosing the whole of God and fulfilling the whole of God's thematic relational action. The implication of this relational dynamic underlying God's strategic shift is that who and what was sent was nothing less and no substitute than the whole and holy God, that nothing less and no substitute could be sent to fulfill this relational dynamic and thus to fulfill God's thematic action. This is the significance of the incarnation, the qualitative function of which Jesus vulnerably embodied to be intimately involved with others in culture, ethics and mission.

The process of being *sent into the world* is the functional outworking of this relational dynamic. For Jesus, only the ongoing function of his whole person embodied his incarnation into the world; and only the ongoing relational involvement of his whole person fulfilled his purpose and function in the world to make whole. Nothing less and no substitutes would be sufficient either to be whole or to make whole. Thus, how Jesus was in the world—whether in word or deed, his teachings or example—cannot be wholly

understood apart from the function of who and what he was. To disengage how Jesus was from the full identity of who and what he was embodied in function is to essentially disembodify Jesus; this has the relational consequence to reduce God's communication and renegotiate God's grace, which creates relational distance with the whole of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement.

"Sent" involves a relationship-specific dynamic, and "sent into the world" involves a relationship-specific function. We need to grasp these about Jesus' life and practice—notably in culture, ethics and mission—in order to understand our place and function in the world. This chapter essentially involves *how* Jesus lived and practiced because of *who* he was and *whose* he was, and thus *how* we need to live and practice because of *who* we are and *whose* we are. Throughout our discussion, Jesus will make evident the ongoing reality: *How* a person lives emerges from *who* and *what* the person is in full identity, the functional separation of which renders how a person lives to reductionism.

Jesus always embodied this process in the integrity of the whole, which necessitated ongoing function in his sanctified identity: that is, his full identity (the relational posture as the whole of God) conjoined with his minority identity (the functional posture as qualitative distinction from the common's function "in the world") for sanctified life and practice. The function of Jesus' sanctified identity in life and practice established the greater context of his person (who and whose he was), whatever his situations and circumstances. This provided the framework for his sanctified life and practice to ongoingly address the issue of *how* the person presented in the surrounding contexts of the world is defined and *what* determines how this person functions. For Jesus to be whole, this functionally necessitated both (1) engaging the human contexts of the world without losing his primary identity of *who* he is and *whose* he is, and (2) participating, involving, partaking in situations and relationships without losing his priorities of *what* he is and thus by nature *how* he is sent to be.

Jesus embodied this process in the ongoing relational dynamic between his full identity and his minority identity, which is the conjoint function of the qualitative significance of his sanctified identity (discussed in chapter five). As the embodiment of the whole and holy God, Jesus' identity functioned in congruence with the relational context and process of the Trinity—his ongoing relational posture; this signifies the source of his ontology, out of which his full identity is derived and to which he belongs (Jn 17:14,16). Since his embodied full identity did not function in a vacuum but was sent into the world to function "in the world's" surrounding context (Jn 17:13)—while "of" the context to which he belongs—this also involved the functional posture of his minority identity. Thus, this points to the dynamic interaction of his full identity with his minority identity that is necessary for the functional significance of his sanctified identity in the world. Clearly then, the person Jesus presented throughout the incarnation was the function only of his whole person because he maintained in sanctified life and practice the integrity of who, what and how he is—without reduction or redefinition. The clarity and depth of his sanctified identity provided the qualitative distinction necessary to function "not of the world" in order to be whole and to make whole "in the world." These dynamics will become evident in our discussion to follow.

It is vital to grasp the sanctified identity Jesus embodied in sanctified life and practice for the experiential truth of our identity to be in his likeness and our ontology to

be in the image of the whole of God (as Jesus asked his Father in his formative family prayer). Without the function of his full identity there is no truth and function of his minority identity in the world; and without the functional truth of his minority identity there is no experiential truth of his full identity for relationship together. This interaction of identities is a function of relationship, not doctrine or ethics; it is a function of a relational process, not a missional paradigm. As the focus of our discussion shifts “into the world,” we need to understand that the functional posture “in the world” of his minority identity is beyond mere ethics and is more than merely mission—even, dare I say, beyond conventional Christian character and conduct.

Receiving and embracing the whole of Jesus, and thus following him in his full identity, will always involve not only being associated with his minority identity but also being constituted in it. Sanctified identity is the relational outcome of this ongoing relational dynamic between his full and minority identities, the function of which is the ontology of the whole and holy God embodied in Jesus and extended in likeness in his followers by the Spirit to love the world. This necessitates congruence of his followers’ whole person with the relational posture of Jesus’ full identity and the functional posture of his minority identity. This congruence is necessary for Jesus’ followers to have the clarity of his minority identity and the depth of his full identity—the clarity and depth necessary to function in the qualitative distinction, and thus significance, of the whole and holy God “in the world” while “not of the world,” just as his Father sent him (Jn 17:18). And Jesus’ involvement “into the world” by its relational nature fully engages culture and practices ethics in vulnerable fulfillment of his (com)mission to love the world to make it whole.

This chapter proceeds with this relational purpose for this relational outcome.

Illuminating Deeper into the Surrounding Context

Jesus’ sanctified identity functioned in the relational context and process of God’s communicative action. As communicative action, his words and deeds in sanctified life and practice did not demonstrate a separatist function isolated or relationally detached from the world, nor did his teachings illustrate ideals unattainable for function in the world. While “sanctified” (*hagios*) denotes, on the one hand, to be separated from ordinary or common usage, on the other, it is devoted to the whole of God and God’s action—namely, the God who sent him into the world. In other words, sanctified identity in life and practice is the qualitative distinction from the common’s function while in the common’s context, and thus it only has functional significance by relational involvement in the common’s context (*koinos*) “in the world.” This is the nature of Jesus’ minority identity, which is associated with his identity as “the light of the world” (summarized in John’s Gospel, partly as an “I am” statement, Jn 1:4,9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36,46).

The clarity of Jesus’ identity as the light “in the world” functioned vulnerably in the narrative of Lazarus’ death and raising (see Jn 11:1-44). Jesus stated that Lazarus’ sickness would not conclude in death (v.4, not that he would not die, vv.11,14). It is important to distinguish between the relationship with Lazarus (along with his sisters, whom Jesus loved, vv.3,5) and the surrounding context of the relationship. Jesus was vulnerably involved in both the relationship and the surrounding context for the same

purpose, yet the functional dynamic involved was different for each. I previously discussed the relationship, and here I focus on the surrounding context.

Jesus defined the situation as having the purpose to highlight the vulnerable presence and involvement of the whole of God signified in the identity of the Son (as “glory” points to, vv.4,40). By its nature as communicative action, this could only be fulfilled by direct involvement of Jesus’ whole person in the surrounding context, not separated from it nor relationally uninvolved in it—in other words, nothing less and no substitute. His disciples raised an incredulous voice to his action to return to that hostile surrounding context trying to kill him (v.8). Jesus responded from his identity as the light (vv.9-10). His action to return was based on *what* he was as “the light of the world” (Jn 8:12; 9:5), and *whose* he was who sent him (Jn 12:45-46); therefore, *how* he functioned cannot be defined and determined by the surrounding context—even if it was receptive, as demonstrated by Jesus’ timing to wait two days before responding to Lazarus, his family and extended community (v.6). How he functioned emerged from his minority identity as the light in interaction with his full identity as the whole of God who sent him (vv.41-42). Thus, as the light he “must by its nature (*dei*, not from obligation or compulsion) do the work of him who sent me” (Jn 9:4).

Jesus’ sanctified identity, defining who and what he was, determined how he was, and that always involved going deeper into the surrounding context. Identity as the light of the world only has significance when it is relationally involved in those contexts. While putting oneself in harm’s way may seem misguided, or beyond the practice of many (consider Thomas’ remark, v.16), that was not Jesus’ purpose in this situation; later, he deliberately avoided contexts to kill him (Jn 11:53-54), which was an earlier reason he stayed out of Judea to extend his Galilean ministry (Jn 7:1). The issue about engaging the surrounding context was not about the extent of hostility or receptivity, but about relational congruence with the whole of God who sent him into the contexts of the world—just as he told his biological brothers who challenged him to go to Judea (Jn 7:3-6), and as he defined for his disciples in their identity together as the light (Jn 9:4, cf. 12:36).

Jesus made definitive: “When I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (Jn 9:5). This defined two vital aspects of the light. First, the light only has functional significance in the contexts of the world (“When I am in the world”); and the identity of the light can only have clarity when it functions in those contexts (“When I...I am the light,” cf. Jn 1:5a). Secondly, the light is not some static attribute of Jesus, nor a quantitative deed, to be observed. Jesus was definitive that “I am” the light (emphatically stated, *ego emi*, in Jn 8:12). In this “I am” statement, the ontology of the whole of Jesus is signified. In presenting the bigger picture, John’s Gospel identifies the light as the life (*zoe*) in the Word (Jn 1:4). Thus, the light is the dynamic function of the *zoe* of Jesus, not some attribute (cf. character) or deed (cf. conduct). Furthermore, the light is the dynamic function of the *zoe* of Jesus’ whole person, that is, conjointly the whole of God, the *zoe* of the Trinity. Therefore, the light is the dynamic relational function of the relational ontology of the Trinity, which Jesus embodied as vulnerable communicative function in the trinitarian relational context and process for relationship together.

With the bigger picture, John’s Gospel helps us further understand the function of the light. The *zoe* in the Word, who functioned as the light, had been in eternal existence and functioned as Creator before his incarnation (Jn 1:1-3). This definitive statement not

only established the source of Jesus' identity in the divine context; it also pointed to the function of Jesus' identity in the context of the world. John's Gospel is unveiling God's thematic action since creation, and how the embodied Word coheres with creation. The whole of the Word as Creator becoming flesh involves two vital functions for us to grasp in the contexts of the world:

1. Jesus vulnerably embodied the whole of God, including as Creator, in whose very image we were created, and he also functionally embodied that image. This implies that Jesus' whole person in sanctified life and practice constitutes both the hermeneutical key to the ontology of the whole of God (Jn 12:45; 14:9, cf. 2 Cor 4:4-6); and, in addition, his person and function constitute the experiential truth of the ontology of the human person (whom the Word created in his image and now also vulnerably embodies in the function as the light) for us to understand in function and thus experience as a whole person. This experience signifies our function also in who, what and how we are in the image of the whole of God. In other words, the light functions to give clarity to the human ontology created in his image, and apart from the vulnerable embodiment of the whole of Jesus, the identity of the human person struggles for who, what and how to be (cf. Jn 8:12).
2. Jesus also intimately embodied the relational ontology of the Trinity (as discussed previously, notably with the Father), thus constituting the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love, by which he engaged the contexts of the world and was vulnerably involved with persons in those contexts. This implies that the whole of Jesus' functional relational involvement constitutes both the functional key to how the relationships in the Trinity are; and, in addition, his relational involvement constitutes the experiential truth of the human relational ontology (whom the Word created in his image to be whole and not "to be apart," and now also intimately embodies in the function as the light) of persons in the relationships together necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. Jesus constitutes his followers together in the experiential truth of human persons who were designed and created in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity. The light functions to give clarity to the relational nature of human life, the qualitative significance of relationships, and the relationships together necessary to make whole the human condition—apart from whose illumination humanity struggles for well-being and wholeness (cf. Jn 1:5).

Jesus' intimate function in this relational ontology by family love with various persons (discussed throughout this study) clearly spoke to the relationships necessary to be whole for us to understand, as well as called us to participate in reciprocal relationship together with him to be made whole. This reciprocal relational involvement gives us the experiential truth of the relationships together necessary to be the whole of God's family constituted by the Trinity; and this further gives us the experiential basis to live whole by extending family love to others in the contexts of the world with the clarity of the function of the light to make whole the human condition (cf. Mt 5:16).

Conjoined with creation to fulfill God's thematic action, Jesus vulnerably and intimately embodied the function of the light as the hermeneutical key to *zoe*, both the *zoe* of the whole of God and the *zoe* of the whole human person created in his image. In addition, his embodiment of the light was also the functional key to the relationships together necessary for the whole of *zoe*, both the *zoe* of the Trinity and the *zoe* of human

persons together created in likeness of the Trinity. This relational process of direct communicative action functioned only in the surrounding contexts of the world—relationally involved deeper and deeper in these contexts, and only relationally involved to be whole and to make whole (Jn 12:46). And as the embodied Word cohered with creation, our grasp of theological anthropology emerges as it coheres with the embodied Light.

Moreover, merely life and practice “in the world” and merely engaging the surrounding contexts are insufficient to function as the light of the world. The clarity of the light is not about having doctrinal purity, goes beyond having the proper character and conduct, and practicing the right ethics, as well as goes deeper than merely articulating the gospel message. The light embodies these in the whole of our *zoe*, not as characteristic or deed but in relational congruence with the *zoe* of Jesus’ whole person. Thus, the identity of the light has clarity only as a function of sanctified identity, which is the relational outcome of the ontology of the whole and holy God embodied in Jesus transforming (creating) his followers in his likeness as the light of the world. Sanctified identity is the qualitative distinction from the common’s function necessary to be neither defined nor determined by the common’s contexts of the world (cf. the indictment in Eze 22:26). This is an ongoing tension with the common’s function that comes with involvement in the common’s contexts, from which we need qualitative distinction to be whole and to make whole. As Jesus made evident in his sanctified identity, this necessitates the relational congruence of his followers’ whole person with the relational posture of his full identity and the functional posture of his minority identity. In other words, the qualitative distinction of sanctified identity is relational congruence with the whole of Jesus, who sends us into the same contexts of the world just as (*kathos*, in congruence with) his Father sent him (Jn 17:18).

This is the purpose Jesus had for his disciples when he exhorted them to go with him to Lazarus deeper into that context (Jn 11:15). And the first aspect of the common’s function all his followers encounter going deeper into the surrounding contexts of the world is *culture*. How did Jesus engage culture?

Jesus and Culture in the Surrounding Context

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

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

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

At its earliest stages of development, culture emerges from the life and practice of those persons gathered together, thus culture was defined and determined by them. As that culture was established, its shape remains consistent or firm, with ongoing minor modifications. In the subsequent process of its life and practice, culture essentially takes on a functional “life” of its own to shape its participants; that is to say, those persons become defined by their culture, and thus how they function is also determined by their culture. To be contrary is to go against the norms of culture, or, in other words, be counter-cultural.

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

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

How Jesus engaged a culture in a particular context was always first with his own culture. That is to say, Jesus always looked at culture theologically because that was his identity: who, what and how he was in the context and process of the whole of God. As noted above, engaging another culture from one’s own culture is an assumption by which all persons engage a different culture. Thus, these are presuppositions of our own which we have to understand and account for, even as we seek to further understand and more deeply engage Jesus (along with his culture).

To say that Jesus looked at culture theologically should not be separated from the function of his identity. Foremost, his theological lens was not about doctrine, propositions of static truth or systems of beliefs and values; though his lens was certainly theologically orthodox (not in a gospel-speak, salvation-speak sense), it was always in conjoint function with orthopraxy (i.e., sanctified life and practice) in the trinitarian relational context and process for relationship together. Jesus functionally engaged culture not only in orthodoxy but with orthopraxy, with the latter at times appearing to contradict the former, which was an ongoing source of controversy in many of his interactions—notably in a so-called orthodox religious context since it was perceived often as counter-cultural. Yet, Jesus’ theological engagement of culture was not for the end result of orthodoxy, or even orthopraxy, but only for the outcome of relationship together and being whole; thus, his engagement was always as communicative action of God’s thematic relational response to make whole the human condition (cf. Jn 12:46-47). In other words, he saw culture through the lens of God’s perception and desires, and this defined and determined his response.

As the embodiment of God’s communicative action in the contexts of the world, Jesus did not engage culture “to condemn” (*krino*, to discriminate between good and evil) the identity it generates “but to make whole” (*sozo*, Jn 3:17) its life and practice influenced by reductionism. By the nature of its source, reductionism has always

functioned against the whole since creation in the primordial garden. The reductionism in culture specifically involved the ontology of the whole person created in the image of the whole of God for the relationships together created in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity, thus which are necessary in conjoint function to be whole.

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

Any reduction in life and practice of the whole person and those persons' relationships together need to be made whole to fulfill who, what and how they are as God's creation. Thus, the reduction of what defines human persons (e.g., in a comparative process to stratify human worth or value) needs to be redefined for persons to be made whole. Likewise, the reduction of human relationships from qualitative function and significance (e.g., by diminishing intimate relational involvement or promoting barriers to relational belonging) needs to be transformed for the relationships together necessary to be whole.

The whole of Jesus, therefore, functioned to engage culture in the surrounding context to: (1) redefine its influence from reductionism, (2) transform its counter-relational work of reductionism, and (3) make whole the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole.

His Approach: Three Qualifying Issues

Jesus' engagement of culture for his purpose to be and make whole involved a relational process; conjointly, this relational process was specific to the relational context of his identity and ontology in the whole of God. The dynamic involvement of this relational process cannot be categorized by typologies of the relation of Jesus and culture. The classic typology of Niebuhr, for example, is of initial interest, yet this is a static framework insufficient to account for Jesus' engagement of culture.³⁶ This includes variations or refinements of his typology.³⁷ The dynamic relational involvement of Jesus in the surrounding contexts of the world was an ongoing process of engaging culture both to be whole and to make whole.

I suggest a different framework to account for the variable nature of this process and to understand the whole of Jesus' various actions engaging culture. This involves three issues which Jesus ongoingly addressed to help us define why and how he engaged culture and aspects of it. Basic to his approach, Jesus involved his whole person in the life and practice of a culture to function to be whole and to make whole; thus the

³⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* 50th-anniversary ed. (N.Y.: Harper San Francisco, 2001).

³⁷ See, for example, Glen H. Stassen, D.M. Yeager, John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), and also Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*, (Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 93-110.

integrating theme “to be whole” defined his actions engaging culture, which were contingent on one or more of *three qualifying issues* involving a culture’s life and practice:

1. *Compatibility, or congruence*, “to be whole”—thus, there is no tension or conflict with the life and practice of a culture, and further relational involvement is for deeper development of the whole.
2. *Partial overlapping areas* “to be whole”—some areas and/or practices in a culture are affirmed as part of God’s general revelation and common grace, and what is basic to humanity as God’s creation; thus this acceptance allows room for flexibility in some differences to cultivate and nurture the whole, though other areas and practices are in tension or conflict “to be whole” and still need to be redefined, transformed and made whole.
3. *Incompatibility* “to be whole”—thus, there is conflict, not merely tension, with no room for flexibility in differences; the situation/condition is nonnegotiable and needs to be redeemed to be made whole.

A culture may involve more than one of these qualifying issues, and engaging various aspects of a culture’s life and practice tends to involve an interaction of these qualifying issues. Culture then cannot be responded to in its surrounding context with a predetermined set of behavioral responses—only predisposed with the relational involvement to be whole and to make whole. This is how Jesus engaged culture and why.

In the process of cultural engagement, Jesus in full identity appears to transcend culture (cf. Niebuhr’s categories, “Christ against culture”), yet while relationally involved in the surrounding cultural context (cf. “Christ in paradox” or “Christ of culture”) with his minority identity (cf. “Christ above culture”) to make it whole (cf. “Christ the transformer of culture”). The relational interaction of his full identity with his minority identity (signifying his sanctified identity) constitutes the qualitative distinction necessary to be whole in the surrounding cultural context, without which there is no basis to make whole culture’s life and practice.

The ongoing process of engaging culture both to be whole and to make whole involves this process of relational involvement embodied by Jesus. This was made evident in his various encounters.

His Practice: Triangulation and Reciprocating Contextualization

Our first glimpse of Jesus engaging culture in the surrounding context during his public ministry was at a wedding in Cana (Jn 2:2-11, discussed previously in chapter one). Revisiting that situation in terms of culture, Jesus made evident the practice of his whole person (who, what and how he is). This demonstrated how he functioned in the surrounding human contexts and in those public social interactions.

In this particular human context, Jesus was involved in three interrelated areas: (1) relationship with Mary, (2) the sociocultural context, and (3) relationship with his Father. The consequence of these areas of involvement helps us understand how Jesus engaged culture: first, “to be whole” in the identity of his own culture, then “to make whole” in response to some aspect of the human condition apart from the whole. He quickly established distinction from his cultural identity defined with Mary by simply

addressing her as “woman” (*gyne*, general term for woman with no other significance). This distinction is specific to the relational context which defined his whole person. Thus, Jesus redefined the nature of his involvement with Mary from the human cultural context to the trinitarian relational context of family.

While Jesus had tension with Mary’s human cultural context of family earlier at age twelve (Lk 2:11-52), he still affirmed its life and practice (v.51) since it was compatible or overlapped with him “to be whole.” As he began his public ministry, however, further qualitative distinction was necessary for the clarity of his identity to be whole in the surrounding context. This distinction fully progressed when Jesus publicly made definitive his family in the trinitarian relational context (Mt 12:46-50)—which no doubt created “culture shock” for both his biological family and the surrounding Jewish context by redefining a basic foundation of their culture based on birth and descent.

Jesus further clarified the function of his whole person with his question to Mary: “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” which is rendered more clearly “what is that to you and to me?” What defined Jesus was always in tension with efforts in the surrounding context to redefine him by reducing his whole person. Mary merely acted in who and what she is defined by in that context for participation in its extended family-community identity. Jesus’ tension with Mary was not about her cultural practice (room for flexibility) but about her attempt to redefine him in her terms. By adding “My time has not yet come,” Jesus wanted Mary to know that what his priorities were, and what and who defined him, were determined by his Father. In other words, “what is that to me” cannot be defined and determined by “what is that to you.” This is somewhat a functional paradigm by which Jesus engaged culture in the surrounding context.

This is a necessary function in order to be whole and not to be reduced in identity and ontology by a culture in the surrounding context. Jesus maintained the whole of who, what and how he is by ongoing relational involvement with his Father, with the whole of God. His ongoing relational involvement with his Father served as the reference point for his involvement in sociocultural contexts (like the wedding culture and the necessity of wine, see previous discussion) and with relationships in those contexts (like with Mary). This can be considered *the triangulation process* (cf. to navigation): Jesus used his reference point in the Father to define and determine his engagement with culture and his involvement in the surrounding contexts of the world, so that he can be whole in order to make whole. *Triangulation* served to give clarity to his identity as the light of the world and relational significance to “his glory” (as in Jn 2:11) vulnerably disclosed in the world in response to the human condition for the outcome only of relationship together in God’s whole.

This relational process of triangulated engagement of culture is further evident as Jesus was involved with a pluralized identity of Judaism in Jerusalem. When Jesus addressed the identity of his followers in the Sermon on the Mount (discussed earlier in chapter four), he made it imperative that who, what and how they are needs to function beyond the reductionists and their practice of reductionism (Mt 5:20). Those particular reductionists were various teachers of the law (scribes) and Pharisees, not all of them nor the sum of Judaism. Thus, as the above three qualifying issues involving Judaism’s complex life and practice emerged and interacted, Jesus accordingly engaged their “pluralistic” culture in Jerusalem. Yet, tension and conflict with reductionism was notable, which will always happen in the presence and function of the whole. And Jesus’

function in sanctified identity demonstrated this life and practice as he engaged those reductionists in the culture of their surrounding context.

The Judaism Jesus would engage lacked a united identity. Some focused mainly on a religious identity, others more so on an ethnic identity, neither being mutually exclusive and both interrelated with social and economic factors. While Israel's national identity was underlying (even a source of national pride), this tended to fragment or pluralize identity in Judaism (e.g., Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots).³⁸ Thus, life and practices in the cultural context of Judaism lacked wholeness—namely specific to its historic roots in the whole of the covenant. Rather than a monolithic Judaism, its variable condition was the shape of the context Jesus engaged with the whole of his person, in which he vulnerably involved the whole of God to make it whole.

Jewish culture obviously was not foreign to Jesus, yet his engagement of Judaism's life and practices was a unique intersection as if it were. Thus, the three qualifying issues are the suggested basis for Jesus' various actions as he engaged Judaism in Jerusalem. John's Gospel provides most of the narratives of these encounters in Jesus' later Judean ministry, which seems to suggest their importance in the big picture of the whole of God's thematic action both in covenant fulfillment to Israel and in relational response to the human condition to make them whole.

Jesus was in congruence with covenant life and practice in Judaism which notably observed the major pilgrimages to the Jerusalem temple. That is, congruent with covenant relationship and its compatible relational function to come before the Lord—not as obligatory religious code but in response to covenant relationship together, namely in the covenant of love. This was its culture's life and practice “to be whole,” which Jesus both affirmed and participated in, as we find him going to Jerusalem to observe Passover (and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, revisiting our earlier discussion of Jn 2:12-25). The practice he saw at the temple was not an isolated incident, yet needs to be seen in its full context.

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

Thus, on the other hand, Jesus' action in the temple constituted his involvement necessary to redeem it (Jn 2:14-17) to make the house of God's dwelling whole for covenant relationship together for all persons without false distinctions (par. Mk 11:17). At the same time, he remained in ongoing tension with certain segments of Judaism (the reductionists) who challenged the source of his identity, thus the validity of his action (Jn

³⁸ For an overview of this historical development, see Bruce D. Chilton, “Judaism and the New Testament” in Daniel G. Reid, ed. *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 603-616.

2:18). Their demand, I suggest, had some merit given the radical extent of Jesus' action; yet, the main issue focused only on what was perceived to be counter-cultural—even that apparent contradiction with orthodoxy noted earlier. Moreover, his further engagement in this context, and relational involvement to make whole, was also in tension with those receptive to him because of their reductionism; thus, Jesus did not allow his person to be defined and determined by them (Jn 2:23-25).

This temple encounter demonstrated Jesus' engagement of the cultural context of Judaism with various actions based on one or more particular qualifying issues, and how these issues interact to preclude a predetermined set of behavioral responses—only to constitute predisposed relational involvement to be whole and to make whole. This provides us with a working understanding of Jesus' relation to culture, and further helps us grasp the significance of his subsequent engagement with Judaism.

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

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

After ministry in Galilee to purposely create space from the reductionists in Judea, Jesus returned to Jerusalem for the specific Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (associated with the period in the wilderness living in tents, Jn 7:1-38). His return, however, was not determined by his biological brothers' misguided challenge; his involvement in the surrounding context was always defined and determined by the triangulation process with his Father (7:2-9). Partial overlap continued to allow room for flexibility to extend his dialogue with Judaism, even as the tension grows in this cultural context. Yet, his purpose and function to make whole appears more directed and urgent.

As his Father determined for him, his involvement in this compatible covenant practice did not emerge until mid-week of the week-long Feast (7:10,14). While this has the appearance of caution, triangulation suggests guidance only by his Father's purpose ("who sent me," 7:16,28-29) to make whole. This involved God's communicative action, which also necessitated intensifying his engagement with this context of partially overlapping Judaic life and practices—namely with the aspects of life and practice needing to be made whole.

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

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

Jesus engaged culture in his identity and function to be whole, and thus in his purpose to make whole. By the nature of his function and purpose, notably as the light, it was inevitable that the heightened tension with reductionism would result in conflict with the dogmatic reductionists. This was the fluid condition of Jesus' engagement with Judaism, which nevertheless neither defined nor determined who, what and how he was in this cultural context. His further engagement with Judaism even intensified his identity and function as the light of the world.

When Jesus engaged them again at another time, there was still room for dialogue in this fluid condition of Judaism's partial overlap toward the whole (Jn 8:12-59). In his involvement Jesus openly shared in dialogue: his identity and function as the light (8:12), thus engaging this context in his sanctified identity—which certain Pharisees challenged him about his life and practice (8:13); this then necessitated identifying the source of his life and practice (8:14-18)—thus they challenged the source of his cultural identity and ontology (8:19a,25a); to which his identity and ontology were vulnerably disclosed (8:19b,23,25b-26) and the purpose of his life and practice (in word and deed) made clearly evident (8:27-29). This room for flexibility by Jesus to dialogue nurtured some in that context for the relational outcome to be whole (8:30). To them, and any receptive reductionists, he made definitive the need to be redeemed to be made whole (8:31-32). This further precipitated the relational consequence of the clear distinction and dynamic between the two alternatives: the whole intrinsic to God or the reductionism inherent of

Satan, and thus their incompatibility and conflict (8:33-59); and any variation from the whole always signified a form of reductionism.

Even under difficult conditions, the light continued to engage the cultural context of Judaism to be whole and to make whole (see Jn 9:1-7,35-39; 10:22-39) for covenant relationship together in the whole of God's family (fulfilling the covenant of love, Dt 7:9)—engagement even to the dismay and misperception of his disciples (Jn 11:7-16). This relational outcome, or even relational consequence, is the effect on reductionism in a culture's life and practice which the identity and function as the light of the world has. Whatever the qualifying issues may be about a culture, this is ongoingly the light's identity to be whole and its function to make whole; and the identity of the light has clarity only as a function of sanctified identity triangulating with his Father to determine his involvement—nothing less and no substitutes, just as his Father sent him into the world.

This is the bigger picture into which John's Gospel contextualizes the narratives of Jesus' relational involvement with the life and practice of culture as the embodied whole of the Word of God's communicative action. As the embodied Word, Jesus engaged culture not merely by contextualizing his involvement in a culture's life and practice, but more importantly he contextualized a culture in his relational context of the Trinity and in his context's relational process of intimate relationship together in family love—the relational significance of his culture. This is what I call *the process of reciprocating contextualization*, which needs to inform the current missiological practice of contextualization.

It is vital to understand the dynamic of *reciprocating contextualization*, and to grasp this as a relational process in necessary conjoint function with *triangulation*. This integrated relational process is necessary for the qualitative distinction in the surrounding common's context in order not to be defined or determined by the common's function. In addition, this relational process converges with the three qualifying issues for the functional involvement necessary both to be whole and to make whole in a culture's life and practice.

Therefore, Jesus' engagement of culture in the surrounding context was always in congruence with, and thus the definitive extension of, the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition to make whole his creation. This is the irreducible and nonnegotiable function of the whole of God's relational work of grace only for new covenant relationship together in love.

Jesus and Ethics

Both in the Kingdom & the Surrounding Context

Sociology correctly helps each of us understand that we are all part of a larger context and a life and practice greater than our individual self. This rightly points to the relational design of humanity and the need for certain character qualities and conduct to optimize function of human persons together. Contextualization, however, cannot stop in sociology, as tends to happen in various biblical studies (e.g., new Paul perspectives) and

missions. While this provides useful descriptive information of collective behavior, this is insufficient to understand the significance of humanity's relational design, and thus inadequate to explain what is necessary for relationships together to be optimal. We need a theological anthropology to take us deeper. Theology in general, and Christology in particular, makes definitive the specific relational design, purpose and function of the human person in relationships together. This relational understanding was vulnerably disclosed by the whole of Jesus' sanctified life and practice, which was the embodied function of his sanctified identity. When we become relationally connected and involved with the whole of Jesus, he involves us conjointly in an even greater context than the human social context. This is his relational context and process of the whole of God.

The dynamic of *reciprocating contextualization* is critical for our understanding of life and practice in the surrounding contexts, whether for Jesus' life and practice or ours. With reciprocating contextualization Jesus connects us to an even greater context and an even deeper process of life and practice beyond the limits of sociology, that is, to the theological anthropology which coheres with the embodied light. As the light, Jesus functioned to embody the relational design and purpose of the human person created in the image of (and his relational context in) the whole of God, and he embodied the function of the relational ontology of human persons together created in likeness of (and his relational process with) the Trinity. This involves going further than moral ideals, values and virtues, and deeper than ethical character and conduct, to engage human persons together not only for optimal function but for the ongoing relationships in everyday life and practice necessary together to be whole, God's whole.

Jesus' involvement in the surrounding context cannot be separated from his identity as the light, which is the *zoe* of the whole of Jesus, the Word (Jn 1:4). His involvement cannot be reduced to quantitative aspects of *bios*, and thus merely to certain character qualities and conduct. By the nature of *zoe*, his involvement was constituted by the function of his sanctified identity in the relational process of *triangulation* with his Father. This ongoing life and practice in qualitative distinction was neither a static framework for engagement nor a program of ethical involvement. This was a process of the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of the *zoe* of the embodied whole of the Word as communicative action of the whole of God. Thus, involvement in his relational context necessitates more than character, and function in his relational process necessitates more than conduct—that is, as character and conduct are commonly perceived in ethical studies.

The Nature of Jesus' Ethics

Ethics in general involves a moral philosophy of how persons should live in a certain context and/or in the presence of others, thus establishing a system or code of moral values, standards and principles for character and conduct. This tends not to be directly associated with identity, yet in function ethical practice (or its absence) does indeed relatively define who, what and how persons are. Christian (biblical) ethics should signify Christian identity and, moreover, needs to be constituted by the identity which is both relationally compatible and congruent with the whole of Jesus.

Jesus' sanctified life and practice in his kingdom and the surrounding context, and in relation to persons in those contexts, went beyond a system of ethics and a predetermined code of conduct. This is not to say that situations determined his ethical practice (as in situation ethics, situationalism), nor to only emphasize principles (as in principlism). Ethics, in specific practice, require a forensic framework which is applicable for all situations and circumstances, or else ethics become merely situational. The three qualifying issues involved in his engagement of a culture continue to inform us of his ethical practice. His sanctified life and practice, in both his kingdom-family and the surrounding context, was a predisposed relational involvement of his whole person guided by triangulation with the Trinity to fulfill his purpose and function in the relationships to be whole and necessary to make whole. This is *the integrating theme of Christian ethics*, to which practice coheres. This relational context and process are only on God's terms, which defined and determined Jesus' identity and function—thus foremost defining and determining his ethical practice.

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

The focus of means to balance a teleological focus in ethical studies is defined as the obligatory (*deon* in Greek) means necessary to an end, or refraining from the wrong means—known as a deontological focus.³⁹ Yet, the issue for ethics in terms of character and conduct is when ethical practice becomes the primary focus. That is, as ethical means become separated or blurred from their particular end, ethical practice is problematic in clearly understanding its significance to that end, tending to become an end in itself, at least in function if not also in purpose. This also reduces the significance of such character and conduct, whose attribute and right behavior tend to become the end revolved around subtly for oneself.

Deontological ethics (based on the obligation and duty to do what is right) is synonymous with the biblical term *opheilo*: morally obligated to (e.g., do something) or by virtue of personal obligation. *Opheilo* in the practice of God's law easily becomes the fulfillment of covenant obligation rather than the response to God on God's terms for covenant relationship together. In contrast to *opheilo*, Jesus consistently made a matter definitive and/or imperative (as discussed throughout this study) with the term *dei*: must, necessary by the nature of things. Yet, for Jesus, a matter was necessary not by the nature of some principle, value or virtue; that would be reductionism, notably of the whole of God. For Jesus, *dei* involved only by the nature of who and what he is in relationship

³⁹ For a discussion on teleological and deontological reasoning, see Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 119-122.

together with the whole of God (e.g., Mk 8:31), thus defining and determining the nature of how he functioned (e.g., Lk 19:5).

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

Definitive Terms for Identity & Function: the Sermon on the Mount

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

As Jesus declared in the Sermon on the Mount (discussed initially in chapter four), his coming adhered to and cohered with the collective word of God in the OT, not to abolish but to fulfill (Mt 5:17-20). The Sermon on the Mount is framed in the larger context of the OT and thus in the full context of God's thematic action. What his embodiment adhered to and cohered with, however, was not a mere list of demands of the law, nor a system of ethics and moral obligations (*opheilo*). The law is God's desires and terms for covenant relationship together. In his relational context and process, Jesus paid attention not merely to the oral and written word of God but to those *words from God*—that is, the communication from God. Unlike much of human communication, God's communicative action is not merely informative for a cognitive purpose, nor was it to announce terms for ethics. God's communication has distinct authorial intention (as communicator/author) to which Jesus' embodiment adhered and cohered: God's thematic relational action in response to the human condition for the purpose only to be whole in

relationship together. His incarnation was indeed Emmanuel, God vulnerably present and intimately involved *with us* for relationship together.

By the nature necessary (*dei*, not *opheilo*) of his identity, all of Jesus' words and action cohered with God's thematic relational action. Thus, Jesus' teachings (*didache*) need to be understood in coherence with the whole of God's communicative and thematic action, and the terms he disclosed should not be separated from this action. Conjointly, Jesus' life and practice (including, yet beyond, character and conduct) was both in relational congruence with God's action in the trinitarian relational context, as well as ongoingly relationally compatible fully to the dynamic grace and love of God's action by the trinitarian relational process. This relational involvement goes further than character and conduct, and deeper than doing the right ethic or fulfilling moral obligation. Without this relational congruence and relational compatibility, there is no functional coherence with God's thematic action, and thus with God's terms for conjoint function to be whole in new covenant relationship together in his kingdom-family and to make whole in relationships together necessary in the surrounding context. And the only alternative to the function of God's whole is anything less or any substitute of the whole from reductionism, which the study of Christian ethics urgently needs to examine.

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

As we began our discussion in chapter four, the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) was Jesus' summary discourse of *what* we are and *who* we become, and thus *how* we live and function—whether in his kingdom-family or the surrounding context—because of *whose* we are. This directly addressed the issue of human ontology and the determination of the person and wholeness in human practice. The issue here, as is consistently evident throughout the narratives of Jesus, was the tension/conflict between God's whole and reductionism. Jesus' conflict with a segment of Judaism was with the reductionist who defined and determined life and practice based on the ontology of the person from the outside in, not from the inside out. Thus, Jesus made imperative for his followers that their righteousness—the integrity and quality of functional involvement which others can expect in relationships—must by the nature of their identity go beyond reductionism (Mt 5:20). That is, this goes beyond merely displaying character traits and practicing the right ethic to the authentic righteousness which functions in likeness to what, who and how God is in relationship.

Righteousness is the process (not attribute) that makes functional our identity as Jesus' followers and whose we are; and identity formation (as he defined in the beatitudes) is integrated with the process to be righteous (the growth characteristic of the fourth beatitude, 5:6), the extent and depth of which is constituted by the righteous God in relationship together. Identity and righteousness are conjoined to present whole persons in congruence with who, what and how they truly are, namely those constituted with Jesus in his trinitarian relational context and process. Righteousness is necessary so that his followers, by the nature of their identity, can be counted on to be those authentic

persons in relationships—both in his kingdom-family and in the surrounding context, nothing less and no substitutes. His summary discourse makes deeply evident this qualitative relational process signifying God’s whole and God’s irreducible and nonnegotiable terms for them to function in relationship together to be whole and to make whole.

The definitive terms Jesus disclosed for the integrity and quality of their functional involvement in relationships (“righteousness” ethics if you wish) are also a necessary function of his followers’ identity based on the ontology of the person from the inside out. This ontology of the person underlies his summary discourse and points to *the integrating theme of God’s terms*: the function of whole persons (constituted by the involvement of the heart, yet not in dualism) in relationships together (signified by the primacy of intimate involvement) necessary to be whole and to make whole, the function of whom are defined and determined only by the whole of God.

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

As we discussed in chapter four, Jesus clearly defined the process of identity formation for his followers (Mt 5:3-12) and the identity issues of clarity and depth necessary to have qualitative distinction from the common’s function of reductionism, and to distinguish who, what and how we are with others in the surrounding context (5:13-16). This necessitates by its nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) the ontology of the whole person created in the image of God and those persons in relationship together created to be whole in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity; moreover, this is the theological anthropology which coheres with the light. This constitutes the relational compatibility and congruence necessary to function as whose we are. Thus, the remaining sections of Jesus’ summary teachings (a primer for discipleship) for all his followers (5:21-7:27) make evident the function of this new identity conjoined with relational righteousness and the ontology of the whole.

Two common issues about the Sermon on the Mount need brief attention. If God’s terms for the whole of relationship together were disclosed by Jesus essentially for the future life in his kingdom, then present life and practice is negotiable or reducible to our terms. On the other hand, if God’s terms are only high ideals incapable for realistic life and practice, then these terms need to be negotiated or reduced to terms shaped by our prevailing function. Neither future-life interpretation allowing us to ignore his discourse nor high-ideals perception causing us to evade the Sermon on the Mount are correct or an acceptable perceptual-interpretive framework for Jesus’ summary teaching. When the Father made it imperative to “Listen to my Son,” he wants us to pay attention to every word for the whole of relationship together made clearly evident, vulnerably accessible and intimately experienced with the embodied whole of the Word. His terms for necessary (*dei*) life and practice in the present, therefore, are nonnegotiable and irreducible, and they are to be understood in the incarnation principle of embodiment of the whole: nothing less and no substitutes.

Moreover, along with his relational context and process, Jesus' summary teachings need to be framed throughout his discourse in the three major interrelated issues for all practice (introduced from the beginning of this study):

1. the significance of the person presented to others, including
2. the integrity and quality of this person's communication and
3. the depth level of relationship this person engages with others.

As Jesus seeks to constitute his followers in relationships beyond reductionism to the whole of God, his terms need to be understood as directly involving these interrelated issues—which directly also involves the above two basic issues of how we define ourselves and do relationships, and thus, of course, implies how we practice church.

In addition, Jesus' summary teachings further cohere throughout with the progression and interaction of three critical concerns: (1) self-autonomy, (2) self-determination, and (3) self-justification. It may seem incorrect to say Jesus was addressing something self-oriented in a non-individualistic setting. Yet, in this collective-oriented sociocultural context, self-autonomy was not the modern self-autonomy of individualism in the West but rather the self-autonomy of persons (individually or collectively) who determined function in relationships together “to be apart” from the whole—for example, by the absence of significant involvement while in relationship together, or by merely keeping relational distance in those contexts (cf. Martha and Mary). This pervasively happens in a collective context as well (even in churches in the East and global South), though due to ontological simulation and epistemological illusion it is less obvious than in the individualism of the modern West. The subtlety of self-autonomy (as an individual or a collective) involves the work of reductionism, which signifies its influence. Jesus disclosed the terms to be whole, and thus ongoingly confronted human life and practice reducing the whole in each of these terms. In the process, he broadens and deepens our understanding of sin, and its functional implications and relational repercussions. Therefore, these three concerns evidence the general applicable character of the Sermon on the Mount and the need in particular for all his followers to respond in the present to his summary teaching.

Matthew 5:21-48

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

The commandments (*entole*) Jesus focused on was not a specific list of demands, code of behavior, system of obligations or rules of ethics—all denoted by the term *entalma*, a synonym for commandment. While *entalma* points directly to its content and stresses what to do, *entole* stresses the authority of what is commanded, that is, its qualitative relational significance. In other words, with *entole* Jesus focused on the law

beyond merely as the charter for the covenant, but he went further to the whole of God's desires for covenant relationship together in love (cf. Ex 20:6, Dt 7:9) and deeper to God's necessary terms for relationship together to be whole in likeness of the Trinity (signified by his emphasis on the Father). Jesus' teaching engaged this communicative action.

This is not to say that Jesus did away with the *entalma* of the law. Jewish ceremonial law, for example, served to maintain purity, and thus to have clear distinction as God's people. Sanctified life and practice serves this same purpose to have qualitative distinction from the common's function and to be defined only by God as God's—that is, who they are and whose they are. Yet, Jewish practice (post-exilic Judaism in particular) of the law often fell into ethnocentricism and national protectionism—maintaining the law was a symbol of this—thus essentially reducing God's terms for covenant relationship and making their collective self-determination an end in itself—that is, merely for themselves rather than as “the light to the nations” for the whole of God and the relationships necessary to be whole. This is how the practice of the law deteriorates when seen only as *entalma*.

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

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

When Jesus juxtaposed God's desires by declaring “But I tell you” (5:22,28,32,34,39,44), he made evident the substantive meaning of the law and the prophets. The focus of *entalma* on the *letter of the law* was a prevailing norm in his day. That practice, however, operated essentially as a system of constraints to prevent negative acts, without any responsibility for further action: “Do not murder” (v.21), “Do not commit adultery” (v.27). Based on the ontology of the person from the outside in, which is defined primarily by what one does, this kind of system invariably focused on outward behavior as the main indicator of adherence to the law. No physical murder and adultery meant fulfilling those demands of the law, without consideration of the significance of that behavior. This opened the way for God's law to be reduced and its function to be shaped by self-autonomy, self-determination or even self-justification. To formulate

practice based only on the letter of the law is to reduce the integrity of human ontology in the divine image and to redefine the significance of human identity based on merely the quantitative aspects of what we do. Furthermore, this self-definition also determined how others are perceived and how relationships are done.

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

The law signifies God's desires and terms for covenant relationship together. This is neither about merely avoiding the wrong behavior nor about a code of merely the right thing to do, neither about not making mistakes nor about trying to be right—that is, about mere ethics. This action becomes legalistic and its preoccupation is legalism. Rather these are terms for relationship together and how to be involved, thus *the positive action to live whole necessary to make relationships whole*. Yet, even the specific prescriptions Jesus presented to these six examples should not be taken as an end-practice for ethics; they are only provisional steps in the relational process to wholeness. For example, merely clearing up something someone has against you is not the sum of reconciliation—nor all that peace involves—yet is a provisional step to that end to be whole. When Christian ethics stops at provisional steps, its practice will not function to be whole and make whole but only as a reductionist substitute.

Jesus clearly countered the underlying concern of the reductionists about doing the “right” thing by the letter, which did not serve to lead them to this positive action. While refraining from negative behavior certainly has some value, the absence of positive action is of greater importance to God—evidencing the deeper significance of God's design and purpose for those relational terms involving murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, an eye for an eye, and love for enemies. As the counterpart to legalism, even moralism is not the righteousness God expects and Jesus constitutes in his followers. Moralists and legalists are misguided in thinking that such conformity is congruent with, and even compatible to, God's desires and who, what and how God is. Conversely, we should not be thinking in the limits of mere conformity to God's terms, which would tend to become merely about doing the right thing.

On the other hand, since the law signifies God's terms for relationship together, this certainly makes the practice of God's law the function only of our whole person, thus making practice vulnerable (vv.44,46-47), threatening (vv.39-42), if not even demanding (vv.29-30) for us. Yet, the further responsibility of God's desires in the spirit of the law is not given to burden or constrain human persons. It was disclosed only for relationships together to be whole; and the various terms of this deeper responsibility signify positive relational opportunities to grow in the new identity of our whole person to make

relationships together whole. The interrelated focus and conjoint function between the whole person and relationships together always emerges in the whole of Jesus' words and action because they embody the essential relational ontology of who, what and how the triune God is. In his summary teaching, Jesus is giving us understanding of the heart of God's desires for human persons and the integrating purpose for God's terms vital for his followers together. As we reflect on these six examples together juxtaposed in this section, they clearly disclose the loving purpose God has: to relationally belong in the relationships together as the whole of God's family.

Without the spirit of the law, we have no grasp of God's law and God's thematic intent for the law in response to the human condition "to be apart" from God's whole. Without the spirit of the law, Christian ethics has no basis to constitute the integrity and significance necessary to be compelling for even Christian life and practice, much less for all human life and practice. In his summary teaching, Jesus conjoins the spirit of the law to the law to qualify the application of the letter of the law. Yet, Jesus disclosed that this forensic interpretive framework is constituted further in the qualitative relational context, and deeper by the intimate relational process of the whole of God. This signifies the relational language by which his teaching needs to be received in order to be understood, and constitutes how it must by its nature (*dei*) be responded to in order to be experienced.

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

The function of this human ontology and its qualitative relational process, however, are ongoingly challenged by reductionism and its counter-relational work. Each of the six examples represents a situation or circumstance which can: either redefine our person and let that determine how we function in that relationship; or, instead, be an opportunity to grow in being our whole person and to function in that relationship to live whole and make whole. The former alternative involves a contrary dynamic. For these situations and circumstances to redefine who and what we are, and to determine how we function, implies that we react to other persons in these contexts essentially out of a concern for self-autonomy. We are reduced to merely *reactors* by pursuits in self-autonomy, thus ironically indicating an absence of freedom, rather than being free to function as *respondors* by the relational involvement of love for the sake of God's whole.

This self-autonomy emerges in the priority or dominance given progressively to: (1) self-interests, for example, signified in acting on anger or sexual desires (involving issues of how the person is defined and relationships are done); (2) self-concerns, for example, signified by unwarranted divorce (overlapping in self-interest), or depending on

oaths for validation (involving issues of the significance of the person presented, integrity of one's communication and level of relationship engaged); and (3) self-centeredness, for example, signified by seeking restitution/vengeance (overlapping with self-concern), or keeping relational distance with those who contest you, are different or are simply not in your social network (involving issues of how the person is defined and level of relationship engaged). The concern for self-autonomy overlaps into self-determination and interacts with the major and basic issues outlined above.

Each of these six expressions of self-autonomy can find some justification, yet at the expense of reducing human ontology and reinforcing reductionism's counter-relational work "to be apart" from the whole of relationships together. The persons involved are reduced to less than whole persons, and relationships become self-oriented instead of relationships together—even in a collective context. This is the contrary dynamic Jesus confronted by juxtaposing the qualitative relational significance of the whole of God's terms necessary for relationships together to be whole, and to be made whole as needed. In the process, he deepens our understanding of sin by introducing us to the functional workings of the sin of reductionism. His summary teaching exposes the sin of countering (knowingly or inadvertently) God's desires, as well as God's created relational design and purpose, by reducing one's own person and then reducing other persons to reinforce the human condition "to be apart."

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

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

To provide clarity and depth of function for this new identity on God's terms, Jesus concluded this section with the functional key (the first of three for the entire discourse) to which the six examples converge and sanctified identity's life and practice coheres.

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

Jesus directed this to those who have been adopted by his Father into God’s family. Moments earlier he said essentially “Love others (even those against you) to be the whole of your identity, that you may begin to function (*ginomai*, begin to be) as the sons and daughters of your Father in heaven” (5:44-45a). It was a recognized responsibility in the ancient Mediterranean world for adopted children to represent their new Father and to extend his name. Jesus defined this responsibility here but qualified it essentially with this key: “*You are to be involved with others as your heavenly Father is involved with others, notably with you.*” This is the relational significance of *agape* love, which Jesus embodied to fulfill God’s thematic action to make us whole in relationship together. Now he calls his followers to embody this love in relationships together to be the whole of God’s family and to make whole for God’s family—to embody, however, not merely as his followers but further and deeper as their Father’s very own sons and daughters. The seventh beatitude (5:9) coheres with this key to give depth of meaning to the practice of peace (wholeness).

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

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

Jesus does not want his followers “to become” reduced to mere *reactors* to that situation or circumstance and to those persons; that would be counter-relational work. He calls us “to be” persons who live in relationships to be whole and function to make relationships whole, thus free to be *respondors* in love. His call and its function are ongoingly challenged to be redefined and determined by reductionism, notably with subtle self-autonomy apart from God’s terms. This first functional key begins to form the basis necessary for *the process of triangulation* in relational congruence with the triangulation Jesus used to engage the surrounding contexts and relationships with persons in those contexts without being redefined or determined by reductionism. Just as it was for Jesus, the main aspect of this triangulation process is ongoing intimate involvement in relationship together with our Father and the whole of God. In this relational involvement, the three major issues for all practice are also addressed ongoingly.

Relational involvement with our Father is the guiding point of reference for the function of our sanctified identity in the surrounding contexts and in relationships with persons in those contexts, including in his kingdom-family. Furthermore, this

involvement is the dynamic necessary for Jesus' followers to embody *the reciprocating contextualization* to clearly both be whole and make whole. In the next section, Jesus takes this relational process even further and deeper.

Matthew 6:1-34

In this discipleship primer preempted by assumptions about the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus constitutes his followers in the relational righteousness that by its nature functions beyond reductionism. Relational righteousness is the process to ensure that our identity as his followers functions unambiguously in ongoing life and practice. It is crucial for our identity to be in conjoint function with relational righteousness in order to present whole persons in congruence with the nature of our full identity, thus as those who can be counted on to be those authentic persons in relationships—both with God and with others, in his kingdom-family and in the surrounding context, nothing less and no substitutes. Christian identity without righteousness is problematic and merely righteousness without wholeness of identity is equally problematic (cf. 5:20), which Jesus made evident in this section. This addresses deeply two of the major issues for all practice: the significance of the person we present to others and the integrity and quality of our communication.

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

God's righteousness is absolutely essential for our confidence in how the whole of God (not merely some part of God) will be in relationship together. This makes evident that righteousness without wholeness of identity is also problematic, which in this section Jesus makes imperative to go beyond reductionism. In other words, a partial or inaccurate presentation, or semblance of the person are insufficient to establish confidence and generate trust in relationships. Authenticity of the person is needed, which is the function of relational righteousness. The incarnation made evident God's righteousness since Jesus presented the embodied whole of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement. How we present our person to others involves this issue of authenticity and the function of righteousness, thus what others can expect and count on from us—including what God expects (cf. Jn 4:23-24, discussed previously).

How we function in the truth of who and what we are emerges from the significance of the person we present. In this section of his summary teaching, Jesus continued to expose the workings of reductionism and disclosed the deeper process of relational righteousness, namely in direct relationship with God. Paying attention to how our righteousness functions involves examining not only the person presented, this also

further involves understanding our perceptual-interpretive framework and the human ontology by which we live and practice.

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

Besides our perceptual-interpretive framework and our operating human ontology of the person presented, other issues which interact with this part of his teaching are: how we define our person and do relationships, thus the integrity and quality of our communication and the level of relationship engaged. And the overriding issue throughout this section of his summary teaching is the concern for self-determination. What follows in this section is a progression from self-autonomy in the previous section because self-determination is always in ongoing interaction with self-autonomy and coheres with that section’s teaching.

As noted previously, *hypokrites* involved playing a role or taking on an identity different than one’s true self. Just like an actor, this presentation of a person was made to a crowd, an audience, observers, that is, before others with interest, or anyone who took notice. When Jesus focused on righteousness, he was specific about “paying attention that you do not live your righteousness before others *to be seen*” (6:1, italics mine). The term for “to be seen” (*theaomai*) denotes to view attentively, deliberately observing an object to perceive its detail. In other words, this is a presentation intended to be observed and noticed by others. Moreover, *theaomai* (related to *theoreo*) involves more than merely seeing (as in *blepo*, to be discussed shortly); the observer regards the object with a sense of wonderment (maybe even imagination) in order to perceive it in detail. This implies that there is a certain effect, image, even illusion, that the “actor” seeks to establish about one’s presentation of self, which will result in a response “to be honored” by observers, and ultimately by God (6:2). The term *doxazo*, from *doxa* (glory), denotes to recognize, honor, praise. Whether performed overtly (as Jesus illustrated) or enacted simply in performing a role of service (as commonly seen in Christian ministries), this points to the self-determination motivating the act. This is what they seek and this is all they will experience, as Jesus said unequivocally: “they have received their reward in full” (6:2,5,16) with “no reward from your Father” (6:2). Consider also how the person is defined, how relationships are done and the level of relationship engaged.

This practice was addressed further when Jesus exposed such efforts “to be seen” in prayer (6:5) and “to show” others their acts of fasting (v.16). The same term (*phaino*) is used for both, which denotes to appear, be conspicuous, become visible—that is, essentially to be recognized by others for one’s presentation of self, and, of course,

ultimately be recognized by God. Both of these acts were accentuated to elevate (v.7) or dramatize (v.16) the effects for greater attention, thus greater recognition and honor. Whether elevated, dramatized or performed simply in religious duty, the effort for self-determination underlying these acts is clearly evident; and for some persons, this effort also overlaps into self-justification.

While the term *phaino* comes from *phos* (light), there is no clarity of light in this practice, even if punctuated with correct doctrine or accentuated with the right ethic and spiritual discipline. The identity of light in this presentation of the person is ambiguous at best, and mainly just reduced to outer simulation and inner illusion. In the absence of relational righteousness, there is no basis for authenticity of the person presented or of the integrity and quality of the person's communication. This is how we need to understand *hypokrites* and perceive its operation today—not so much as a blatant lie or subversion of the truth but as the reductionist substitute (sometimes even enacted unintentionally) for authenticity of the whole person, and thus for the function of one's full identity with others, notably with God. When the pursuit of recognition and affirmation is left to self-determination, it invariably becomes reduced to being seen by others and how others perceive what one does, thus easily compromising the authentic presentation of self "to be seen in a better light."

This is the purpose for Jesus making imperative the ongoing need to pay attention to how our righteousness functions. It has direct relational implications for determining the level of relationship we engage. In highlighting these three important areas of religious practice, his concern is foremost our relationship with our Father and the level of relationship we engage with him. The major implication of merely performing roles in Christian duty is the significance of the specific relational messages we communicate to God implied in such practice: first, about how we see ourselves—with an outer-in human ontology and the responsibility for fulfilling obligations by self-determination; next, about how we see God—that God is similar to us, and thus sees us as we see ourselves, holding us accountable to fulfill our obligations by self-determination; and then about our relationship together—it functions neither on the basis of grace nor on the intimate relational involvement of *agape*, which would be on God's terms, but rather it functions on the basis of obligation (*opheilo*) and fulfilling those expectations (from *entalma*, not *entole*), thus the preoccupation with what we do, reducing the relationship to our terms. There are assumptions about God made in these relational messages which we have no right to make—assumptions which Jesus corrected with the relational truth of the Father (discussed below).

These are pivotal relational messages implied in such practice constituted by self-determination. Their significance reflects a perceptual-interpretive framework and an outer-in ontology of the person which reduce life and practice to quantitative (over qualitative) function embedded in reductionism. How self-determination emerges in this process that reduces life and practice to quantitative function involves a two-fold dynamic: (1) it reduces function and practice to what a person can both control (overlapping with self-autonomy) and thus manage to accomplish for success in determining one's self, identity and worth (in contrast, qualitative function necessitates more from the whole person); yet (2), this cannot be determined in a spiritual vacuum or in social isolation, but by necessity of its quantitative approach can only be determined in comparison (and competition) with others, thus the use of quantitative indicators to

ascribe “better” or “less” to self-definition, identity and worth, and to establish higher and lower positions in stratified relationships (overlapping with self-justification, cf. 7:1-5, discussed in the next section). This reductionist focus becomes the preoccupation (even compulsion or obsession) in practice with the relational consequence implied in the above relational messages; and ethical and moral practice alone does not address this.

In contrast and conflict, Jesus disclosed the intimate relational messages from his Father, both in these three areas of religious practice and the rest of this section. He made eleven references to “your Father” (6:1,4,6,8,14,15,18,26,32)—vital relational messages about how our Father feels toward us and defines the nature of our relationship with him. In conflict with self-determined pursuit of recognition and validation, Jesus embodied God’s relational work of grace, and in his teaching he communicated the holy and transcendent God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement. From the midst of this apparent litany of prescriptions and injunctions emerged his relational language clearly divulging the intimate involvement and response of our heavenly Father. Contrary to the reductionist effort to be seen, he fully disclosed that “your Father sees” (6:4,6,18). The term for “sees” (*blepo*) is the most basic of a word-group having to do with sight and observation; others include *horao*, *theoreo* and *theaomai* discussed earlier. *Blepo* simply denotes exercising one’s capacity of sight, to look at with interest, to be distinctly aware of—suggesting an intentional or deliberate act (cf. 5:28, the implication of *blepo* as a relational act). The significance of his disclosure that your Father simply *blepo* is vital to what Jesus taught about these practices.

Jesus did not compartmentalize various acts (like giving to the needy) to different areas of function, thus fragmenting the person (“...do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,” 6:3). Nor, in this, was he suggesting to be subconscious in practice (“so that your giving may be in secret,” v.4); rather he was directly addressing the issue of practice becoming *self*-conscious, that is, self-oriented (for recognition) instead of giving self in relational involvement with the person(s) receiving. Jesus rendered such practice unfulfilling and unnecessary. Likewise for praying (6:6-7) and fasting (6:17-18), Jesus was not suggesting these practices be inconspicuous, nor inward or detached. These are relational acts of involvement for relationship together—namely, prayer as a means for greater intimacy with God, and fasting as a means of submission to God for deeper relationship. And Jesus targeted the authenticity of the whole person in intimate relational involvement together with our Father, nothing less and no substitutes.

Thus, Jesus declared the experiential truth for relationship together: our Father *blepo* us because he is relationally involved with us; such giving of our whole person to others (in service) and to God (in prayer and fasting) is relationally compatible to his involvement and is relationally congruent with how he sees us, as well as both defines our relationship together and functions in it. Jesus used the term “secret” (*kryptos*) to describe this relational involvement together. In an apparent play on words, *kryptos* (6:4,6,18) is in juxtaposition to *hypokrites* (6:2,5,16). *Kryptos* means hidden and *hypokrites* functions essentially to hide the whole person. Yet, in function they are contrary and in conflict. *Kryptos* (“in secret”) signifies the qualitative relational function of the whole person (constituted by the heart) in intimate involvement in relationship together, which *hypokrites* avoids and/or precludes this deeper involvement by the quantitative function of reductionism. Since this involvement signifies the relational truth of how God functions, our Father *blepo* intimately “what is done in secret,” that is, what

has qualitative relational significance from the inner out of the person. Our Father neither needs to use wonderment or imagination (as in *theaomai*) to see *what* we are, nor does he need deep contemplation (as in *horao*) to experience *who* and *how* we are, as we need to experience him. Our Father simply *blepo* the truth of the person presented, thus he intimately knows what, who and how we are, including what we need (6:8).

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

Jesus wholly embodied and thus vulnerably disclosed our Father’s intimately relationship-specific involvement with us, which is the basis for his Father’s imperative “Listen to my Son.” This is the experiential truth of their authentic presentation of their whole persons, with nothing less and no substitutes than what, who and how the whole of God is. In this teaching as the whole of God’s communicative action, Jesus called his followers to be whole in what, who and how we present of our person in relationship together with him, our Father, the whole of God.

As a relational means for, and an ongoing relational response of, the function of our full identity in relational righteousness together, Jesus taught us this summary prayer using only relational language to build relationship together: *the Lord’s Prayer*, a functional outline for relational communication humbly submitted directly to our holy (*hagiazō*) Father for relationship together as family (6:9) only on the whole of God’s terms (v.10) in order to be made whole, to live whole and to make whole for God’s family (vv.11-12), which necessitates neutralizing the influence (“temptation,” *peirasmos*) of reductionism and being disengaged (“deliver,” *rhyomai*) from its counter-relational work, authored and ongoingly promoted by Satan (v.13). These relational messages (about him, our relationship and our person), ongoingly communicated to our Father in humble response back to the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of God, constitute the integrity and quality of our communication (involving the three major issues for our practice). This then signifies the engagement of our whole person at the level of intimate involvement in relationship together—in the relationships necessary to be whole.

Just as with the incarnation of Jesus, this relational process begins with embodiment of the person. The significance of any embodiment, or incarnation, is a function of the person presented in relational context.⁴⁰ The incarnation of Jesus had ultimate significance because Jesus presented his whole person vulnerably in relationship

⁴⁰ Embodiment and “incarnational” are terms gaining wider usage in recent years—for example, incarnational discipleship, ethics, ministry, etc. Yet, these tend not to be understood as a function of the whole person presented in the relational context and process engaging intimate involvement in relationship together—namely in relational compatibility and congruence with the incarnation of Jesus embodying the whole of God for relationship together. Jesus was more than incarnational and embodied more than embodiment. In other words, mere use of a term does not make practice more functionally significant.

and functionally embodied the whole of God, nothing less and no substitutes. Likewise, the embodiment of our person only has significance in this relational process when it is the function of our whole person presented for intimate involvement in relationship together. Anything less and any substitutes for the whole (of our person and of God) are a function of reductionism, notably and subtly emerging from self-determination. Jesus continued in this section to directly address the issue of whom and what we will pursue.

Anything less and any substitutes of our whole person are incongruent with the person created in the image of God (cf. 6:25b-28), and thus incompatible for intimate relationship together with the whole of God. Jesus made this clearly evident in his remaining teaching. The influence of reductionism pervades our perceptual-interpretive framework and how we see things (6:23), thus defining our priorities and determining our primary pursuits (6:19,24). As noted previously, the eyes and the heart are interrelated functions for the whole person, which Jesus made evident earlier (5:28, cf. Job 31:7, Ecc 11:9). He now also interrelated their functions to the ongoing tension-conflict issue of reductionism of the whole. In function, Jesus said “For what defines you also determines where your heart (signifying the whole person) will be also” (6:21). In conjoint function, he made evident that what the eyes focus on determines the function of our identity as the light, that is, the full identity of our whole person (6:22-23). And he unequivocally delineated the complete incompatibility between reductionism and God’s whole, as well as exposed any illusion that we can pursue and function in both (6:24).

The lens from reductionism focuses on quantitative matter and function, thus pays attention to (or preoccupied with) the quantitative aspects of life and practice—namely in what we do and have—while ignoring (or making secondary) the qualitative areas and functions of persons and relationships together. Jesus reconstitutes this reductionism by restoring the qualitative function of the heart to constitute the whole person. Only the heart in qualitative function signifies the presence of the whole person—no matter how much quantitative practice accentuates the person presented. Conjointly, Jesus restored the primacy of relationship by constituting whole persons in the relationship together necessary to be whole. These are the qualitative intimate relationships, which by their nature are the function of only the hearts of whole persons opening to each other and coming together. This is the intimacy in relational congruence with the whole of God and God’s vulnerable presence, and the intimacy necessary to be relationally compatible with God’s ongoing intimate involvement. This is the relational outcome and experience “in secret” divulged by Jesus, in which the whole of God seeks our vulnerable presence and intimate involvement.

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

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

Second Functional Key: “*Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*” (6:33). “Seek” (*zeteo*, actively pursue to experience) in Jesus’ relational language is not about obligatory striving (*opheilo*) to belong to God’s kingdom, which becomes self-determination overlapping into self-justification. Likewise, “seek” is not about striving for an attribute of righteousness, and thus to be righteous in likeness to his to justify and/or ensure receiving “all these things.” Nor is this about practicing mere “kingdom ethics.” In his relational language, the imperative of *zeteo*, by the nature (*dei*) of God’s terms, is the qualitative pursuit of the whole of God (“his righteousness”) for intimate relationship together in his family (“kingdom”). This qualitative pursuit necessarily (*dei*) involves the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole person, constituted by the heart from the inner out, nothing less and no substitutes; such a pursuit, then, provides the clarity and depth for both who we are and whose we are in relationship together as his very own daughters and sons. This intimate relational process of belonging to his family and participating in his life has the relational outcome of ongoingly experiencing the whole of God further and deeper, as well as receiving what belongs to our Father in his family—the qualitative relational significance of “all these things” necessary to be made whole, to live whole and to make whole.

This functional key also provides the relational process by which our Lord’s summary prayer needs to be submitted to our Father and from which it will be fulfilled in his reciprocal relational response. Moreover, this key relational process coheres with the interrelated process between the fourth and sixth beatitudes (5:6,8). The second functional key of pursuing our Father on his terms further forms—conjointly with the first functional key of living how our Father loves us—the basis for *the process of triangulation* by making functional in our life and practice the main aspect of this triangulation process: ongoing intimate involvement in relationship together with our Father and the whole of God as family. Guided from this intimate relational point of reference, we are defined in the surrounding context by the trinitarian relational context of family, and how we function in relationships and in all our situations and circumstances is determined by the trinitarian relational process of family love for relationships together to be whole.

With the focus on this pursuit in our life and practice, it becomes unnecessary (not to mention insufficient) to self-determine the course of our life “into the future” (*eis*, motion determining action). Instead, ongoingly engage, without reductionism (implied by the daily presence of “enough trouble,” *kakia*, evil), the level of reciprocal involvement of intimate relationship together with the whole of God and the level of involvement with other relationships necessary to be whole and to make whole, just as Jesus projected (with the subjunctive mood) to close this section (6:34).

Matthew 7:1-27

Self-determination is never an individual action (or an individual group action) done in isolation from others (or other groups). Self-determination is a social phenomenon requiring a process of comparison to others to establish the standards of

measuring success or failure in self-determination. Invariably, these comparative (and competitive) differences lead to “better” or “less” social position (historically, even ontological nature, as seen in racism), thus the operation of stratified relationships together (formalized in systems of inequality). When relationships become separated, partitioned or fragmented, there is a basis of justification needed either to access a “better” position or to embed/maintain others in a “less” position. The pursuit of this basis is the effort for self-justification (by individual or group). That is to say, the effort for self-determination inevitably becomes the function in social context for self-justification; and the results of this effort invariably come at the expense of others, even unknowingly or inadvertently.

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

The dynamics of reductionism in religious/Christian life and practice is embedded in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of God’s whole. Yet, Jesus exposed the efforts of self-autonomy, self-determination and self-justification as insufficient (not to mention unnecessary) to be whole. Reductionism and the whole are incompatible. Moreover, they cannot be conjoined in any pluralistic or syncretistic way, and any attempt to do so will fragment the whole. It is the integrity and significance of this whole which Jesus pointed to in a vivid illustration of the issue of whom/what we will pursue (7:6). This verse is not merely an added injunction thrown into his discourse but needs to be directly integrated into this issue at hand. Given the full identity of his family in relationship together to be whole, to function in anything less is to pursue an alternative substitute of reductionism, even with good intentions. The dynamics Jesus described is consequential: The integrity (“sacred”) and significance (“pearls”) of your whole person and relationship together in essence are impulsively thrown (*ballo*) to reductionists, who treat with disdain (*katapateo*) anything whole, and even turn (*strepho*) on you to break down your wholeness and leave you fragmented (*rhegnymi*). While this may appear as hyperbole, the dynamic is rightfully described because of the essential violence reductionism exerts on the whole—even though the influence reductionism exerts, notably in its counter-relational work, tends to be a very subtle process, even appearing in Christian roles (cf. 2 Cor 11:14-15) or as the Christian norm, for example, in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of God’s whole.

The choice of whom/what we will pursue is really quite simple, as Jesus' summary teaching made definitive: God's whole or anything less and any substitute. Yet, the results are profoundly consequential, as Jesus made evident in this concluding section of his most major discourse with his followers.

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

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

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

This teaching tends to be reduced by interpreting it only in the limited context involving us with others. This bases how we do relationships with others on the self-orientation formulated from two basic issues (which Jesus addressed throughout his summary teaching): (1) how we define our person, and thus, on this basis, (2) how we do relationships. If this self-orientation has been influenced by reductionism, then "in everything we do to others" will not go beyond and deeper than a reductionist practice of how we do relationships based on a reductionist self-definition. In other words, what we desire others to act on (*thelo*) in relation to us will always be seen through this lens, which in turn will determine how we function with them. This use of self-orientation, even with the best of intentions as the Golden Rule, is insufficient basis for our life and practice "in everything"—for example, even for Christian ethical decisions and practice. Moreover, the practice emerging from this approach is inadequate to be the sum and substance (*eimi*, what is) of the law and the prophets (i.e., God's communicated Word), which Jesus vulnerably embodied in his teaching for relationship together to be whole.

The alternative to this reduction is the whole. The third functional key cannot be limited to only the context involving us with others, which would then take it out of its whole context, as the Golden Rule does. Its whole context involves us further and deeper

than this. This functional key can only be understood in the relational context of “your Father” and grasped by his relational process in intimate relationship together, which is the relational context and process Jesus disclosed and made definitive in his summary teaching. That is to say, in our Father’s relational context and process we have engaged vulnerable relationship together and have been intimately involved to experience the whole of God’s mercy, grace and *agape* involvement to be made whole. In his relational context and process, we ongoingly experience being redefined as whole persons, redeemed from reductionism and its sin, transformed necessarily in human ontology from the inner out and reconstituted in the relationships necessary to be whole. From this experience we know: (1) how we want to be seen (from the inner-out human ontology), (2) how we want to be treated by others (as whole persons, nothing less), and (2) what we want to experience in relationships (the intimacy together to be whole, no substitutes).

Therefore, on the basis of this relational experience together with our Father, Jesus calls those made whole to live whole “in everything,” notably with others in relationships to make whole. In other words, to **paraphrase his third function key**: *Use what you are intimately experiencing in your relationship with ‘your Father’ as the basis for defining and determining how to function with others, both in his kingdom-family and in the surrounding context—‘in everything’ live to be whole and make whole.*”

This points to the triangulation process. The third functional key completes the basis for *the process of triangulation* by making definitive the relational experience of being made whole in relationship together with our Father. In conjoint function with the second functional key (of pursuing our Father in relationship together as family on his terms), the third functional key uses what is being experienced in that intimate relationship to interact in conjoint function with the first functional key (of living how our Father loves us). Functioning together, these three functional keys provide this intimate relational point of reference by which to be guided in order to be defined in any context by the trinitarian relational context of family and to function in any relationship by the trinitarian relational process of family love. Triangulation with our Father takes us further than the right ethics and merely doing the right thing, and engages us deeper than acting in life and practice as mere *reactors* to others in situations and circumstances. As Jesus embodied and calls us to embody in likeness, triangulation with our Father takes our whole person and engages us to be involved with others just as he is involved with us for relationship together necessary to be whole, God’s whole.

Jesus embodied the whole of God’s thematic action and relational work of grace in response to the human condition “to be apart” from God’s whole, nothing less and no substitutes; thus he functioned on God’s terms signified in the law and the prophets for relationship together to be whole—terms irreducible and nonnegotiable, embodying the whole of God’s Word. Our embodiment, in likeness without reduction, will function in our full identity with relational righteousness to be also the sum and substance of the whole of God’s word—to function both in loving involvement to be whole and in loving response to make whole.

Without ongoing relational function in these three functional keys (all about our Father) and the triangulation process, Christian life and practice is left with only alternatives to the whole. To pursue, settle for or be resigned to anything less and any substitutes for the whole is to engage in reductionism. Jesus made clearly evident in the juxtaposition of reductionism with the whole throughout his summary discourse that

there is no other alternative in-between. Consequently, in each moment, situation, circumstance and relationship encountered in our life and practice, we are faced with the decisions of what is going to define us and what will determine how we function, notably with others in relationships. And we have only two alternatives (7:13-14): God's whole, which is irreducible and nonnegotiable, thus imperative to only one function ("narrow gate and road"); or anything less and any substitutes, which is amenable to any variation away from the whole, thus adaptable to various functions ("wide gate and road"). "Gate" is a metaphor for what defines and determines us, while "road" is a metaphor for the ongoing function in our practice emerging from that "gate." The wide one leads away (*apago*) from the whole to loss (*apoleia*, i.e., reduction) or ultimate ruin, while the narrow one brings before (*apago*, same word for opposite dynamic) the *zoe* of the whole of God and to the qualitative relational function of *zoe* in God's whole.

Zoe signifies the qualitative relational function of the whole of God and the Trinity's relational action in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. *Zoe* involves the practice of this qualitative relational work made definitive in Jesus' teaching, which is contrary to prevailing practices and norms (as implied above) and in conflict with quantitative outer-in presentations of a reduced human ontology (7:15-20). Moreover, authentic relational work is not about doing something (like performing ministry, 7:22), nor about beliefs, associations or intentions with "Lord" (7:21). This qualitative relational work is only about involvement in intimate relationship together to be whole, experienced first with the whole of God ("I don't know you" to the reductionists, 7:23). This is the qualitative relational work of those being made whole in relationship together in God's family, and thus who are able to live whole as their Father's very own daughters and sons—those "who do the will of my Father" (7:21b).

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

As Jesus unfolded the truth for relationship in his teaching, he clarified that: in reality, the function of self-autonomy is not free but only an ironic form of enslavement—namely because of the outer-in human ontology which defines it and

determines its practice—which self-determination reinforces by being constrained to the limits of ontological simulation, and which self-justification then embeds even deeper in epistemological illusion. The events, situations, circumstances and relationships (“rain...wind,” 7:27) experienced in life and practice will expose their lack of qualitative substance to be whole, qualitative significance to live whole, and qualitative function to make whole. This is a reality check for those engaged in any form of reductionism (even inadvertently or naively), which extends our accountability with the clear need to ongoingly account for what defines us and what determines how we function—notably in what we specifically characterize as our Christian practice.

As the primer for discipleship, Jesus’ words to his followers made evident that discipleship is following him in relational progression to his Father for relationship together as his very own to be whole as family (cf. Jn 12:44,49-50). This clearly involves discipleship and frames discipleship formation in only his Father’s relational context and process. While there are more than a few variations of discipleship and approaches to discipleship formation, his closing metaphor of building a house warns us that they may only appear to be authentic to define his disciples and valid to determine discipleship. Jesus was unequivocal that the authenticity and validity foundational for all his followers is grounded in the inner-out functional practice of all his words. All his words, communicating our Father’s terms for relationship together, are what his Father also made imperative for us to “Listen to my Son.” Therefore, all his words communicated to us from our Father are not optional, negotiable, nor can his authentic followers be selective about which of his words to practice (cf. Lk 6:46). They cohere as the whole of God’s terms necessary for relationship together to be whole.

Even as he shared his summary discourse, Jesus vulnerably embodied the whole of God and intimately involved himself in relationships with others to live whole and to make whole. Many also listening to his words, other than his disciples, recognized his qualitative difference (*exousia*, denoting his right and authority to be and make whole) and his qualitative distinction from the apparent reductionists prevailing in their context (7:28-29). Yet, what those persons did with his words they listened to with interest was an issue of accountability conjoined with authenticity (cf. Eze 33:30-32, a pervasive practice in ancient times as well as modern). His followers are called beyond reductionism to be the authentic whole relationally congruent to him, and thus ongoingly accountable to vulnerably embody God’s whole and to be intimately involved with others for relationship together—to be whole, to live whole and to make whole, nothing less and no substitutes.

Ethics Sanctified and Made Whole

As Jesus vulnerably embodied and clearly made definitive in his teaching, how we live emerges from who and what we are. That is, more than a paradigmatic association, our practice directly emerges from what functionally (not ideally) defines who and what we are—shaping our identity by which we actually function, not who and what we merely profess to be.

It is an illusion for a person to think one makes choices/decisions about how to live completely on one’s own without any influence from others or the surrounding

context. Jesus clearly challenges our consciousness in two ways conjointly: (1) to understand this influence and what actually shapes, determines, controls or even enslaves us; and (2), at the same time, he does not merely raise our consciousness level to just redeem/free us for independent choices from this influence, but, further and deeper than this, he reverses the dynamic (as signified by triangulation and reciprocating contextualization) for his followers from being reactors to that influence to responders who are involved with others and the surrounding context in love to be and make whole, thus responding for their well-being and wholeness (cf. to function of seventh beatitude, 5:9).

For this reversal of influence in how we live, Christian ethics needs to be sanctified in our life and practice. That is, Christian ethics needs to be relationally compatible with Jesus' relational context and needs to function in relational congruence with his relational process in order to have the qualitative distinction from the common's function of reductionism necessary to constitute the process of living in relationships to be whole on God's terms. The process of Christian ethics as sanctified life and practice emerges only from the function of sanctified identity (with the contingency of the sixth beatitude, Mt 5:8)—the interaction of our full identity with the whole of God conjoined with our minority identity sent into the surrounding context. By its nature (*dei*) sanctified identity is intrusive of (not set apart from) the surrounding common's context, thus the sanctified life and practice emerging from it will be intrusive of (while qualitatively distinct from) the pervading and prevailing common's function in that context. And the practice of Christian ethics can be nothing less and no substitutes of this qualitatively distinct function in "the process of living in relationships to be whole only on God's terms."

If what and who we are, and thus how we are in the surrounding context, does not function "to be whole," then whatever else we do—however well-intentioned with dedication, sacrifice or service—becomes a substitute of reductionism. Without the process of living to be whole, Christian ethics becomes mere ethics, thus essentially becomes some reductionist alternative about what to do, not who, what and how to be. This is the functional practice of Christian ethics when the underlying human ontology is less than whole—even if unintentionally or inadvertently shifted to focus merely on the right thing to do; and in this practice, who, what and how we are is diminished in qualitative significance, even if high in quantitative activity. This practice directly involves the issues of (1) the significance of the person we present to others, (2) the quality of what we communicate by our action, and (3) the level of relationship we engage in this practice.

The identity of Jesus' followers and the whole of God's family is rooted in his *call to be whole*. The functional embodiment of his call involves whole persons intimately involved in the relationships together necessary to be whole in likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity. This implies that Christian ethics, though enacted by persons, is not about what the individual person does, nor about a form of righteous self-autonomy; rather, by the nature of God's whole, Christian ethics is always about persons together living as the whole of God's family. Furthermore, this relational context and process goes beyond the conventional function of community and merely its collective practice. Without the functional whole to belong to and to be an ongoing part of, the individual person cannot be whole, and thus merely strains to do the right ethics and to

fulfill one's obligations, likely in self-determination and/or self-justification. Moreover, without the functional presence of the whole, these reductionist alternatives and substitutes are not exposed for us to understand their influence on us, such that we can further be made whole and reverse reductionism's influence in order to make whole.

Therefore, by the nature of being relationally compatible with Jesus' trinitarian relational context of family and relationally congruent with his trinitarian relational process of family love, Christian ethics is necessarily both sanctified and made whole. And the practice of Christian ethics must by this nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) be nothing less and no substitutes of the process of living in relationships to be whole only on God's terms.

The prevailing practice of relationships in the surrounding context (and often in churches) effectively functions "to be apart" from the whole in the counter-relational work of reductionism. The whole of God's thematic relational work of grace intrudes on this human condition in loving response to make it whole, which Jesus vulnerably embodied and intimately involved his whole person for the relationships together necessary to be God's whole. This embodied relational involvement is the process of living to be whole, and thus what Christian ethics is and what our engagement with culture in the surrounding contexts is for. Embodying Jesus' "call to be whole" in sanctified life and practice is a function of sanctified identity, which conjoins his call with his commission "sent to be whole" in salvific life and practice to extend God's family love to make whole the human condition.

The coherence of Jesus' engagement with culture and practice of ethics naturally unfolds to extend our discussion to Jesus' mission. This, of course, has been increasingly made evident already by the clarity of function of his sanctified identity in qualitative distinction of his sanctified life and practice in the surrounding contexts of the world—with ongoing triangulation and reciprocating contextualization.

Jesus and Mission

Engaging culture and practicing Christian ethics are inseparable from participating in mission, and they converge together in the same relational dynamic. It is this relational dynamic which provides both coherence for these three areas and the significance necessary for their function to be constituted in God's whole. This includes the convergence of sanctified life and practice to be whole and salvific life and practice to make whole, in which all three are involved by the nature of what this relational dynamic constitutes.

This relational dynamic is notable for participation in mission since, on the one hand, mission involvement is antecedent to involvement in culture and ethics in the apparent order of God's priorities—which some Christians use to minimize or ignore culture and ethics. Yet, on the other hand, their involvements necessarily interact and cannot be separated without reducing the integrity of mission (namely with an incomplete Christology) and fragmenting its significance (notably with a truncated soteriology). Participating in mission cannot be done apart from a surrounding context nor apart from righteous involvement with persons in that context. Within the interaction of these three areas, mission in function often needs to emerge from engaging culture and practicing

Christian ethics, though the process is not linear. There is one function, however, antecedent to mission, which this relational dynamic makes evident—and indeed imperative to respond to.

The incarnation evokes various images, but “intrusive” tends not to be one of them. Yet, Jesus embodied the intrusiveness of God in response to the human condition—which was disconcerting for the reductionists and their counter-relational practice—because “the Father sent me into the world” (Jn 3:17; 5:36; 10:36; 17:18a). The term for “sent” (*apostello*) denotes to send forth on a certain mission, signifying Jesus’ commission by his Father to fulfill his response to the human condition. Yet, “commission” should not be reduced by disembodiment from the relational dynamic of the Father with his Son. That is, the context for his commission should not be confused with “into the world,” which the current missional emphasis on contextualization tends to do. The world is certainly where his salvific work is to be fulfilled but its situations and circumstances do not determine the context for the significance of his commission.

In his formative family prayer (Jn 17), Jesus summarized his purpose to disclose (*phaneroo*, not merely *apokalypto*) his Father to us for intimate relationship together in the very likeness of their relationship in the Trinity (17:6,21-23,26). This relationship (defined as eternal life, 17:3), theirs and ours together, cannot function while under the influence of the surrounding context “of the world” (*ek*, preposition signifying out of which one is derived or belongs, 17:14,16); that is to say, relationship determined by our terms (even with good intentions) or by reductionist substitutes from the surrounding context. Jesus made evident the ongoing conflict with reductionism this relationship encounters and pointed to the relational dynamic necessary to live in the whole of relationship together, which Jesus vulnerably embodied in sanctified life and practice to be intimately involved with his followers for their sanctified life and practice (17:19).

In his prayer, Jesus commissioned (*apostello*) his followers for the specific mission “just as” (*kathos*, to show agreement between) his Father commissioned him: “As you sent me into the world, I send them into the world” (17:18, cf. 20:21). In Jesus’ paradigm for serving (Jn 12:26, discussed previously), the first priority of intimate involvement with him in relationship together is necessary over the work of serving, ministry and mission. For conventional paradigms for mission, sending workers out to the harvest fields becomes the urgent priority dominating our focus, thus disembodiment the commission (however well meaning). Yet, as Jesus made definitive, the call to discipleship is the call to be whole, which, in order not be reduced, involves the need to be sanctified (holy) to distinguish the whole from the common’s function in the surrounding contexts of the world, including those notable harvest fields. This clearly qualifies “Christ’s commission” for mission and edifies prevailing perceptions of it by defining: *what* to send out, *whom* to send out, *why* and thus *how* to send out.

For the Son’s purpose and function from his Father to be transferred to his followers, the enactment of the commission has to be both sanctified and whole to be compatible (“just as,” *kathos*) with the Father-Son relationship and then the Father-Son-disciples relationship. Jesus’ prayer conjoins the call to be whole and his commission in the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love (17:21-23). This clearly established the context of his commission in sanctified life and practice with the whole of God, 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 kinship family) are not statically "still in the world" (*en*, remaining in it, 17:11) but now dynamically sent "into the world" (*eis*, motion into) to function whole in likeness of the Father and the Son with the Spirit in further response to make whole the human condition. Therefore, his followers' call to be whole is conjointly *his followers sent to be whole*. This constitutes the significance of *what* to send out and signifies the importance of *whom* to send out and defines more deeply *why* to send out (with the full soteriology), while providing the basis for *how* to function in his commission.

This relational dynamic for involvement in mission (as well as in culture and Christian ethics) is made further definitive in his formative family prayer. While the whole of life together in his relational context and process is uniquely intimate and sanctified, its practice cannot remain private nor individual. As he directly related the world (and life and practice in its surrounding contexts) to himself and then to his followers (in relationship together), Jesus prayed using the prepositions "in" (*en*, 17:11,13), "of" (*ek*, vv.14,16), "out of" (*ek*,v.15) and "into" (*eis*, v,18). Each preposition has its own significance which needs to be distinguished in any discussion on mission.

For Jesus to be "in the world" only described a general surrounding context in which he remained (*en*) temporarily. While *en* also signifies his followers remaining in the world, this position is governed by the preposition *ek*. That is, how Jesus functioned while remaining in the surrounding context was determined by the nature of his context of origin (relationship together in the Trinity), not by what prevailed in the surrounding context "of the world" (*ek*, out of which one is derived, belongs). Likewise, for his authentic followers, those also "not of the world," *ek* involves a dynamic moving from being embedded to motion out from within the surrounding context, yet only in terms of the common's function and practice, not going out of the common's context. This dynamic of *ek* signifies going from being defined and determined by the prevailing culture (or situations and circumstances) in a surrounding context to movement out from within its influence—which certainly necessitates engaging culture.

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

The practice of this relational involvement is always while "in the world," which the above *ek* phrase does not include since it is limited to a shift only in purpose and function. In the same breath Jesus also prayed for his followers not to be removed "out of the world" (17:15). "Out of" is the same preposition *ek*, which is used differently in this phrase not for being embedded but for the matter of spatial location. The dynamic of this phrase signified the direction of their purpose and function to be relationally involved not away from but directly in the midst of the surrounding context and in the lives of persons in that context. Eliminating this sense of separation (spatially and relationally) also applies to not being removed from relational involvement even while practicing service,

ministry and mission by maintaining subtle relational distance; this certainly includes righteous involvement with those persons in Christian ethics so that they can count on his followers to be of significance and their actions to have substance (cf. 17:21b,23b).

Clearly then, Jesus gave his followers no option but to remain (*en*) and to be relationally involved (not the separation of *ek*) in direct life and practice in the surrounding contexts of the world; and he distinctly qualified what (who) is to define them and determine how they function in those contexts (*en* is governed by the other *ek*, out from within its influence). While this relational dynamic is irreducible and nonnegotiable, there is always the functional alternative to remain “in the world” on ambiguous terms, which essentially become defined and determined by reductionist substitutes—notably in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion. In this relational dynamic, grasping *en* and *ek* (out of) conjoined with the other use of *ek* (of) is a crucial distinction, the subtle difference of which is commonly blurred by reductionism. Being “not of the world” goes beyond having a static identity or self-determination status and deeply involves a functional framework imperative for the relational process defining the life and determining the practice of those who remain (*en*) in the surrounding context but emerge beyond (*ek*) the common’s function—indeed, beyond the reductionists, as Jesus made imperative (Mt 5:20).

This interrelated dynamic is the functional basis in his prayer for Jesus making imperative his call and his commission in conjoint function. The call to be whole (thus holy, sanctified) emerges in life and practice in the surrounding contexts of the world as *sent to be whole*. For this emergence to be unambiguously distinguished and thus clearly distinct from the common’s function in a surrounding context, it is necessary in function for the call to precede the commission because the commission alone is insufficient to fulfill the transfer of the Son’s purpose and function without embodying the qualitative relational significance to be whole constituted by his call.

The sanctified life and practice to be whole, the whole of God’s family in sanctified identity, constitutes his commission and signifies the basis for the authentic undertaking of their mission in salvific life and practice to make whole in the surrounding context. To be whole is the basis for his followers to be sent “into the world” (*eis*). As *ek* governs *en* with the “motion out from” the world’s influence necessary to constitute their functional significance to be whole, *eis* now governs “motion (back) into” the surrounding context for embodying their function to make whole to fulfill the transfer of the Son’s purpose and function from his Father to his family. *Ek* and *eis* are not in dialectical tension but operate ongoingly together in a reflexive interrelated process (with triangulation and reciprocating contextualization) for his followers to grow further and deeper in their conjoint call and commission. Therefore, Jesus made definitive that: *salvific life and practice to make whole emerges from sanctified life and practice to be whole to cohere together with God’s thematic relational response to the human condition “in the world.”*

How his followers live and practice in the surrounding context emerges from who and what they are; that is, what (or who) defines them determines how they function. The truth of this functional paradigm was embodied by Jesus throughout the incarnation: his full identity conjoined with his minority identity in sanctified life and practice, the conjoint function of which constituted his salvific relational work of grace for relationship together in God’s whole. As Jesus prayed to constitute his followers in this

interrelated process: to be “in the world” and “not of the world,” salvific life and practice must by its nature (*dei*) function distinctly with the minority identity he embodied “in the world” in qualitative distinction “not of it”; this minority identity necessarily by its nature is functionally conjoined in sanctified life and practice with the full identity of who, what, and how his followers are in relationship together—thus relationally congruent and compatible with the whole of God and God’s action (17:16-19).

Yet, what defines his followers in the surrounding context and determines how they function is constantly being influenced, challenged, even coerced by that context to be assimilated into its culture. To the extent that its culture is incompatible with the whole of God and God’s action, this is the ongoing tension and conflict with reductionism—the common’s function and practice contrary to sanctified life and practice. This makes it essential for his followers to engage culture and to ongoingly practice triangulation and reciprocating contextualization. Reductionism’s subtle influence shifts human ontology from inner out to the outer in, thus redefining the person and how persons function—notably in relationships “to be apart” from the qualitative significance of the whole, God’s whole. Under such influence how his followers practice relationships together is compromised, and how they engage in mission is fragmented—namely without the qualitative relational significance to be whole and to make whole.

As Jesus prayed, it is imperative for his family’s public life and practice that *eis* (“into” as the dynamic with *ek*) is not to be confused with only being *en*, that is, merely to be in the same context, remain in the same space, even merely occupy ministries in surrounding situations and circumstances. *En* only statically describes where we remain, not what, who, why and how we are in that context. *Eis*, however, is not simply dynamic “movement into” a surrounding context, which is the reason “into the world” is not the context for his commission. The *eis* dynamic further signifies active engagement of other persons in deep relational involvement the depths of which is “just as” (*kathos*, indicating conformity) the Father sent his Son in the incarnation (17:18). This relational process of embodiment invokes God’s self-disclosure principle of nothing less and no substitutes. Thus, in the embodiment of his followers to live whole, anything less and any substitutes of this depth of involvement to make whole are reductions of his family’s conjoint call and commission. While the commission takes place “in the world,” it can only be enacted and fulfilled “into the world” as salvific life and practice (to make whole) emerging from sanctified life and practice (to be whole) distinctly not from the influence “of the world.” Anything other than relational involvement in this *ek-eis* process is less than whole—in other words, a substitute of reductionism.

The Father sent only the whole of God into the world. This good news is not merely the truth of a doctrine of salvation but definitive only as the experiential truth embodied by Jesus for relationship together in the whole of God’s family. Salvific life and practice is the relational outcome of what Jesus saved us both from and to (the full soteriology), the experience of which is only in relationship together with the embodied whole of Jesus. It is the qualitative relational significance of this whole embodied in Jesus by which he constitutes his followers together to be whole. On this basis, the Son sends only the whole of his family to be whole, live whole and make whole—along with his Spirit to complete God’s whole. Therefore, his family is not, and cannot be, sent on any mission in the surrounding context without function in their call to be whole; nor can

their salvific life and practice make whole *into* (not merely *in*) that context without being holy in sanctified life and practice from the common's influence and function.

If *what* and *who* we “send out” for mission is anything less than the whole, then *how* we function essentially misrepresents the gospel. Most importantly, to send out any substitute for God's whole vitally reduces: the whole of God, *what* and *whom* he sent, and *why* he sent his Whole to be embodied “into the world.” For Jesus' mission, and thus ours, any separation of his commission from his call fails to understand (and thus fully receive) the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition “to be apart” from the whole of God. This only fragments his church's purpose and function as the whole of God's family in likeness of the Trinity, and thus reduces the significance of the gospel—fragmenting it namely with an incomplete Christology and reducing it notably by a truncated soteriology. With a reductionist practice of mission, what can “the world believe” about “the God who sent” and what does this “let the world know” about “the God who loves for relationship together to be whole”?—for which Jesus asks his Father to embody his followers together in his formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-23).

This discussion will be extended in the chapters ahead, and hopefully in mission discourse throughout the world.

Functional Implications

The functional implications of culture, ethics and mission revolve around how we are going to live and practice. These three areas present vital issues which ongoingly question our faith, test our theology, and examine and appraise our discipleship. Yet, what Jesus vulnerably embodied throughout his life and practice—as he engaged culture, practiced ethics and fulfilled his mission—emerged only as a function of his full identity, in which he constitutes his followers to embody in likeness.

Culture, ethics and mission together persist to pursue us for a response to first and foremost: Who are we and what is our purpose in this world? Then they inquire out of necessity: How are we going to live? These are not philosophical questions for cognitive understanding but serve as both theological and social discourse for what we are accountable: to be (*eimi*, Mt 5:48) more deeply in full identity, to become (*ginomai*, Mt 5:45) further in minority identity, and thus to function in significantly with our whole person together with the whole of God (in the intimate process of triangulation, Mt 6:33) and to practice living whole without reduction in the world to make whole (with the experiential relational process of reciprocating contextualization, Mt 7:12).

Since the Christian faith is not a mere system of belief but a dynamic process of relationship with the vulnerably present and intimately involved whole of God, faith cannot be practiced in a spiritual vacuum—namely private and individual. Since Christian theology is about this self-disclosing God, notably embodied in the whole of Jesus, theology is the relational dynamic of the vulnerable function of the Trinity only for relationship together, and thus cannot be constrained to doctrine or reduced to disembodied theological perspectives and principles. Conjointly, since authentic discipleship is this intimate relationship with the whole of Jesus, the practice of discipleship cannot be engaged in social isolation, nor embodied by only the individual, but only in relationship together “in the world.” Culture, ethics and mission interact to

formulate the issues necessary to be responded to by the ongoing function of our faith, our theology and our discipleship in order to be whole, live whole and make whole—God’s whole for relationship together on God’s terms.

These issues needing our response in the surrounding contexts involve human ontology and the social design of humanity, whose created nature necessitate the response from the convergence of our sanctified life and practice (to be whole) and our salvific life and practice (to make whole). In other words, for us to be involved in the surrounding contexts of the world and to be responsive to others in those contexts, there is the necessity of a clear qualitative distinction in the function of our identity, from which emerges practice having relational significance for the whole of God and relational substance for others to experience also in relationship together (as Jesus prayed in Jn 17:20-23). Consequently, these issues from culture, ethics and mission must be responded to while in the process of addressing ongoingly *two paramount issues*:

1. The increasing transformation of defining and determining our life and practice by submitting their basis only to the conjoint function of sanctified life and practice to be whole and salvific life and practice to make whole—the submission of which while in the surrounding context further necessitates the ongoing relational process of triangulation and reciprocal contextualization.
2. While involved in this first issue to define and determine our life and practice, also paying attention to and understanding the continuous presence of reductionism, and thus honestly examining any other influences to define and determine our life and practice, thus reducing our involvement in the above process (1)—notably, for example, by disembodiment of our involvement or separating his commission from his call.

These two paramount issues, of course, are in unceasing interaction, which reflects the ongoing tension-conflict between reductionism and God’s whole. How we will live and practice always emerges from who and what we are in function. The critical issue centers on what (or who) will define our identity and, in turn, determine our practice. Thus, the first paramount issue involves the need to examine: our working Christology (incomplete or complete) and practicing soteriology (truncated or full); the authenticity of our discipleship based on his terms in the Sermon on the Mount, notably our relational involvement with our Father; thus the issues of the significance of the person we present, the integrity and quality of our communication, and the level of relational involvement we have. The second paramount issue involves the need to examine: our working human ontology (outer in or inner out) for both the person and relationships together, and our specific functional purpose in the created social design of humanity; thus the issues of what defines our person functionally (not ideally) and then determines how we actually function in relationships with others—both in his kingdom-family and in the surrounding context.

The human redefining of God’s whole has been problematic and reflects the human condition since the primordial garden. God’s thematic relational response to the human condition, however, also has been subject historically to human shaping. The patriarchs were clear examples of this. They demonstrated the use of incongruent means to advance the covenant by their human shaping, thus displaying an ambiguous participation in culture, practicing contradictory ethics and self-determining their “mission.” While staying in Egypt, for his own safety and prosperity, Abraham instructed

Sarah to lie to the Egyptians, saying she was his sister. This led to her becoming part of Pharaoh's harem as his wife (Gen 12:10-16). To protect himself from being killed, Isaac acted similarly during their sojourn in Gerar by lying about Rebekah, saying she was his sister; Abimelech correctly admonished him for exposing his wife, Rebekah, to abuse (Gen 26:1-11). Later, Jacob used Esau's hunger as leverage for a calculating acquisition of his birthright (Gen 25:29-34). Then, Jacob schemed to deceive Isaac into conferring his blessing (meant for Esau) onto Jacob (Gen 27:1-29).

What was common in their human shaping is: first, the reduction of the human ontology for the person and for relationships making the covenant process amenable to human shaping, and, then, the relational consequences such efforts of self-autonomy and self-determination have to fragment the relationships necessary to be whole, and thus to diminish the relational significance of the whole—the whole of God, whose relational work of grace is not amenable to human shaping. God's terms for covenant relationship together were yet to be fully disclosed to the patriarchs, which apparently allowed the latitude for this human shaping of God's thematic relational response to make whole in covenant relationship together. In addition to God's terms for relationship given in the law, those terms have been clearly made definitive by Jesus in both his teaching and in his vulnerably embodied life and practice, thus irreducible by anything less and any substitutes, as well as nonnegotiable to our terms for human shaping. This always brings us back to the issue of what (who) will define our identity and, in turn, determine our practice.

The reality is that reductionism is always positioned against the presence of the whole. While this tension-conflict can be an overt struggle, the genius of its promoter is the subtle counter-relational work operating in ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of the whole. A major sign of reductionism's influence is when our primary focus is on the quantitative aspects of human function for the person and relationships, and then on those aspects of church practice and all related service, ministry and mission. With this focus, Christian life and practice easily get embedded in the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of reductionist substitutes, evidenced in Jesus' rebuke to the churches at Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea (Rev 2 & 3, to be discussed in the next chapter).

Our willingness to address these interrelated issues will indicate how seriously we take the sin of reductionism. Our vulnerable involvement in the *ek-eis* process constitutive of Jesus' call and commission will indicate our submission to our Father to *change*—that is, to be changed to be made whole, thus to live whole and to make whole, and be ongoingly defined and determined by nothing less and no substitutes.

Chapter 8

The New Relational Order and the Ecclesiology of the Whole

For light to illuminate what is around it, the light needs to have clarity. When *the light* has clarity—as defined and determined in the last chapter—what does the function of its identity illuminate specifically about the ontology of human persons and the social design of humanity, which the surrounding contexts of the world will pay attention to with either positive response or negative reaction? Since the light does not merely illuminate the human condition but also signifies God’s thematic relational response to it, what does the light illuminate specifically about the qualitative relational alternative for our condition constituting God’s response? These questions certainly are interrelated and, even further, are interdependent in the discussion for both the functional significance of the gospel and the experiential truth of life together as God’s people. This chapter responds to these questions by attempting to define the new relational order of the gospel which is determined by new covenant relationship in the ecclesiology of the whole.

Jesus’ identity as the light of the world was obviously perceived with mixed reviews, if at all. The Greco-Roman world appeared ambivalent to Jesus and his emerging church. While this dominant culture was polytheistic and thus pluralistic in their approach to religion, they were skeptical of new religions such as the Jesus cult. For first-century Jews, messianic expectations determined the lens through which Jesus was paid attention to, positively or negatively. Many simply wanted the Christ to establish Israel among the nations (e.g. Jn 6:14-15). Jesus came only to fulfill the covenant relationship for all the nations together. In other words, how Jesus’ identity as the light was perceived in the surrounding contexts was often in contradistinction to the whole of Jesus’ function as the light. This discrepancy exists today, not only in the surrounding contexts thus reducing the functional significance of the gospel, but also among churches thus reducing the experiential truth of their life together. We need to bring together specific parts (*syniemi*, cf. Mk 8:17-19) of Jesus’ life and practice to grasp the functional reality of his relational purpose fulfilling God’s thematic relational response to the human condition.

This directs us to the specific working soteriology we use in practice and to examine its compatibility with Jesus’ salvific life and practice. When our Christian life and practice (individual and corporate) remains focused on only what Jesus saved us *from*, our perspective of soteriology is truncated. Moreover, with this truncated working soteriology, our perception of sin in human life and practice (including our own) is weak—despite being focused on what we are saved *from*. A weak view of sin does not understand the underlying issue in the human condition as the sin of reductionism, which emerged in the primordial garden to challenge God’s whole and has been positioned against it ever since. This sin redefines human ontology from the outside in (e.g. by the quantitative aspects of form and function, *metaschematizo*, cf. 2 Cor 11:13-15) and, on this basis, determines the function of human relationships, thus countering the involvement of the whole person in the relationships necessary to be God’s whole.

The lens of a weak view of sin does not recognize or pay attention to all of the relational consequences constituting the human condition, and this perceptual-interpretive

gap diminishes the awareness of reductionism's counter-relational work and minimalizes its effects. Like the reductionists in Judaism addressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, a weak view of sin further and more deeply fails to grasp the significance of the law (and its counterpart in Jesus' teaching) as God's desires and terms for covenant relationship together; this thus reduces Christian life and practice essentially to a quantitative framework of what to do or not to do, as the reductionists did in Judaism.

The sin and its effects which Jesus saves us *from* is only half of the soteriological equation. Without the other half of the equation to make it whole, salvation is not realized, the whole of God's thematic relational response is not fully received, and God's deep desires for relationship together are not wholly experienced. Relationship together is what Jesus saved us *to*—which is the only significance the gospel of the whole of Jesus has and the only experiential truth his followers in life together can embrace. This chapter involves what Jesus saved us conjointly from and to. Therefore, our discussion necessitates the further grasp of sin and the deeper experience of church.

The New Relational Order

As Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the final phase of his earthly ministry, he healed ten lepers (Lk 17:11-19). Lepers were not mere persons with leprosy but were labeled as unfit outcasts unable to belong to the surrounding community; the Levitical terms for maintaining purity of Israel's community ostracized them from their midst (Lev 13:45-46). The fact that in this group of Jews was a Samaritan suggests a substitute association for their loss of community. More significantly, that the Samaritan was the only person to return to Jesus to praise and thank God after his cleansing signifies the wholeness of Jesus' salvific relational work of grace. Jesus not only cleansed his body of disease but also made his total person whole (*sozo*, v.19) to belong to the whole of God's family, as the Samaritan's relational response back ("your faith") warranted.

What appears in Luke's Gospel as a fortuitous encounter between a Samaritan and Jesus goes beyond anecdotal evidence of Jesus' impartial grace and mercy. His impartiality further constituted the strategic, tactical and functional shifts of God's thematic action (discussed in chapter three) to be fulfilled in Jerusalem, which Jesus initially made evident to another Samaritan (Jn 4:7-26). When Jesus declared to the Samaritan woman at the well "a time is coming and has now come" (4:23), he vulnerably disclosed God's strategic shift with the transcendent whole of God's presence and intimate involvement, which thus pointed to the new relational order he was establishing. This is the new relational order he enacted with the Samaritan man devalued with leprosy.

The intimate relationship introduced with the Samaritan woman, necessary by its nature together with the whole and holy God, involves the whole person (constituted by the heart) in the inner-out human ontology ("in spirit and truth"). This is the intimate involvement in relationship also necessary by its nature to be and live whole in God's family, and thus to make whole in the surrounding contexts of the world. Jesus clearly made this intimate relationship together definitive in his tactical shift to family and in his functional shift by family love. Yet, for human hearts to be open and come together in intimate relationships (as Jesus embodied), there is another necessary relational condition

for these relationships together to be an experiential reality. This relational condition also was made definitive throughout Jesus' sanctified life and practice, the relational significance of which converged during the week he reached Jerusalem—that is, when the relational outworking of God's strategic, tactical and functional shifts reached its summit.

The Process of Equalization and Jesus' Working Assumptions

Jesus' vulnerable relational involvement to constitute this relational condition started in John's Gospel (for the eschatological big picture) at the collective level with his temple cleansing (Jn 2:13-16), emerged intimately with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:7-26), continued in Matthew's Gospel (for continuity with the OT) with the improbable calling of Levi (Mt 9:9-13), and extended further in Luke's Gospel (concerned for all people groups) in vulnerable involvement with the prostitute (Lk 7:50), by receiving the Samaritan man with leprosy (Lk 17:19), and with a discrimination-negating pursuit of Zacchaeus in family love (Lk 19:9-10). With further overview, in the process of Jesus' relational involvement: he disclosed that the kingdom of God had come (Lk 11:20); he opened a previously closed door to women for discipleship (Lk 10:39,42); he redefined for his followers the prevailing quantitative indicators of achieved success and acquired greatness for status, prestige and power to now be "the very last and servant of all" (Mk 9:35, cf. Mt 20:26-27), "who is least among you all" (Lk 9:48b); and he dissolved the stratified relationships pervading others' contexts by making definitive the qualitative relational involvement like a child to be "the greatest" in his kingdom-family (Mt 18:4).

These accounts are not mere narrative anecdotes but signify an abridged account of God's intentional process for a historic pattern of change being constituted for the human condition. The common denominator in these human stories is the relational consequences from reductionism diminishing the human person, redefining personhood and fragmenting relationships. And throughout their narratives is the integrating motif of Jesus' relational involvement: to redefine the diminished person, to transform their human relational condition, and to make them whole. This cohered in the relational progression of the whole of God's desires, the Trinity's thematic action and the whole of Jesus' embodied relational work of grace, which was fully constituted at Jerusalem in what can be defined as "the week of equalization."

Equalization is the other relational condition in conjoint function with intimate involvement which is necessary for relationships to come together to be made whole, to be God's whole. The relational condition of being equalized was constituted by Jesus in the above human stories to make them whole, which needs to be grasped for both its historic and relational significance (cf. Is 57:14-15, Eze 21:26, Mt 23:12). This implies an existing relational condition of inequality which kept persons in explicit or implicit relations "to be apart"; moreover, this relational condition "to be apart" only evidenced the ongoing human relational condition throughout human history. Thus, in this historic process of equalization for relationships to come together, the existing (and historically ongoing) relational condition had to be addressed directly with the intent for change, that is, the redemptive change necessary to open (free) the relationship for the process of reconciliation.

While redemptive change, historically, was always involved in God's covenant of love (Dt 7:7-9), there was a further and deeper relational process unfolding of historic significance. The deeper qualitative relational need for redemptive change was inherent in Jesus' ongoing relational involvement as a working assumption of his relational work of grace. Furthermore, this need for change was also assumed by each of the persons above who received his relational action. His response and their response back both demonstrated the need for change for relationships to come together to be made whole.

For example, when Jesus equalized the Samaritan woman at the well, her response demonstrated the change from prevailing gender, ethnic and moral distinctions which otherwise would have prevented their coming together. Levi (as well as Zacchaeus) also crossed over cultural, social and religious barriers to reciprocate with Jesus in new relationship together—changes which Jesus initiated and constituted by family love to be clearly distinguished from the existing relational order. In his functional shift to extend family love, Jesus constituted the whole of God's new covenant family. This new kinship family was not based on blood relation, racial/ethnic ancestry or cultural lineage, but based on intimate relationship together of any and all persons equalized by Jesus to be relationally involved only on the Father's terms, just as Jesus vulnerably disclosed earlier (Mt 12:48-50). This essential new relational order was constituted further as Jesus entered Jerusalem.

“The week of equalization” began with his humble but triumphant entry to Jerusalem to the joy of many with messianic expectations. Yet the donkey's colt (Mt 21:4-5, par. Jn 12:14-15) signifies a strong contrast to a Roman military leader's triumphant entry mounted supremely on a horse. This sets the tone for this week and points to the nature of Jesus' messianic fulfillment and the equalizing nature of his relational work, his purpose and his church to follow. Entering with the humility of a commoner, not a king, this commoner's king (of those apart from the whole) did not seize upon their messianic hope and aspirations in an exercise of power relations (cf. Mk 10:42-45). He exercised authority and power in relationships to make them whole, and he humbly assumed responsibility for fragmented relationships and pursued those apart from the whole. Thus, in spite of his popular reception, Jesus took the initiative to enter this hostile context in order to open the way to reconciliation for relationships to come together unlike experienced before in human history.

Matthew used the prophet Zechariah to connect this entry toward the fulfillment of God's salvific action—though omitting the phrase as “righteous and having salvation” (Zec 9:9)—and to define Jesus' coming to them as “gentle” (Mt 21:5). The term for “gentle” is *praus*, denoting meek, mild, gentle (cf. the third beatitude, Mt 5:5), for which the Hebrew term in Zechariah is *'aniy* to denote poor (cf. *ptochos* in the first beatitude, Mt 5:3). Matthew's Gospel essentially connected Jesus' earlier words (from the Sermon on the Mount) and action here to God's covenant fulfillment for “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3) and “they will inherit the earth” (Mt 5:5). Jesus came to them, however, to fulfill the messianic order beyond (if not contrary to) the prevailing expectation, thus this new relational order was not experienced by many of them (Lk 19:44b). The need for change was evident in order for the relational outcome to be whole.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept openly for it (Lk 19:41, cf. Is 22:4). His deep feelings could not be contained and compassion for the whole of God's creation overflowed. Throughout this week Jesus made openly evident the full

glory of God in his heart, his intimate relational nature and his vulnerable presence as the passibility of God emerged. In his initial poignant expression he said “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace” (Lk 19:42). Both the vulnerable expression of his heart and his statement combine to help us understand his actions and working assumptions.

Jesus’ compassion and statement for the city point to the extent of his concern for the human condition, which involved both the individual person and the existing collective order of persons together. This suggests his belief or model about the nature of humanity and also his perception about the nature of the social order (or society). Whether we articulate it or not, we all hold to some kind of belief or model about the nature of humanity; this is also true of our conceptions about society—assumptions usually even more implicit. Basically, we hold to either the inherent sinfulness or the inherent goodness of humankind, and generally assume either the basic goodness of the existing social order (in function, if not theologically) or not. Jesus entered the world in general with the working assumption of humanity’s sinfulness and entered Jerusalem in particular without the assumption of the goodness of its existing order, including its existing institutions, systems, structures, practices and values. The peace weighing on Jesus’ heart was not a partial and temporary solution to the human condition but involved the response necessary to make persons together whole.

In our earlier discussion of peace involving the seventh beatitude (in chapter four, Mt 5:9), Jesus’ statement above was identified as a critical issue focused on *what belongs to peace*. This critical matter was not addressed by many in Jerusalem, which Jesus further said “but now it is hidden from your eyes.” Peace is an extension from the OT and of the Hebrew *shalom*: well-being and wholeness; well-being which has both an individual dimension and a corporate/collective dimension; wholeness which extends to all aspects of human life and by necessity included salvation and the end times but certainly is not limited to the latter. The gospel is predicated by this peace (cf. Ac 10:36), in which Jesus constituted his followers—yet which is qualitatively distinguished from conventional peace (Jn 14:27). Therefore, it is insufficient to define what belongs to peace and to signify the gospel of peace with a truncated soteriology (only what Jesus saved us from) without the relational outcome of what he saved us to. This involves the experiential truth of the relationships together of the whole of God’s family in which Jesus constituted his followers to be whole in the new creation of his family. Wholeness is intrinsic to this peace, which can only belong to this new creation that Jesus entered Jerusalem to raise up. This condition of wholeness and well-being is the new relational order of the whole of God’s family—the functional significance of the gospel.

Redemption and the Normative Character & Collective Nature of Sin

As Jesus vulnerably disclosed in Jerusalem, to be part of his new creation family in the new relational order of life, we must embrace change and go through a process of redemption—that is, undergo redemptive change. God’s thematic plan of redemption for his creation emerges in the progression of God’s ultimate response that Jesus fulfilled at the end of this week by paying the price for this redemption to take away the relational

barrier of hostility between us for reconciliation to the whole of God (cf. Eph 2:14-16). This redemptive relational process functions with specific assumptions.

Jesus' major working assumption as God's ultimate response to the human relational condition "to be apart" assumes the need for turn-around change, that is, the need for repentance. For the authentic whole of peace, God is not concerned about the mere absence of conflict—a condition better understood on Monday of this week. The absence of conflict alone does not bring people together—no matter how much activity, space and time are occupied together—nor is it ever sufficient to bring about a new relational order, a new creation family. In other words, the absence of conflict, and its counterpart in the appearance of harmony, will not result in wholeness and well-being. Those hoping and working for peace need to grasp the relational significance of peace and must not settle for anything less or any substitutes. The non-reductionist lens of repentance assumes the need for redemption, pays attention to the human condition and calls for its action where necessary. *The new* does not emerge without liberation from *the old*. Thus, basically and soteriologically, *peace is grounded in God's work of redemption*. There is no whole of peace without it, only reductionist substitutes, which is why Jesus wept for Jerusalem.

Paying attention to or ignoring the presence of reductionism, its counter-relational work and its substitutes is directly correlated to our view of sin. Certainly, if we assume the goodness of humankind and/or the existing order of life, there is no need for redemptive change. Yet, merely assuming their sinfulness assures neither a need for redemptive change nor the extent of such change; this depends on the strength and adequacy of our view of sin. Two factors strongly influence our working perceptions of sin. One factor is contextual and the other is structural.

The contextual factor is the increasing normative character of sin, notably as reductionism. We need to realize that the growing frequency and extent of any negative behavior or practice create conditions for redefining those more favorably. Our perceptions of what is unacceptable are being redefined continuously. That is to say, what we pay attention to or ignore through our lens to distinguish sin becomes more difficult in a surrounding context's normative practice of sin. Jesus addressed many of those normative practices of sin as reductionism in the Sermon on the Mount. Later he confronted such practice in churches (Rev 2-3, discussed later in this chapter), which points to the next factor.

The other factor which strongly influences a weak position on sin is a structural one. Being a structural factor, its effects on our understanding of, and subsequent dealing with, sin is much less obvious than the conventional moral and spiritual issues. In understanding that human life is not merely operating under the total control or influence of the individual, there are broader operations which must be taken into account. This involves the social design of humanity, whose operations are found on the collective and more systemic level of everyday life.

It is in this area that our understanding of sin and evil must be further developed. Sin or evil can no longer be seen merely as the outworking of the individual(s) alone. It can also be found in the operations of institutions (even churches), systems and structures of a social order (society), or in modernity's global community. In its more developed stages, evil is not only manifested at this structural level but rooted in those very institutions, systems or structures such that they can operate quite apart from the control

of the individual, or even the latter's moral character. This is especially true, for example, when the very infrastructure of a society obscures moral issues and legitimates such systemic operations. Historically, institutional discrimination has been a major example demonstrating this collective process of sin. Reductionism of the human person and fragmentation of relationships together (by stratification or segregation) has underlain this human condition and created ontological simulations and epistemological illusions to mask its sinful operation.

The contextual factor is the *normative character* of sin, and the structural factor is the *collective nature* of sin. Their increasing presence in our midst strongly influences our working perceptions of sin. Jesus addressed both the normative character and collective nature of sin with the lens of repentance, which allowed for no false assumptions about humanity and the existing relational order.

The consequences of reductionism in stratifying human persons and relationships together were what Jesus found operating at the temple on Monday of this week (Mt 21:12-17, which was included in the early part of John's Gospel for the strategic shift in God's thematic action, Jn 2:13-22). He drove out those who exploited the less resourceful for profit in an inequitable system which created barriers to access "my house" (*oikos*, 21:13, "my Father's house" in Jn 2:16). *Oikos* denotes the dwelling of a family, that is, the dwelling of the whole of God for communion together with the whole of God's family ("house of prayer for all nations," Mk 11:17, cf. Is 56:7). While this account in Luke's Gospel (who was concerned for all peoples) curiously omitted "for all nations," Matthew's omission involved his purpose directed to the Jews and John's focused on his shift from the place to the person of God directly. Yet, all of them account for the underlying inequality being addressed for the redemptive change necessary to equalize persons in the new relational order of God's house and family. The normative practice of the temple was unacceptable and its collective dysfunction needed redemptive change in order to be made whole.

"All nations" goes further and deeper than an inclusive sampling of all peoples. Jesus was not merely opening access to God's house for "all nations" by his actions, and his Great Commission needs to be understood beyond the missional focus of going to "all nations." In the whole of God's family constituted by Jesus, all the human differences catalogued under humanity *come together* in intimate relationship, not simply have access or a presence. This is the multifaceted nature of the whole of God as family constituted in the Trinity: an interdependent relational context and process without the distinctions which stratify in a system of inequality, yet with all the unique functions necessary to be whole. The distinctions of reductionism applied in a comparative process with others always imply (directly or indirectly) inequalities which separate or disconnect persons, distance their relationships and fragment the whole of God's family. Thus, even Matthew's omission of "all nations" in his temple account still addressed the reductionist distinctions of the human persons and the fragmented relationships of reductionism's counter-relational work, which Jesus was redeeming and reconstituting by his actions at the temple.

Matthew recorded the Jewish leaders' strong objection to the relational outcome in the temple afterward—namely the children shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Mt 21:15-16). The implication of the protest by the chief priests and teachers of the law was essentially that the children didn't know what they were saying, but that the leaders

knew in general about God and in particular about the messiah because of their rabbinic education. In their view, there was no way children could make definitive statements, and these children needed to be kept in their place in the socio-religious order.

Jesus' response to them redefined the person and transformed the existing relational order. He pointed them to God's relational action having "ordained praise" from children (*katartizo*, 21:16). *Katartizo* signifies either to complete or to repair and restore back to completion, which in this context points to God's relational action to make whole the person reduced to outer-in distinctions and the relationships necessary to be intimately involved together in God's whole. This wholeness is signified in the vulnerable openness of these children involved with Jesus in their relational response of trust. This more deeply connects back to when Jesus leaped for joy over his Father's "good pleasure" (*eudokia*, righteous purpose) to disclose himself to the intimate relational involvement of "little children" and not to the "the wise and learned" in what functionally constitutes the new relational order (Lk 10:21). Jesus' action at the temple fulfilled God's thematic relational response to reduced persons and their relationships "to be apart" to restore them to God's whole. His definitive action needs to be understood as the new relational order, which he established in human history for ongoing function in his present family to be and live whole, and conjointly to extend to others in the world to live and make whole. This is what the children understood at the temple, as they vulnerably received Jesus and intimately responded back to him—which demonstrated the new relational order displacing the existing relational order necessary for all his followers to engage (cf. Mt 18:3-4).

The relational dynamic involved in Jesus' cleansing of the temple was not a unique incident but cohered with the whole of his life and practice to make whole the human condition. Just as Jesus used his power and resources to heal after the cleansing (Mt 21:14), and previously used on the Sabbath to restore (*apokathistemi*, restore to soundness, Mt. 12:9-14) to be well (*hygies*, sound, whole, Jn 5:6-16), Jesus further enacted this relational dynamic of restoring persons back to wholeness. He clearly saw, through the lens of repentance, both the person and persons together without false assumptions (Lk 5:32), thus the process of restoring meant much more than to mend, to fix or to reform, that is to say, essentially returning something to its commonly existing condition (cf. Jn 5:14). To restore to wholeness involves a change from the existing condition—the redemptive change which the temple needed. Based on this turn-around change of repentance, therefore, to heal and restore to make whole necessitates changing from old to new that Jesus was constituting in Jerusalem.

The existing temple practice represents a general condition needing redemptive change. While Jesus participated in temple life, he made no assumptions about the inherent goodness of its current practice. That is, with the lens of repentance Jesus perceived the operation of sin whether in religious life or social life; and any lack of response to that sin would have implied complicity. Church can be substituted in place of temple to involve other issues in the normative practice of sin in its collective operation—notably sin as reductionism, to be discussed further in the ecclesiology section. In other words, this relational dynamic to wholeness involves the strength and adequacy of one's view of sin. A weak view of sin, for example, does not account for the increasing normative character of sin present in Christian life and practice which has become accepted, or at least tolerated; likewise, sin's collective nature would not be

perceived in church operations. While churches would disassociate their practice with the image of practice in the temple above, the image from Ezekiel 33 can easily be normative for churches and pastors today: “Your [members] are talking together about you...saying to each other, ‘Come and hear the message that has come from the Lord.’ My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice” (Eze 33:30-32). This image is quite different from the temple image, yet their participants experience the same consequence from reductionism’s counter-relational work and reductionist substitutes. Jesus closed his Sermon on the Mount with the functional consequences of such practice (Mt 7:26-27)—practice which involves unintentional reinforcement or inadvertent promotion by pastors with a reductionist practice of preaching. It is likely that Jesus would have cleaned out this pervasive practice in churches today as he cleansed the temple. Normative practice, even from tradition, neither legitimates it nor precludes it as sin—no matter how prevailing it has become in church practice and Christian subculture.

Just as a weak view of sin ignores the normative character of sin, an inadequate view of sin fails to pay attention to and address its broader relationship issues in operation. Sin is not perceived beyond an individual matter outside of a spiritual context. Sin, however, has to do with our relationship to God and the whole order of life God established for all of creation. Sin is a violation of that relationship with God but it also has relational consequences in God’s design and purpose for creation. That is to say, sin has social consequences also, as well as social influences. Our perspective of sin must be broadened to include these macro-level human factors and human contexts which establish the complexity of the human problem. Jesus’ action in the temple demonstrated that sin does not restrict itself to the individual nor does it stay within the limited context of the individual(s). Thus, we need also to address the increasing collective nature of sin and evil and deal with all sin in this broader relational context. Economic globalization today, for example, compounds sin’s collective nature by simulating the whole while promoting illusion about its normative character. With the lens of repentance, however, we can perceive the operations of the normative character of sin and the collective nature of sin, which is necessary for the redemptive change to equalize persons in the new relational order. This was the purpose Jesus fulfilled at the temple as he constituted the whole of God’s family to be functionally embodied in human history.

Redemptive Reconciliation

Cleansing the temple was part of what Jesus said belongs to peace. Restoring to wholeness requires redemption, and to be redeemed involves the turn-around change to be equalized. This relational process both frees the person and opens the relationship to come together (viz. reconciliation) in the intimate involvement of the whole of God’s family. This restores the person to the human ontology created in the image of God and restores persons to relationships together in the created design and purpose in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity. The created ontology of the person cannot end only

within the individual but conjointly involves the relationships necessary together to be whole in the new relational order. These were the created functions Jesus disclosed as the identity of the light. Cleansing the temple constitutes restoring persons and relationships to the wholeness of their created functions.

The importance of the whole of their created functions without reduction is illustrated in a so-called “Markan sandwich” (Mk 11:12-21). The importance of restoring the created function of the temple (vv.15-17) is sandwiched between the account of the fig tree that had no fruit, and thus was rendered dysfunctional by Jesus (11:12-14,19-21). With its leaves, the fig tree only had an appearance of fruition without having functional significance—a reductionist substitute for the whole of its created function. This contrast illustrates the importance to God of having wholeness in function, and the qualitative relational significance of the whole of God’s response to the human condition. Nothing less and no substitutes of the whole embodied Jesus’ vulnerable presence and relational involvement, and can embody the relational response of his followers—just as the children embodied at the temple.

The new relational order is a function only of transformed relationships together. This involves persons who have been equalized from the inner out, who have been redeemed from outer-in distinctions promoting barriers in relationships, and thus who can come together in the process of intimacy necessary for relationships to be whole—the whole of God’s family in likeness of the Trinity. Transformed relationships together are the conjoint function of equalized and intimate relationships, the vulnerable process of which establishes the experiential truth of the new relational order.

The relational process of coming together is certainly problematic, even after the process of equalizing persons has been established—which Peter was about to learn later in this week. In God’s created design and purpose, for human persons to be whole necessitates this dynamic relational condition of coming together, which by its nature cannot be compatible with any presence of the more static relational condition “to be apart.” Therefore, to be whole is an ongoing relational condition that involves reconciliation. For relationships no longer “to be apart” from the whole of God, we need to engage the redemptive process of reconciliation that God extends to us through redemption in Jesus. This is imperative for relationship with God in particular. To participate in—that is, to be relationally involved in and have communion with—the whole of God’s life necessitates the redemptive change which transforms (*metamorphoo*, inner-out change, not *metaschematizo*, mere outward change) the person to be reconciled to God for intimate relationship as the Father’s very own, belonging permanently to God’s family.

Furthermore, for our relationships in general no longer “to be apart,” we need conjointly to engage the relational process of redemption and reconciliation (*redemptive reconciliation*, as Jesus exercised in the temple) also imperative for these relationships to be whole. To participate in and have a functionally equal share in life together as family in likeness of the Trinity involves by its nature the equalization of redemption and the intimate involvement of reconciliation in family love, both of which are irreducible (e.g. by the collective operations of sin) and nonnegotiable (e.g. by the normative practice of sin).

The Rigorous and Vulnerable Process of Reconciliation

Coming together to be whole is a rigorous relational process, which Jesus pointed to in “what would bring you peace,” demonstrated at the temple cleansing, and fully constituted in the definitive development of his intended relational work for this entire week. Situations and circumstances may bring persons into common activity or shared space, even for a common purpose, but they do not account for (unintentionally or by design) bringing those persons *together* in relationships to be whole. In the human condition, this is the unique function of reconciled relationships. Yet, as Jesus agonized knowing “what belongs to peace,” reconciliation is not mere peaceful harmony or operational unity. We cannot fully come together as one (a relational whole) in deep, meaningful relationships unless they are established with the whole person signified at the level of our hearts and ongoingly functioning with this relational significance.

The NT term for reconciliation (*katallage*) denotes: to change from one condition to another by taking away the root cause of a broken (or uninvolved) relationship, and thus leaving no barriers to restoring communion. This restoring to communion definitively involves the qualitative significance of persons coming together, that is, constitutes hearts coming together. In other words, as noted earlier, this is intimacy. *Intimacy is the relational process which underlies all reconciliation.* And there is no experiential truth of reconciliation without intimacy; nothing less and no substitutes can have the full relational significance of coming together to be whole. Even merely identifying an activity, a setting or a process with the adjective “intimate” does not necessarily involve hearts opening to each other and coming together (e.g. the physical act of sex); thus intimacy is not to be confused with merely anything labeled intimate and should be distinguished from it. Clearly then, peacemaking (viz. the seventh beatitude) and the ministry of reconciliation involve specifically the development of intimacy in relationships together necessary to be whole—most notably within the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love.

In the drama at the temple, Jesus’ forceful action cohered with the redemptive process imperative for “what belongs to peace” to open up relationships to be reconciled with the intimacy necessary for “what will bring you peace.” There is no other full explanation for Jesus’ forceful action, which otherwise would be contradictory, at worst, or a paradox with little understanding, at best. With the conjoint function of redemptive reconciliation, however, persons and relationships are redeemed to be restored to their created function in the intimate relationships together of God’s whole. Though his redemptive action did not appear reconciling for the temple practitioners, Jesus was always relationally involved with family love to restore wholeness in relationship together (as demonstrated on the cross, Lk 23:34). This “door” to his house was opened to all for reciprocal relationship; some responded like the children while others reacted making it problematic for them to come together. Nevertheless, redemptive reconciliation prevailed, and the temple would be even further reconstituted by Jesus’ salvific action on the cross. This is the week Jesus fully constituted the new relational order of his followers in intimate relationship together to fulfill their function in the new creation—foremost with the whole of God and within God’s family, then extended to all of God’s creation.

These transformed relationships of the new relational order are ongoingly challenged by reductionism and are readily substituted with ontological simulations and

epistemological illusions. On Tuesday of this week, a day full of polemics, Jesus further addressed the influence of reductionism, notably confronting its operation with the seven woes (Mt 23:1-39, discussed previously). This made even more evident his anguish for Jerusalem and his deep desire to take additional action for God's covenant household, but the covenant relationship of love is not unilateral and necessitates reciprocal involvement (cf. Dt 7:9), which they were not willing to engage (23:37-38).

The terms for participation in the new relational order are not amenable to the terms (and notions) of our situations, circumstances or culture, for which our assumptions must be addressed by the process of reciprocating contextualization (discussed in chapter seven). There is a qualitatively distinct relational dynamic interconnecting in this week which is definitive for the wholeness and well-being of persons in relationship together. We need to grasp this dynamic to address the influence of reductionism in our midst. What emerges is the following: There is no significant coming together (reconciliation) in relationships without intimacy; there is no function of intimacy in relationships without equalization; there is no equalizing of persons in relationships without redemption; there is no redemptive change in persons and relationships without the vulnerable relational work of God's grace and intimate involvement with family love. In this relational dynamic there is no reconciliation without redemption; and Jesus does not redeem us merely to be free but only to come together in the relationships necessary to be whole. That is to say also, there is no significance to redemption without reconciliation. Therefore, in his salvific work, Jesus never only saves us *from* without conjointly saving us *to*, and there is only wholeness in the transformed relationships from redemptive reconciliation constituting the new relational order of God's family. As this interrelated relational dynamic progresses in this week, the process of equalization in relationships is conjoined further and more deeply by the development of intimacy for relationships to be transformed to function whole in the new relational order.

No record of Jesus' activity on Wednesday was reported by the evangelists. This could strongly suggest that Jesus separated himself for a full day in the solitude of prayer; he apparently spent evenings in prayer on the Mount of Olives (Lk 21:37; 22:39-41). As his disciples demonstrated in their Gethsemane experience a day later (Mt 26:36-46, par. Lk 22:39-46), the solitude of prayer is a vulnerable position to be in—particularly when there are strong feelings we are trying to circumvent, as those disciples did. Moreover, the vulnerable solitude of prayer is a distinct place of equalization for us. This is a time and place where there is no one else to be compared to (as more than or less), and no work activity or role function to define self other than our whole person. The solitude of prayer equalizes all persons by the function of God's grace demanding nothing less and no substitutes than the full involvement of the authentic who, what and how we are. We cannot fully come together with God in communion apart from the grace which equalizes us to be vulnerably involved in relationship together, whether in prayer, worship, service or other aspects of fellowship. Thus, assuming Jesus spent the day in prayer, Wednesday can be considered also part of this week of equalization. Certainly, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee would attest to their humbling experience in prayer at Gethsemane; and Peter most notably in general had difficulty being intimately involved with Jesus. Peter's life and practice demonstrated both that participation in the new relational order is not amenable to our terms and that coming together in transformed relationships is a rigorous relational process.

Assuming a traditional view of what day the Passover meal took place, on Thursday evening Jesus washed his disciples' feet (Jn 13:1-17) and formalized the new covenant (Lk 22:19-20). These are not unrelated acts. They are deeply conjoined in Jesus' salvific action of what he saved us both from and to. As the new relational order was unfolding and the disciples gathered with Jesus for this meal, they were still hassling over their status as the greatest (Lk 22:24, cf. Mk 9:34), still maneuvering for position of privilege (cf. Mk 10:37,41). This points to the pervading issue of distinctions and roles in church leadership which effectively create barriers to come together for intimacy in church relationships. While the disciples still needed to be redeemed from the stratified old order, Jesus always responded by redefining them in the new relational order of his kingdom-family (Lk 22:25-30, cf. Mk 9:35; 10:42-45). At this crucial junction of their relationship together, Jesus' response also deeply embodied the transformed relationship signifying this new relational order, which functionally constitutes his family by its nature in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity. This was embodied in his footwashing, which operationalized transformed relationships for his disciples.

In this defining interaction for all his followers, Jesus' embodied action started to make definitive "the full extent of his love" (discussed previously in chapter two, Jn 13:1); he fulfilled this in the closing hours of the most pivotal week in human history. The full extent of his love involved the whole of God's thematic action in response to the human condition now being fulfilled with God's family love. The context of Jesus' footwashing is not limited to the situation and circumstances prevailing prior to his death. As the embodiment of God's relational grace, his whole person functioned to affirm the created importance of the whole person and to constitute intimate relationships together as God's family—namely by redeeming and transforming the person and reconciling their relationships. Thus, in his footwashing Jesus vulnerably took his followers deeper into his trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love.

By relationally embodying God's grace to his followers, Jesus made his whole person fully vulnerable to his followers in direct relational involvement. Since God's grace affirms the whole person—which reductionism resists and replaces with alternatives—grace demands nothing less and no substitutes. This also applied to Jesus' life and practice throughout the incarnation, and anything less or any substitute of his own person would be a contradiction of the righteous function of his sanctified identity; even fulfilling his function merely in a role was insufficient, even incompatible. His footwashing signified this relational righteousness to be intimately involved with his followers in the transformed relationship necessary to be whole together as God's family.

Since cultural custom obligated a host to make provision for washing the dinner guests' feet, either water or a household servant was provided for this menial purpose. For Jesus, however, nothing less and no substitute of his whole person than he personally assuming this footwashing would be sufficient to constitute his relational involvement of family love—that is, as the embodiment of God's grace. This goes well beyond merely the act of serving and humility in function. This is not about what to do but how to be involved in the new relational order. Yet, Jesus did not reverse the stratified old relational order but transformed it. He was not exercising a role as servant but dissolving roles which create barriers to deeper relationship—an important distinction to grasp. As were all his other actions (notably this week), this act was only for transformed relationship

together and “the full extent” of his relational involvement vulnerably making evident his family love.

In this unparalleled experience, the embodied Word of God essentially was equalized and intimately involved with his followers in transformed relationship together to constitute the new relational order for his family. The significance of his relational messages implied in his action communicates the importance of the whole person involved in relationship together without stratification and other relational barriers to intimacy. Footwashing doesn’t represent so much how far (or “low”) Jesus is willing to go, as much as the feet are symbolic of the depth level of relational involvement Jesus’ person engages with his followers. No level is too deep or beyond any limits—whether personal, contextual or structural—for relationship together in the new relational order. While reductionism resists this and tries to redefine it, God’s grace demands this, and Jesus’ salvific relational work of grace constitutes this equalized-intimate relationship of God’s family. This not only made Jesus’ whole person vulnerable but also makes the whole person of his followers vulnerable. Peter had difficulty with this intimate involvement, as well as being equalized.

If Peter’s perceptions of Jesus had changed from before, there would have been a different response than the earlier time he tried to prevent Jesus from going to the cross (Mt 16:21-22). His categorical denial and refusal of Jesus’ footwashing (indicated in the Greek grammar, Jn 13:8), however, evidenced his same reductionist lens. Just as his earlier objections to the cross, there was no reasonable and honorable way Peter’s Teacher, Lord and God could do this servile act (culturally, students served the teacher). Moreover, Peter saw himself through the same lens, which comparatively defined him as unworthy to receive. Their roles precluded such involvement. In other words, Peter was still embedded in the stratified old relational order, and thus he could neither receive the significance of Jesus’ whole person equalized before him nor receive Jesus’ relational involvement for intimate relationship together in the new relational order. Despite Peter’s honesty, his old-order response involved the distinctions and inequalities Jesus was equalizing; and that prevented their whole persons from coming together, which Jesus was reconciling to be whole together. Peter’s honesty, pronouncements and claims notwithstanding, his response was incompatible for deeper relationship with Jesus.

Jesus was making evident to Peter that to “Follow me” is a new-order function only of relationship together, not of confessions of faith (e.g. Mt 16:16, Jn 6:68-69) nor merely to serve him (however devoted and loyal, e.g. Jn 13:37, Mk 14:31). This relational significance of Jesus’ vulnerable involvement embodying the fullness of his family love and God’s grace still eluded Peter (cf. their post-resurrection interaction, Jn 21:22); essentially, Peter, along with other disciples, was not making deep relational connection with Jesus even after three intensive years together, thus demonstrating their lack of intimacy (cf. Jesus’ disappointment in Jn 14:9a). Yet, without redemptive change from the *old* (namely reductionism) there can be no assumption for Peter to be transformed to the *new*.

The influence of reductionism always resists God’s grace (which affirms the whole person and constitutes intimate relationship together to be whole) by redefining the person to something less (away from qualitative function of the heart) and by counter-relational work displacing intimacy of relationships with some substitute—even with the use of something labeled intimate to simulate intimacy or create its illusion. By its nature,

reductionism is always positioned against God's whole. Reductionism is a dissenter of the experiential truth of that whole, and thus its practice is always incompatible for wholeness of persons in relationship together.

God's relational grace acted in response to the human relational condition "to be apart" from the whole and thus demands in response the function of the whole person (signified with the heart) to be vulnerable to each other (hearts open and coming together) to constitute the intimate relationships of the whole of God's family. This was how God's grace embodied in Jesus functioned with Peter and the response he called from Peter. God's grace defines the terms for relationship together, and the relational messages communicated to Peter in this vulnerable moment suggest this summary: "In my call to 'Follow me,' I am calling you to be whole in relationship together; you have to let my whole person be intimately involved with you as I wash your feet; yet, it is critical to understand that this is not a ritual act of service, and in order to let my whole person be intimately involved with you, and you with me, you must (*dei*, by its nature, not by obligation) turn from your old ways (notably, reductionist substitutes and practices) and then let me go to the cross for you so that you can be redeemed from this old and reconciled in the new covenant of transformed relationships together as my family in the new relational order." Peter would later learn and experience—albeit not without struggle—that Jesus' footwashing and cross were only for this relationship together in his trinitarian relational context of family and by his trinitarian relational process of family love, and thus that relationship together was only on the nonnegotiable terms and the irreducible whole of God.

Communion in the New Relational Order

The new relational order is the function of God's terms for relationship together to be whole in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity, in whose image human ontology was created. By vulnerably being involved in footwashing, Jesus radically changed our relationship with God (as signified in God's strategic shift) and how to be involved with God (as signified in Jesus' tactical and functional shifts)—and thus how to be involved with each other. His vulnerable relational act directly connects with his salvific action on the cross which tore down the veil in the temple between God and his people. His footwashing vulnerably engaged his followers in transformed relationships, the specific relationship which operationalized the relational significance of the torn veil opening the way for deep and intimate communion with the whole of God. Thus, this new relational order operates only by the function of transformed relationships, which are necessarily both equalized and intimate relationships by the nature of the Trinity's relational ontology.

The process of equalization and intimacy are not separate processes but are conjoined in an interrelated process by the function of the whole person signified by the heart. Equalizing of persons opens the way for coming together in intimacy, and intimacy demands that our relationships operate predominantly on the heart level. As Jesus vulnerably demonstrated with his whole person and the involvement of his heart—notably in footwashing but throughout this week—these are God's terms and the only way he does relationships. What Peter needed to grasp in his heart, and all Jesus'

followers need to grasp, is an unavoidable condition of God's terms for relationship: *to live at the level of our hearts is to function openly in the fullness of our humanity, which includes being vulnerable with our weakness, fallibility and sin.*

These certainly are pervasive reasons for the heart to keep its distance or hide. These areas of our lives (notably sin), when left unattended, distorted or hidden, also greatly reduce the quality, well-being and wholeness of life for our person as well as for those we have relationships with. Jesus provided for this matter.

As the Passover meal progressed, Jesus passed the cup (four times in Jewish tradition) and the bread (matzo in their tradition).⁴¹ Jesus apparently focused on the third cup which related to the third of four covenant promises of God to Israel for redemption (Ex 6:6-7). The cup Jesus passed was identified with both the fulfilling of God's promise and the shedding of blood required to make whole the covenant relationship (Ex 24:6-8, Heb 9:12,18,22). What was unique about this Passover meal, however, was that Jesus formalized the new covenant with his own blood for the forgiveness of sins and transformed relationships together in the new relational order of God's family (Lk 22:14-20).

Jesus invited his disciples to partake of the bread and the cup, his body and his blood, which he made vulnerably accessible for them to share in. This image should be placed in juxtaposition with an earlier scene involving would-be followers in conflict over Jesus' invitation to partake of the bread of his body—in which they argued “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (Jn 6:48-52). The contexts for these two scenes were certainly contrasting, yet their images give focus to the same vital issue: What does it mean to partake of Jesus?

Moments earlier Jesus told Peter his footwashing was necessary for Peter to have a “part with me” (Jn 13:8). “Part with me” (*meros meta*) means to “share with me,” which involves the relational function of communion together. This is Peter's call to be whole in ongoing intimate relationship together. Communion (*koinoneo*), from which fellowship (*koinonia*) is derived, involves a partaker (*koinonos*) who has a common (*koinos*) share in something. Jesus made his whole person vulnerably accessible to Peter to share in his person (“share with me”) in intimate relationship together—that is, without distinctions, roles, stratification or any other relational distance but equalized for intimacy. As Jesus passed the symbols of his body and blood, he was not focused on symbols or elements. He was making his whole person even more vulnerably accessible to them to partake in his ultimate relational involvement, and thus to have an intimate common share in his ultimate salvific action—the full extent of his love. This is how his footwashing and his formalizing the new covenant are deeply interrelated, and thus were necessarily integrated for this pivotal table fellowship to make definitive the relational process of partaking of Jesus and participating in his life—which needs to inform all participation in the Eucharist, if not transform its practice.

To partake of this communion meal is not an activity, nor about tradition or even faith. It is a function only of relationship and participating in Jesus' life, thus the whole of God. To partake in his life is to have a common share in not merely his past salvific action but to ongoingly share in intimate relationship together in his trinitarian relational context of family by his trinitarian relational process of family love. To be a partaker in

⁴¹ Daniel G. Reid, ed. *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 670-71.

his life on the terms of his relational context and process is a function conjointly of the whole person sharing in common intimately in relationship together as the whole of God's family, not merely as an individual. Nothing less and no substitutes of our whole person involved in intimate relationship together constitute partaking of and participating in the whole of Jesus' life. This is to say then, what Jesus made a necessity for Peter to be involved with him in the footwashing is the same intimate involvement necessary also to partake of Jesus in communion and relationally participate together in his life with the help of the Spirit. And this intimacy can only be authentic by also being equalized before him, as Peter learned at his footwashing. Anything less and any substitutes are reductionism incompatible for ongoing relationship together with Jesus in his embodied relational context and process.

What is exalted in celebrating the Eucharist is the restoration of relationships to the intimate communion of authentic fellowship both with God and with the whole of God's family together. This is a functional reality, even though we cannot be human (i.e. what we really are) and intimate with each other at the same time without our sin impacting each other directly. Jesus' blood constitutes the experiential truth of the transformation necessary for intimate relationship together with the forgiveness of sins (Mt 26:28). Therefore, by the lens of repentance without any false assumptions about human ontology and the human relational condition, Jesus' salvific action made definitive: *the most vital means in the process of developing intimate relationships together necessarily has to be forgiveness*. He demonstrated this functional necessity by opening his ultimate salvific discourse with forgiveness as his blood was shed (Lk 23:34).

This matter of forgiveness should not be taken lightly, nor should it be seen as a mere spiritual matter. Jesus' salvific action embodied with his own blood is only for relationship together. Therefore, it is absolutely essential for us to grasp that forgiveness is an ongoing necessity conjointly for what Jesus saves us from and what he saves us to. This is the experiential truth and functional reality in which the whole of Jesus' vulnerable relational involvement is embodying his followers together to be whole, God's whole on only God's terms.

The Emergence of New Order Family

What is unfolding in this week is the relational outcome of redemptive reconciliation. This is the week the world and all history became equalized, whether received yet or not, and when the *old* died and the *new* was raised up, whether experienced yet or not, and where relationships were restored to their true purpose in God's design, whether realized yet or not. And the emerging changes signify the nature of transformed relationships (equalized and intimate) embodying the whole of God's family in the new relational order.

The functional significance of this redemptive outcome is that the ongoing relational work of God's grace does not allow any terms in relationships for our false distinctions of the person, and also renders inapplicable the use of human differences which keep us apart from the whole of relationship together. When such human distinctions formulated by reductionism, and the incorrect use of human differences influenced by reductionism, are self-imposed, imposed on us by others, or imposed on

others by us, we need to be redeemed to be disembedded from them in order to open (free) the relationship to come together. As Jesus' disciples demonstrated in their lives, this is an ongoing issue, and the process of coming together in transformed relationships remains a rigorous process, if not also a struggle.

After the meal, Jesus and his disciples went to Gethsemane for further opportunity to be relationally vulnerable (Mt 26:36-46). Jesus went more deeply into his intimacy with his Father, making evident the extent of their openness and the depth of their involvement with each other in relationship together. The disciples had opportunity to further experience the same intimacy with Jesus by sharing in his deep anguish, but they chose to keep their relational distance and not to be vulnerably involved with him (cf. Lk 22:45). Their relational struggle only intensified in the hours ahead.

Nevertheless, the week of equalization would be fulfilled and redemptive reconciliation would prevail. Jesus clearly functioned as *the equalizer*. In his ultimate salvific discourse on the cross (discussed in chapter six), Jesus definitively constituted his family in transformed relationship together just as he had redefined his family earlier (Mt 12:48-50). By transforming his mother Mary's and John's relationship as new family together (Jn 19:26-27), he functionally embodied (not symbolically) them in the new covenant relationship signifying the new relational order of the gospel. Conjointly, his salvific action for Mary and John made definitive what Jesus saves us *to*: new covenant relationship together belonging to the whole of God's family, which embodies the functional significance of the gospel. This was further signified when his salvific action tore the veil to reconstitute the temple for God's intimate dwelling by shifting it directly to the relational context and process of the whole of God's family.

This fully initiates the function of his family to be whole in transformed relationships together, thus also operationalizing his church as family to live whole within its life and practice and to make whole the human condition in the world. Jesus functioned definitively as the equalizer to make whole, and those who followed in relationship together to be whole became *the church as equalizer*. The new relational order of the gospel signifying the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human relational condition will further emerge as his church with the ecclesiology of the whole, in which all the human differences catalogued under humanity come together in transformed relationships necessary to be the whole of God's family.

The Ecclesiology of the Whole⁴²

Perhaps it may appear premature to you to be focusing on ecclesiology (the doctrine and practice of the church) while still in the Gospels discussing Christology. That would depend on what your perceptions of the early church are based and what your understanding of church is. When Jesus revealed "I will build my church," the Greek term he used for church was *ekklēsia* (Mt 16:18). The term meant the assembly or gathering of those who were called out (*ekkletōi*). *Ekklesia* also has roots in the OT, which the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) uses for Israel as the covenant

⁴² For a broader discussion of ecclesiology of the whole, see my overlapping study *The Person, the Trinity, the Church: The Call to be Whole and the Lure of Reductionism* (Wholeness Study, 2006), online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

community—suggesting Matthew’s Jewish emphasis as the apparent reason only this Gospel records Jesus’ statement about the church. This embeds the Christian church in the context of God’s dealings with his chosen people and their covenantal relationship (Ex 19:5, Dt 7:6, Heb 8:10, 1 Pet 2:9-10). The NT extends this salvation history as the Father pursues a people for himself in his eschatological plan (Lk 1:17). This was Jesus’ salvific action in complete Christology and full soteriology to build his church.

The term *ekklesia* itself appears to have only limited descriptive value for what his church is and does. As far as function is concerned, *ekklesia* is a static term which is not useful to define the church (notably the local church). We need a more dynamic understanding for the church’s function than merely a gathering. The functional significance of his church emerges when we focus of the process Jesus implied in his statement above, and that he embodied in his life and practice—and made further evident in post-ascension discourse with various churches.

In Jesus’ disclosure “I will build my church,” the term for build is *oikodomeo*. This term denotes building a house, derived from its root *oikos* meaning house, home, family, that is, a family living in a house. These terms were conjoined later with their significant cognates: *oikeios*, belonging to a certain family (Eph 2:19); *oikodome*, building (Eph 2:21); *oikonomos*, a person who manages a family (1 Cor 4:1). The function of these terms points to the relational process of the new kinship family of God and building his family together. This provides us with the vital relational context of his church and the dynamic relational process for the function of his church, both of which Jesus vulnerably embodied progressively in his trinitarian context of family by his trinitarian relational process of family love. Thus, the church as God’s family was made definitive by Jesus even before the cross and was fully constituted by his salvific work during the week of equalization—which the Spirit came soon afterward to develop for completion and Paul, not Peter, would later formally operationalize. Therefore, ecclesiology is necessarily integrated within a complete Christology to establish the experiential reality of a full soteriology. Any ecclesiology that is not functionally integrated within Christology is insufficient and lacks wholeness.

Church Formation

It may be argued that church today bears little resemblance to the church which emerged in the first century. The validity or invalidity of this discussion also depends on our perceptions and understanding of the church being built in Jesus’ disclosure.

When Jesus cleansed the temple, this was for “my house” (*oikos*) to be a context for communion (notably communication through prayer) together with God for all peoples (Mk 11:17). When the veil was torn to reconstitute the temple, this context of God’s intimate dwelling shifted to the relational context for God’s people to have communion directly in relationship together. Relationship together in this new context, however, was only on God’s terms, just as Jesus initially disclosed to the Samaritan woman at the well about God’s strategic shift. God’s terms (“Listen to my Son”) involved following Jesus in relational progression to his Father to belong to his new family, which he redefined in functional distinction from his biological family (Mt 13:49-59). It was in his trinitarian relational context of family by his trinitarian relational

process of family love that Jesus constituted his followers in transformed relationship together as family in the new relational order. Just as he established Mary and John becoming family together, it was this gathering (*ekklesia*) of his followers being “built” together in relationship who formed his church.

The church, which emerged with Jesus, is the direct relational outcome of the relational dynamic involved in establishing the new relational order; they are inseparable. The formation of his church is vitally interrelated to Jesus’ vulnerable relational work to equalize persons and intimately involve those persons in the relationship together necessary for the new relational order of wholeness. If church formation is separated from this relational process, then church is no longer about his family. His church as family is a function only of relationship. Yet this relationship has significance only as a function of transformed relationships—that is, redeemed and reconciled relationships together. By its nature, these are the relationships together necessary to be whole in likeness of the Trinity. Therefore, church formation must (*dei*, not *opheilo*) involve equalizing persons, whose hearts then open to each other and come together in the relationships as family in the new relational order—coming together to live and be whole among themselves, and in conjoint function to live and make whole in the world.

This is what we need to perceive and understand about his church, and thus how we need to function to be his church. Anything less in church formation is insufficient to be whole, God’s whole on God’s terms, and becomes merely a substitute from reductionism; the influence of reductionism is addressed in his post-ascension discourse to help us further perceive and more deeply understand the purpose and function of his church. The church Jesus formed will challenge how we practice church today, yet hopefully help our ecclesiology to be whole.

Church Practice as Family or Orphanage

The relational process of discipleship involves following Jesus in the priority of relationship together for the relational progression which leads to the redemptive act of adoption as the Father’s very own daughters and sons permanently belonging in his family together (cf. Jn 8:31-36). The whole of God’s family is the fulfillment of God’s covenant promise which establishes the functional significance of the gospel and what Jesus saves us to—rendering inadequate a reductionist emphasis of good news merely for the individual in what Jesus saves us from.

God’s thematic response to the human relational condition “to be apart” from the whole of God has been the integrating thesis for God’s vulnerable involvement with humankind, thus the theme for salvation history and the ultimate expectation for its eschatological conclusion. In the process of this relational progression which Jesus vulnerably embodied, he promised his followers that they would not be left as orphans because the Spirit will replace him to bring his family to completion (Jn 14:15-18). Then in his formative family prayer, Jesus asked his Father for all his followers to experience the relational reality of the whole of God’s family just as constituted in the Trinity—not at the eschaton but now for the world also to witness (Jn 17:20-26). When Christian life and practice is without this relational significance and experiential reality, it lacks

wholeness because it basically functions in the relational condition of orphans, that is, functional, relational, even emotional orphans.

Given God's thematic relational response, Jesus' salvific relational work and prayer, and the relational purpose for the Spirit's ongoing presence, each church is unavoidably faced with the decision that functionally defines its existence and determines its practice. Knowingly or inadvertently by its practice, each church decides either to reciprocally respond to its relational responsibility as the whole of God's family, or to assume instead by default the function of a gathering of functional and relational orphans in effect as an orphanage. This either-or decision is directly correlated to a church's perspective on and extent of practice in the relational condition "to be apart"—notably in a church's operation and how it functions together. Whether a church gives functional priority to this reciprocal relational responsibility of family or subordinates it with other functions, there is no intermediate position for church practice that functionally defines its existence. Based on God's terms for relationship together, we either are engaging the relational process of the whole of God or are apart from its relational function—no neutral practice, though certainly the relational process is not always consistently engaged in practice.

The metaphor of "church as an orphanage" is descriptive of any gathering of Jesus' followers who remain in some condition "to be apart" as relational or emotional orphans—gathering even with good intentions and/or for a missional purpose. An orphanage can provide organizational membership, group identity in joint association and activities, and it may even simulate belonging in a limited sense of community. Yet biological-family orphans would have no illusions that this would substitute for belonging to an authentic family. The same awareness cannot be said for most relational and emotional orphans in churches.

The church as orphanage functioning in some relational condition "to be apart" is contrary to God's design and purpose for creation in general. God's design and purpose are both functionally whole and wholistically relational, thus God's declaration "It is not good for [human persons] to be apart" (Gen 2:18). The functional significance of God's declaration "not good to be apart" converges with the relational significance of Jesus' declaration "not leave you as orphans" to form the integrating basis of Jesus' ecclesiology, thus the heart of his ecclesiology of the whole. Consequently, any church practice "to be apart" is also a contradiction of God's desires specifically for the new creation family in likeness of the Trinity, which Jesus definitively signified in his formative family prayer. Therefore, what authentically represents God and being in God's image is to function in likeness of the Trinity, and what genuinely reflects the life of the Trinity is church practice in likeness of the Trinity's relational ontology of intimate interdependent relationships as family.

Jesus made definitive the reciprocal relational responsibility involved in relationship together as family without being apart as orphans (Jn 15:3-11). The key term he used for this relational process is "remain" (*meno*, abide, dwell), which is not a static descriptive term but a dynamic relational term involving ongoing engagement in a relational process. This is the same term Jesus used to define the relational involvement of his disciples, which tends to be reduced to following his teachings (Jn 8:31). Furthermore, *meno* is used by Jesus to distinguish the function of those in enslavement (or in reductionism) from those redeemed who authentically live as God's very own

daughters and sons in his family as the relational outcome of redemptive reconciliation, thus defining the qualitative significance of *belonging* (Jn 8:34-35).

Belonging (not merely membership) is a relational function of the whole of God as family—not as an organization nor even in a limited sense of community—which is constituted in and by the Trinity. While *meno* has a quantitative dimension of duration (permanence), Jesus emphasizes the qualitative aspect of the depth of involvement in relationship together. Therefore, belonging is the relational outcome of intimately experiencing the relational reality of being God’s very own together as family. The experiential truth of God’s family love was further disclosed by Jesus to define his Father’s and his response to “make our home” (*mone* for *meno*) with those in reciprocal relationship together (Jn 14:23). This family experience may be simulated with good intentions or may be perceived with illusions but authentic belonging cannot be substituted for. Nor should church practice be accountable for anything less, as we will discuss shortly about what Jesus addressed in churches.

What renders a church effectively an orphanage are its reductionist practices: first, by defining persons functionally based on what they do, the roles they perform or spiritual gifts they have, thus reducing the importance of the whole person signified by the function of the heart; then on this basis, practicing relationships without the primacy of intimacy, thus not having communion together necessary to participate in God’s life, nor the fellowship to live and be whole together as family. Even though church as orphanage can be a refuge for those who are apart—as orphanages historically have served for those without family—this practice is still a reductionist substitute for the reciprocal relational responsibility as the whole of God’s family. As evidenced from God’s created design and purpose for relationship together since the primordial garden, God holds his people accountable for this relationship together in likeness of the Trinity, accountable to be his people in covenant relationship together, to live in the new creation of his family—that is, accountable to relationally respond back to the whole of God’s thematic relational response, whose trinitarian persons have been vulnerably present and intimately involved with us in family love. Settling for anything less or any substitutes puts a church in tension or conflict with the whole of God’s desires and with what matters most to God; this church operation is not his church, and thus is not about being his family but merely functioning as an orphanage.

As we have discussed throughout this study, Jesus was in ongoing conflict with the main reductionists of his time. The disciples in general and Peter in particular also were in tension with Jesus for their reductionism in how they defined themselves, as they tended to have distance from their heart and to maintain relational distance from the vulnerable heart of Jesus involved with them. Consequently, they did not intimately know Jesus (and thus his Father) despite their membership as his first disciples, and in spite of all their shared activities and time together—experiences witnessed in many churches today. As a group, the early disciples essentially functioned as relational orphans suggesting their participation together in an orphanage during Jesus’ earthly life. This limited involvement would account for some of Jesus’ disappointment (Jn 14:9), sadness (Mt 26:40,45) and frustration (Mk 8:17-19, Jn 21:22) experienced in their relationship. It was not until after Jesus’ ascension that they decisively took up their reciprocal relational responsibility as the whole of God’s family.

Certainly the arrival of the Spirit's presence and relational work can explain the redemptive changes undergone by the early disciples, though without full explanation since the Spirit does not work unilaterally. That is to say, this does not eliminate the necessity for the reciprocal relational work of Jesus' followers in cooperative engagement with the Spirit, for which the church is accountable in the trinitarian relational context of family to practice, to nurture and to extend by the trinitarian relational process of family love.

By the relational nature of the Trinity, this family love is a function always for relationship, the relationship of God's family, thus is always constituting and maturing God's family. Functional, relational and emotional orphans need family, not orphanages, and urgently need redemptive reconciliation, which the relational function of God's family love directly and ongoingly addresses. The whole of God's family love always signifies the following function: pursues the whole person, attends to redeeming persons, and addresses the relational involvement necessary to come together in relationships to be whole as family in likeness of the Trinity. The working assumption of family love is: the importance of the whole person to be involved in the primacy of intimate relationships together as those belonging to God's family. When the trinitarian relational process of family love is applied to churches and becomes functional in church practice, any church functioning as an orphanage can be redeemed to authentically function together as God's family.

For authentic followers of Jesus, to maintain function as orphans together is a contradiction of being in relationship with Jesus and is not an option for practice in our relationships together as church. Nor is it negotiable to follow Jesus in the relational progression as his new kinship family. In his study of the NT house church, Roger Gehring observes that the image Jesus preferred for the new people of God was the eschatological family of God. He concludes that this was most likely because family of God best communicated the theological essence of what Jesus was trying to impart.⁴³ Through social history, Joseph Hellerman examines the social organization of the pre-Constantinian house churches to find, that from first-century Palestine to third-century Carthage the church was a surrogate kinship family whose members understood themselves to be the sons and daughters of God.⁴⁴

We can add that the function of this new kinship family (not necessarily in the form of a house church) is by its nature the necessary practice of God's people everywhere and how to do church anywhere regardless of its tradition, even in the twenty-first century Western world or global North. Christian church community formation (past, present or future) is more significant than a house, a household or even a conventional family. His church as family in likeness of the Trinity is a new creation unlike any gathering experienced before, even as covenant people of God (as Jesus implied to Nicodemus, Jn 3:3,5). And as whole persons involved in equalized and intimate relationships together with family love, the practice of this relational process in the new relational order raises issues for us which need to be resolved both as individuals and as a church family.

⁴³ Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structure in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 47.

⁴⁴ Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

The transformed relationships together of God's family are the relationships functionally necessary to be whole as signified in the relational ontology of the Trinity. When church practice accounts for this reciprocal relational responsibility, it functions for the experiential truth of this wholeness. Yet, accountability of church function often suffers with a bias of epistemological illusion from reductionism, which masks actual church function with ontological simulation. Reductionism needs to be exposed for its counter-relational work in church practice. Just as family love constitutes and matures God's family, family love also necessarily involves clarifying what is not a function of God's family—even contending with what is not authentically God's family, as Jesus demonstrated in the temple cleansing. The issue of authenticity is an ongoing concern of family love. *Accountability for authenticity* defines Jesus' action when he further expressed family love to various churches to be whole.

Jesus' Post-Ascension Discourse on Ecclesiology to be Whole

Jesus' formulating for ecclesiology to be whole did not stop with the end of his formal earthly ministry. He had other defining interactions specific to his church, which can be considered his post-ascension discourse on ecclesiology definitive for his church to be whole.

After the Spirit came to his church for its development and completion, Jesus acted for Paul's conversion and called him to be whole to operationalize the church's wholeness for the experiential truth of the gospel (Acts 9:1-16, Gal 2:11,14). Then Jesus challenged Peter's perceptual-interpretive framework for making distinctions about persons/peoples, in order to redeem his bias in relationships which created barriers in his church preventing all persons from coming together in transformed relationships as God's family (Acts 10:9-36; 15:7-9). In family love Jesus clarified the full significance of his relational work of equalization to establish the function of his church also as equalizer, and thus the ecclesiology of the whole was being made definitive. Yet, what was formed (and reformed) theologically was not always made functional in practice, which was the reason Paul later had to chasten Peter in family love for him to practice the relationships together necessary to be whole as God's church family congruent to the truth of the gospel.

Jesus' post-ascension discourse on ecclesiology continued when his family love exposed reductionism in various church practices to hold them accountable for the authenticity to be whole as his church (see Rev 2-3). Examining his discourse with these churches will help us grasp the functional and relational significance of Jesus' ecclesiology necessary for churches to be whole—God's whole on God's terms.

The issue about being whole always involves reductionism. What prevails in (*en*) any context of the world is reductionism. Jesus calls his followers relationally out of (*ek*) these contexts in order to be whole together as his family, then also relationally sends them back into (*eis*) those surrounding contexts to live whole together as his family and to make whole the human condition (as defined in his formative family prayer, Jn 17). Without the reciprocating dynamic of this *ek-eis* relational involvement (discussed in the previous chapter), church practice is functionally based on just *en* (in) the surrounding context. This is problematic in function for the ongoing relational involvement with the

whole of God and God's terms to constitute the whole of who we are as church and whose we are.

Without the ongoing function of the reciprocating *ek-eis* relational involvement, there is no engagement of a culture's life and practice in the surrounding context with the necessary process of reciprocating contextualization (discussed in chapter seven). In conjoint function with triangulation, reciprocating contextualization provides the relational process imperative for the qualitatively distinguished identity of a church to function in the surrounding context without being defined or determined by what prevails in that context. That is to say, without this reciprocating relational process in church practice, there is no consistent functional basis to negate the influence of reductionism. This leaves church practice susceptible to subtle embedding in the surrounding context, or engaging in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion, even despite the presence of apparent indicators of important church practices distinguishing its identity. This is clearly illustrated in the various churches Jesus addressed, each notable for its own variation of church practice.

We examine Jesus' discourse by starting with the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29), which both establishes the framework of Jesus' discourse and frames our discussion as we also end with this church.

Thyatira's economy emphasized trades (including brass-working) and crafts (cf. Ac 16:14). In the Greco-Roman world of that time, trade guilds organized the various trades and were necessary to belong to if one wanted to pursue a trade (much as unions today). These guilds served various social functions as well, one of which was to meet for common meals dedicated to their patron deities, thus engaging in activities of pagan worship and immorality. For Christians not to belong to a guild and participate would generally mean becoming isolated economically and socially,⁴⁵ which may suggest a pragmatic approach to church practice in Thyatira.

In the nature of this surrounding context, Jesus acknowledged this church's extensive "deeds" (*ergon*, work that defined them, Rev 2:19): "love" (*agape*), "faith" (*pistis*), "service" (*diakonia*, service, ministry that benefits others, especially compassion to the needy), "perseverance" (*hypomone*, enduring and not giving in to bad circumstances in contrast to *makrothymia* which is patience with respect to persons), and that they were "now doing more than...at first," suggesting not a status quo situation but actually doing more *ergon* than before. Yet, their practice also "tolerated" (*aphiemi*, to let pass, permit, allow, v.20) Jezebel's teaching. What they let pass, permitted or allowed is important to understand in the above context.

Jezebel (probably a byword symbolizing the OT character of Jezebel, cf. 1 Kg 18:19) appears to be a woman (or possibly a group) accepted within this church fellowship. The practice associated with her teaching probably refers to compromise with prevailing activity related to trade guilds prominent in the city which "misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols" (2:20). What is significant to grasp here is not the obvious disparity of this teaching and practice with the desires of God. What is more significant is how these prevailing influences of the surrounding context were absorbed into the practices of this church along with all its other so-called good deeds acknowledged above. This is not simply an issue about

⁴⁵ For further contextual information, see Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).

syncretism, synthesizing competing ideologies, or even pluralism, but goes beyond merely maintaining doctrinal purity to the deeper issue about participation *en a* surrounding context having the prevailing presence of reductionism and its subsequent influence on their perceptual-interpretive framework. This is the lens which determined what they ignored and paid attention to, thus the lens by which they practiced their deeds. When reductionism is not negated, its influence then affects how those other deeds would be engaged with something less and some substitute for the whole of persons and relationships, thus raising issues of authenticity, quality and significance.

Thyatira demonstrated a weak view of sin, namely sin as reductionism which was the normative character of their surrounding context and was embedded in its collective order. They also lacked involvement in reciprocating contextualization to distinguish their identity in that surrounding context without being determined by it; and any pragmatism in their practice became a euphemism for reductionism. Their tolerance was essentially about reductionism, thus they reinforced its counter-relational work and functioned incompatibly to be whole, God's whole on God' terms. The influence of reductionism is usually more subtle than observed in the Thyatira church. This is illustrated increasingly in the other churches Jesus addressed, as we look next at the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22).

Laodicea was a rich city, the wealthiest Phrygian city, ten miles west of Colossae. It was known as a prosperous banking center, for its textile industry and its renowned medical school. Their residents had great pride in their financial wealth, fine clothes and famous eye salve. But Laodicea lacked a natural water supply. Hot water was piped in from hot springs and cold water came from the mountains. Both were lukewarm by the time it reached Laodicea. Since hot water was preferred for bathing and cold for drinking, there were frequent complaints about their water as inconvenient to their exceptionally comfortable lifestyle. This background gives important context for Jesus' discourse and helps us understand further the significance of his ecclesiology of the whole.

How the church in Laodicea functioned was just like their water: lukewarm. Though tepid does suggest that their church practice was "hot" earlier, church life and practice was now comfortable, self-satisfied and complacent, essentially status quo of what prevailed (3:16). Their self-assessment reflected the perceptions of the surrounding city: that they were rich and had everything they needed (3:17a)—relatively speaking, of course, since the comparative process always makes such self-definition provisional. More importantly for those whose self-definition is based on what they do and have, Jesus addressed the illusion of those perceptions and exposed their reductionism (v.17b). They functioned in the epistemological illusion of reductionism, consequently their church practice was without functional substance and relational significance. For Jesus, their lukewarm practice was not only inconvenient but distasteful ("I am about to spit you out of my mouth"), which Laodiceans could readily identify with given their water condition. Moreover, their neither-cold-nor-hot practice was a lie of reductionism; there is no intermediate condition of church practice between being God's whole as family or not, that defines its existence. Jesus held this church accountable for authenticity—even "cold" was better than a lie—which is how family love functions with its working assumption.

The Laodicean church practice should be familiar to Western churches, notably in the U.S. Yet, this is not merely about relative affluence and comfortable lifestyles. This is about the first major issue of what defines the person, and how this eventually determines how church practice functions. The surrounding context of Laodicea defined itself by what it did and had. The human person was perceived from the outer in, thus functionally reducing the importance of the whole person from the inner out signified by the heart. In this quantitative process, both the importance of the whole person and the primary priority of relationships are replaced by secondary areas of interest and concern. Substitutes are made for the functional substance of our heart and for the quality of our relationships. Substitutes involve any alternative which reduces the qualitative and functional significance of being whole as persons in relationship together. These substitutes of reductionism are what the church in Laodicea accepted (intentionally or inadvertently) from its surrounding context of the Greco-Roman world to determine its church practice, thus creating the illusion (the epistemological illusion of reductionism) about their authentic existing condition. This false sense of self-understanding is ongoingly promoted, reinforced and developed by Satan, who encourages churches with Christian substitutes in ontological simulation (cf. 2 Cor 11:14-15)—which Jesus addressed further in two other churches.

While Jesus exposed the Laodicean church's reductionist substitutes and dismantled their illusion, he also extended further family love by making his whole person vulnerable to them for the redemptive change imperative in relationship together to be whole (3:18-19). He was clarifying for them that relationship together on God's terms is incompatible with any reductionist practice. As family love always functions, he redefined them to pursue their whole persons from the inner out to be redeemed to come together in transformed relationships. This is signified in Jesus' well-known words which followed—an intimate relational message of family love for his church, usually taken out of this context. The classic image of Jesus knocking at the door (v.20) is a metaphor of these deep desires of the whole of God to have intimate relationship with his family. The change they needed, therefore, must (by its nature as signified in the Trinity) be a relational change transforming their practice from a mere gathering without relational belonging (church as orphanage) to whole persons intimately involved in relationships together as family (signified by "open door," hearts coming together in table communion). This metaphor makes evident that redemptive change is *the relational imperative* for his church.

This metaphor is helpful to locate the ongoing involvement of Jesus with his church: pursuing his followers for transformed relationships together as family. We cannot continue to reduce Jesus' intimate relational message of family love for his church in this metaphor by perceiving it only for the individual, as is Christian convention. This metaphor of Jesus' relational work of grace needs to be returned to its full context for use in ecclesiology. Thus, the significance of this metaphor should not be lost on even the most mature Christian because it is a relational key in Jesus' ecclesiology to be whole (cf. 3:7-8). This metaphor functionally interacts with the metaphor of church as orphanage to make whole his church.

Any church practice "to be apart" is a contradiction of God's desires specifically for the new creation family in likeness of the Trinity, which Jesus constituted earlier with his formative family prayer. Since what authentically reflects the life of the Trinity is

church practice only in likeness of the Trinity's relational ontology of intimate interdependent relationships as family, any alternative to God's whole always becomes church practice as an orphanage, notably operating as an organization or as a voluntary association (cf. church in Thyatira and trade guilds). This either-or defining process is an ongoing tension for church practice. For churches to address the influence of reductionism, even in pragmatic practice, they need the presence of the whole, God's whole. This is the whole that the relational function of the Trinity ongoingly provides, by which Jesus knocks on church doors. Therefore, embracing the relational function of the Trinity emerges as the primary issue facing churches to define and determine how they will function both within themselves and in the world.

This relational issue was involved in two other churches Jesus addressed. The next church, the church in Sardis (Rev 3:1-3), had "a reputation of being alive" apparently in the prevailing perception, although the city hosted many pagan cults whose practices pervaded the surrounding context. The implication here is that this church lived behind their "reputation" (*onoma*, used as the substitute of what a person actually is). Even with their reputation of being alive, Jesus made no such assumptions about them. Rather he examined how they functioned through the lens of repentance with family love. Uninfluenced by the surrounding bias, he exposed what existed beneath the outer layer of "being alive": "you are dead" (*nekros*, the condition of being separated from the sources of life, thus being unaccompanied by something) based on the fact that "I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of God"—that is, incomplete based on God's terms, not as defined by the surrounding context. With the perceptual-interpretive framework Jesus makes definitive here for his ecclesiology, their "deeds" (*ergon*, works denoting what defined them) were not "complete" (*pleroo*, to fill up, make full or complete). In other words, what defined them was not whole. What was missing in their church practice?

Since no explicit sins such as idol worship and sexual immorality were mentioned (as in Thyatira), their incomplete deeds suggest something more subtle or lacking. Their activity was perceived as alive, yet likely in the quantitative aspects of *bios*, not the qualitative function of *zoe*. Their reputation signified only a substitute (*onoma*) of the authentic identity of who, what and how his church is. While Jesus' polemic about soiled and white (*leukos*, bright, gleaming) clothes described those incomplete and a remnant who weren't incomplete respectively, bright clothes symbolized those who participated in God's life (3:4). This is about relationship and involvement together, which soiled clothes symbolized a barrier to or precluded. Any type of "soiled" clothes—whether stained by blatant sin or dirtied from subtle incomplete work—would have this relational consequence. I suggest this all implies: their deeds were not whole because they were substitutes from reductionism; and they were not whole because what defined them was based on reductionist practices; thus how they practiced church was separated from the relational involvement of God's life, unaccompanied by the vulnerable presence and function of the Trinity, because of their sin of reductionism—in what defined their persons and determined their relationships together, and thus in how they practiced church.

The issue of not being complete and being whole started back at creation and the purpose to "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). The Hebrew term for "fill" (*male*) generally denotes completion of something that was unfinished. When God declared "not good for human persons to be apart," God started with Adam and Eve the relational context and

process of the function to be God's family. This was now fulfilled by Jesus—as he declared “I will not leave you as orphans” and sent us the Spirit for completion—in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. This relational context and process were not the primary function of the Sardis church's involvement and ministry, so Jesus critiqued what they “filled their church” with, as he does all churches.

In spite of how well the Sardis church presented itself (its appearance) and how well it was perceived (its image), substance was lacking. This reflected a shift in how they defined themselves from the inner out to the outer-in aspects and functions (*metaschematizo*). This lack of deeper qualitative substance exposed the credibility of their reputation as essentially worthless, while the validity of their work (apparent service and ministry) was relationally insignificant because they were separated (“to be apart”) from the substance primary to wholeness of life. These are severe critiques Jesus made of a church which at least was doing something to earn that reputation of being alive—unlike the Laodicean church's lukewarmness. The choice essentially of style over substance is not unique to the church in Sardis. In fact, the distinction between style (for appearance and image) and substance is blurred in many church practices. Yet, the credibility gap between what appears to be and what actually exists is not readily apparent to a church and observers, when a church relies on what it does to define itself. Reputation becomes one of those valued indicators of success which many churches depend on for feedback to evaluate their work—or value to validate their position in God's kingdom. Jesus asks, “What are we filling our churches with?”

Family love functions for authenticity in relationship together to be whole, and for accountability for anything less and any substitutes. Thus, Jesus' critiques were “a critique of hope” in his call to be whole—a functional key in his ecclesiology to be God's whole. When Jesus confronted them to “wake up,” the sense of this two-word combination (*gregoreuo* and *ginomai*, v.3) is to emerge as a new, whole person. This was not about self-determination but redemptive change—the relational imperative. They needed to be transformed in the inner-out aspects and functions (*metamorphoo*) of a person, while being redeemed from the outer-in aspects and functions (*metaschematizo*) which did not give full importance to the qualitative function of the whole person (signified only by the heart). Their outer-in over inner-out way of defining themselves determined what they paid attention to in how they did relationships and how they practiced church—which were not complete. This certainly diminished their relationships both with God and with each other, though they were unaware of this condition due to the simulation and illusion of reductionism, which ignored the lack of qualitative relational substance.

With the lens of repentance by the function of family love, Jesus called them back to what they had “received” (*lambano*, v.3) in relationship from the beginning: his whole person, not just his teachings. As disclosed in John 1:12, *lambano* means to embrace and follow him as a teacher—that is, be his disciples not as students in the rabbinic tradition but as adherents in relationship together in progression to be whole as God's family, thus pointing to the formative process in his ecclesiology to be whole. In other words, Jesus called them back to be whole in the qualitative function of relational work inherent in who, what and how the Trinity is, and therefore who his followers are and what his church is: the whole of God's family. For nothing less and no substitutes of this relational

reality, they needed to become transformed persons from the inner out who vulnerably engage in the relational work necessary to integrate equalized and intimate relationships together to be his church family in the new relational order.

The rigorous nature of this relational process makes church practice more susceptible to reductionism; church practice is also thus tempted to use the easier alternatives of reductionist substitutes. The lack of primary involvement in this definitive relational work for church practice becomes even more acute with the church in Ephesus (Rev 2:1-4).

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

Jesus knew not merely the information about their deeds but also knew (*oida*) the nature of them, and the extent of their functional significance. It may seem somewhat perplexing that Jesus was not impressed with this church and even felt to the contrary about their church practice: "You have forsaken your first love" (v.4). If it was not Jesus making this critique, we would probably dismiss this as a misguided conclusion or uninformed allegation. Yet, his discourse here on ecclesiology raised a serious issue of church function, which is crucial to account for in how we practice church ourselves. His critique makes definitive *the very heart* of his ecclesiology to be whole.

The term "forsaken" (*aphiemi*) means to forsake, abandon persons, to leave, let go from oneself or let alone—which would include functionally maintaining relational distance even while in close physical proximity or in mutual activity. *Aphiemi* is the same term Jesus used in his promise to "not leave [his followers] as orphans" (Jn 14:18). Connecting these provides the context and process for the function of ecclesiology to be God's whole. In the church context at Ephesus this strongly describes not paying attention to the whole person and not giving primary priority to relationships together. They worked hard doing things *for* God but the relational process necessary for their functional significance was deemphasized or misplaced in their effort. This often happens as churches develop and the goals of church growth become the priority of church practice. In the process, as the Ephesian church demonstrated, there is a subtle shift in which the *means* become the *end* and the purpose for relationship together to be whole is forsaken.

As the term *hypomone* for "perseverance" denotes, they were so focused on circumstances and situations such that persons (especially God) unintentionally were ignored in relationship, inadvertently left in relational distance or emotionally forgotten. Their *hypomone* was in contrast to the Philadelphian church's *hypomone*, which was a reciprocal relational response to Jesus' desire ("my command") for relationship together (3:10, to be discussed in the next section). Their persevering character of not giving in to

bad circumstances also stands in contrast to *makrothymia* which is patience, endurance, longsuffering with respect to persons; the former is about dedication in hard work (characteristic of the Ephesian church) while the latter involves relationship with mercy, grace and family love (cf. Mt 18:21-22, Rom 2:4).

Despite what would usually be defined as significant church practice reflecting sound ecclesiology, there was distance in their relationships leaving them in the condition “to be apart,” indicating a sound orphanage and not ecclesiology of the whole. They did not have the relational involvement of family love, which is the only involvement having relational significance to God (cf. Mary’s anointing of Jesus as a priority over ministry to the poor, Mt 26:8-13). This is further evidenced by their reduction of the truth merely to doctrinal purity. They forgot that the Truth was vulnerably disclosed only for relationship together on God’s terms, which they were effectively redefining on their terms. Essentially, their terms reversed the priority order of Jesus’ paradigm for serving (Jn 12:26), which defined the first priority of discipleship as intimate involvement in relationship together, not focused first on the work to be done for serving (*diakoneo*). Thus, they also compromised their identity as the light, which is rooted in their relationship with the Light (v.5b, cf. Mt 5:14-15). Since they focused primarily on what they did—suggesting how they defined themselves—they paid attention to related situations and circumstances and less important issues, while ignoring the primacy of relationship together in family love. Functioning with this perceptual-interpretive framework resulted in the relational consequences of forsaking their first love which reflected the lack of relational involvement in their church practice.

This was the relational involvement Jesus called them to turn around and get back to for them to be whole: “Repent and do the things you did at first” (v.5). Jesus was restoring their misplaced priorities and more deeply made discipleship definitive by further operationalizing his paradigm for serving. This involved the first priority of discipleship, which is ongoing vulnerable involvement with Jesus in the relational progression to the whole of God’s family—the *formative process* in Jesus’ ecclesiology to be whole. His ecclesiology is the ongoing relational outcome of discipleship in this relational progression to the whole of God, which vulnerably engages reciprocal relationship with the Trinity and conjointly is intimately involved in reciprocal relationships together as church family in likeness of the Trinity.

The basic complaint Jesus had against this church is the primary issue facing all churches for defining and determining how they will function: embracing the relational function of the Trinity and embodying church practice in likeness of the Trinity’s relational ontology. In all that the Ephesian church was doing (which was a lot), they were not directly involved in the relational context and process of the whole of God and did not function in the context of family and process of family love constituted in the Trinity. They demonstrated a direct correlation between the priority we give relationships and the extent to which we are loving (as defined by relational involvement, not as doing something however dedicated). This correlation is axiomatic for Jesus’ ecclesiology of the whole. Whether Jesus’ complaint against this church included both their relationship with God and with each other is not clearly indicated in the text. Yet we can strongly infer that it included all their relationships, because their primary emphasis on their work reflected: (1) how they defined themselves, which further determined (2) how they did relationships and thus (3) practiced church. These three major issues are always deeply

interrelated, and also in interaction with the above primary issue of the Trinity, thus together they need to be accounted for in ecclesiology in order to be whole.

The practices of both the churches in Ephesus and Sardis were contradictions in function which reflect the influence of reductionism. What they focused on and engaged in were reductionist substitutes for the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. The relational consequence was to become embedded in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion. Moreover, the relational function of the Trinity cannot be grasped in theological propositions nor experienced in church doctrine, even in its purity. By reductionist practice, these churches demonstrated how their practice (“have forsaken your first love” 2:4) and their understanding (“a reputation of being alive,” 3:1) became *decontextualized*. In their struggle to remain distinct in a pluralistic Greco-Roman context, the Ephesian church stopped paying attention to the greater context which defined them and distinguished their significance. In their effort to be significant (or popular) in their surrounding context, the Sardis church ignored the primary context which constituted them. That is, they were removed, diminished or deemphasized from the relational context and process of the Trinity and needed to be recontextualized in the relational nature of the Trinity. This is the function of reciprocating contextualization in the *ek-eis* relational involvement of Jesus’ ecclesiology to be whole and to make whole. Without this reciprocating relational dynamic, church practice increasingly finds its functional basis only *en* (in) the surrounding context, in which reductionism prevails.

Whatever a church’s surrounding context may be, we can expect the prevailing influence of reductionism to affect the whole of church practice. It will, that is, unless there is the ongoing function of the reciprocating *ek-eis* relational involvement to definitively distinguish church purpose and function from beyond merely its position *en* the world. His church’s purpose and function in relationship together to be God’s whole necessitate nothing less and no substitutes of this whole, as the terms of God’s grace demand. Without function in the relational terms of grace in reciprocal relational involvement, reductionism is able to shift grace’s demand for nothing less and no substitutes than the whole in church practice to anything less and any substitute. This shift is qualitative, thus cannot be observed in quantitative terms, as the Thyatira church’s increased amount of “good deeds” demonstrated and the Laodicean church’s wealth, fine clothes and medicine illustrate. This shift is ontological, away from the inner-out whole person, thus cannot be grasped by an outer-in ontology of personhood, as evidenced by the Sardis church’s inability to understand its true condition. This shift is relational, thus cannot be experienced in any other human activity than the primacy of intimate relationships together, as signified by the unawareness of the Ephesian church’s diminished experience in their level of relational involvement together.

As long as our perceptual-interpretive framework is reductionist, our lens’ view of the qualitative, the ontological and the relational will not discern the extent of the surrounding influences reducing the whole of church practice. The relational demands of grace, however, clarifies for church function that nothing less and no substitutes than to be whole is the only practice which has significance to God. Additionally, the lens of repentance in conjoint function with a strong view of sin makes no assumptions to diminish addressing sin as reductionism, first and foremost within church practice and then in the surrounding contexts. And Jesus wants “all the churches” to clearly “know

that I am he who searches hearts and minds” (Rev 2:23)—that is, examines the qualitative significance of persons from inner out, whom he holds accountable for authenticity to be whole in relationships together as the whole of God’s family (2:25; 3:11). In their effort to be relevant (and possibly pragmatic) in the surrounding pluralistic context, the Thyatira church forgot in their many admirable church practices what was necessary to be whole and to make whole (cf. a similar error by the church in Pergamum in a reductionist context, Rev 2:12-15).

It is not sufficient for churches to be a mere presence, or even merely to function, *en* the world; their only significance is to function *eis* (relational movement into) the world both to be relationally involved with others as God’s whole and, by the nature of this function, also to confront all sin as reductionism of the whole. Jesus teaches us about ecclesiology in his discourse, and the lesson we need to learn from the Thyatira church is: to let pass, indifferently permit or inadvertently allow—“tolerated,” which the others also did more subtly—the influence of reductionism in any form from the surrounding context proportionately diminishes the wholeness of church practice and minimalizes their relational involvement with God, with each other in the church and with others in the world. For churches to get beyond practice merely *en* the world, they need a different dynamic to define and determine their practice.

By searching hearts Jesus teaches us that church function is about being whole, not merely doing correct ecclesial practices. And the *eis* relational engagement of church function has to be conjoined with the *ek* (movement out of) relational involvement with the whole of God as its defining antecedent in the *ek-eis* dynamic. This reciprocating relational process negates the continuous counter-relational work of Satan and its reductionist influence (Rev 2:24) by ongoingly engaging, embracing, experiencing and extending God’s whole in the qualitative significance of the integrated ontology of both personhood and the church constituted in and by the Trinity.

In his discourse Jesus teaches us a profound lesson which delineates a simple reality of life about the human person and the existing social order—matters we either pay attention to or ignore depending on our working assumptions of humanity and society (discussed earlier in this chapter). Since we do not live in a vacuum, our practice is either shaped by the surrounding context we are *en* (thus embedded) or constituted by what we enter *eis* that context with. In the latter function, for *eis* to define and determine practice necessitates the *ek* relational involvement to disembed us from a surrounding context in order to embed us to the whole of God’s relational context and process, thus constituting God’s whole for the *eis* relational movement back. This reciprocating relational process signifies the relational demands of grace compatible with the working assumptions Jesus came *eis* the world and his assumptions of humanity and the existing social order with which he engaged the world.

For our practice both as person and persons together as church, disembedding from the influence of reductionism to re-embed to God’s whole is the issue we need to grasp. Without the function of nothing less and no substitutes, which grace demands for person and church, wholeness is diminished and the whole is minimalized—or functionally not whole. For church practice to fulfill its divine purpose and function, it must account in its function for being relationally embedded in the whole of God and God’s eschatological plan for its globalizing commission “sent to be whole” in conjoint

relational function with its “call to be whole and holy” (as Jesus pointed the Thyatira church to, 2:26-29).

Jesus’ post-ascension discourse is not merely an addendum for his church. This is what in pre-ascension he vulnerably embodied with nothing less and no substitutes of the whole of God and ongoingly accounted for the whole of God’s intimate response for relationship together. After his church had opportunity to establish its practice in his call and commission, his discourse provided in family love the critique of hope necessary for all churches also to embody in its practice the qualitative relational function to be God’s whole. Now in deeper reciprocal relational responsibility, his church is ongoingly accountable for God’s whole with compatible relational response back. And his post-ascension discourse on ecclesiology is clearly definitive for his church’s response to be whole as God’s new family, and for his church to live and make whole as equalizer for God’s new relational order. His ecclesiology constitutes church function only in relational congruence with his embodied function as the equalizer in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family, nothing less and no substitutes but God’s whole on God’s terms.

His Church as Equalizer

The redemptive changes, which Jesus made the relational imperative for the above churches to undergo, directly involved his relational work of equalizing. What Jesus embodied throughout his sanctified life and practice was vulnerable relational involvement with the devalued, the dispossessed, the discounted and disregarded—that is, with those stigmatized by false distinctions which created barriers for relationships to come together to be whole. This required also being involved with those who benefited from such distinctions in a prevailing collective order, whether sociocultural, economic, political or religious (including the emerging church). These were persons, even collective orders, which Jesus never avoided and even took initiative to engage (notably Jewish leaders, cleansing the temple). His relational work of family love always involved redemptive reconciliation, and to be redeemed is to be equalized for reconciliation in the relationships necessary to be God’s whole. These relationships are necessarily transformed relationships both equalized and intimate. Relationships are not fully reconciled in coming together intimately until they are first redeemed, thus equalized.

Human communities containing this diversity of distinctions and related misuse of differences (e.g. about gender and age) ongoingly maintain relationships together in some condition “to be apart” as long as this existing order is not changed. When the discussion is about bringing together human diversity, it is misguided to think that persons can be united in relationship together without these distinctions being rendered insignificant. Those who employ distinctions on others and for themselves knowingly or inadvertently use a “*deficit model*” in human relations: the treatment, however subtle, of others who are different as being essentially *less*. Whatever the distinction or difference, persons are perceived as less because ostensibly they do not measure up to the prevailing standards used in the reductionist process of defining human persons by what they do or have, achieved or acquired. The relational consequences of such perceptions is a stratified relational order embedded in the human relational condition “to be apart” from the whole.

Peter used a deficit model to make false distinctions about Gentiles which stratified relationships in the early church, thus creating barriers to their full participation in relationship together. This necessitated both Jesus to correct him in his post-ascension discourse and Paul to chasten him to practice the truth of the gospel. Until Peter's bias was redeemed, the Gentiles were not equalized to be functionally able to come together in church practice in transformed relationships as his church family—regardless of maintaining a theology of grace.

This counter-relational process—of distinction making, with the use of a deficit model to stratify relationships, for creating barriers in relationships together reinforcing the human relational condition “to be apart” from God's whole—was made evident by Jesus in his post-ascension discourse, when he encouraged the church in Philadelphia of the experiential truth of his relational work as the equalizer (Rev 3:7-12). Apparently, this was directed to Jewish Christians who had been ostracized from the Jewish community (excluded from the synagogue) because they no longer measured up to the prevailing standard of Judaism (v.9, as the church in Smyrna was, 2:9). Jesus identified himself as the functional and relational keys to God's house prophesied earlier (Is 22:22), who determines access to belonging to God's family (v.7). He fully affirmed the experiential truth that they permanently belonged to God's family (“open door,” v.8, cf. metaphor of 3:20, a relational key to Jesus' ecclesiology of the whole). As the equalizer, Jesus' family love rendered insignificant the distinction imposed on them by the Jews prevailing in that religious order and redeemed them of the barriers to full participation in God's family (v.9b). This equalized them to relationally respond back to be reconciled in reciprocating transformed relationships together as God's family in the new relational order. Their response back was not of self-determination (“little strength,” *dynamis*, signifying being unable or incapable) or out of obligation (*opheilo*) to a code of the law, but ongoing relational response back to Jesus and his terms for relationship together as family: “kept my command with *hypomone*” for ongoing reciprocal relationship together (v.10, in contrast to the perseverance of the Ephesian church, 2:3).

By equalizing them in the surrounding context of this religious order, Jesus made unequivocal the experiential truth that “I have loved you” with family love to be whole in relationship together as God's family. As the equalizer, he will also humble those Jews functioning in ontological simulation, who imposed this counter-relational process on them, to know as well that he has loved them as family together (v.9)—in a dramatic image of equalization. This dramatic image should be projected back onto his equalizing cleansing of the temple to complete the relational outcome of equalization in the redemptive reconciliation necessary for “my Father's house” to be for “all nations” without distinctions. In this relational outcome Jesus constituted the Philadelphian gathering further and deeper as his church family in the relational progression embedded within the whole of God's eschatological plan to the new Jerusalem (3:11-12). In doing so, Jesus' ecclesiology of the whole is functionally integrated with eschatology in the whole of God's thematic action.

As those who have been equalized to permanently belong to the whole of God's family, part of “your crown” (v.11) as the relational outcome of redemptive reconciliation involved their defining commission (in conjoint function with their call) to live whole and make whole as the church as equalizer. This was the experiential truth of the gospel

they were to embody, not in isolation merely among themselves but embody to the world, just as Jesus embodied from his Father to make whole the human condition (Jn 17:18).

Ironically, the counter-relational process of distinction making and discrimination by Jews to Christian Jews became the same counter-relational process used by various Jewish Christians to make distinctions of Gentile Christians to discriminate against them in the early church. This was Peter's perceptual-interpretive framework and essentially his contradictory practice in the church until Jesus' post-ascension discourse. Then Peter led the discussion in reordering the stratified early church to be the equalizer, though Paul would be the one to operationalize it and to formalize the ecclesiology of the whole. After Jesus redeemed his bias and reformed his ecclesiology, Peter declared at the Jerusalem church council that "God made no distinctions between us and them" (Acts 15:9). The term *diakrino* denotes to make a distinction, discriminate, treat differently, which God does not practice in his family. This term and God's family action help us understand that such distinctions are not neutral without repercussions but rather are integrated in a counter-relational process which then uses those distinctions to discriminate toward those persons by treating them differently, namely as being *less* by the deficit model. Peter learned that those distinctions are human constructs, not made by God (cf. Acts 10:14-15).

In this pivotal action for ecclesiology, the early church shifted to emerge as the equalizer. Its defining function for church practice became: dissolving false human distinctions of human construction and absorbing legitimate human differences from God in order to be and live the whole of God's family in the new relational order of transformed relationships together conjointly equalized and intimate. As Jesus embodied in his equalizing, church function as equalizer by its nature necessitates being both whole and holy, thus to be qualitatively distinguished from the function of *the common*—notably from the prevailing function of the surrounding context's relational order.

The significance of the church being holy involves a functional aspect and a relational aspect for which church practice is accountable not only in sanctified identity but also in sanctified life and practice. Since Jesus redeemed (thus equalized) persons in extending to them the relationship of his Father as family together, what distinguishes his followers—his family, his church—is to *live equalized*, and, in full congruence with his relational work, to *equalize* by extending this family relationship of family love. Jesus made clearly evident throughout his sanctified life and practice that his equalization perspective and a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework are irreconcilable, thus incompatible as a working basis for church practice. Therefore, the functional aspect of being holy involves being freed from the influence of reductionism which explicitly or implicitly defines and/or determines church practice. The related relational aspect of being holy involves the authentic practice of church relationships together in likeness of the Trinity, which is distinguished from any aspects of the relational condition "to be apart" from the whole, for example, as orphans in an orphanage. This functional and relational significance of the church being holy interact to shape the process of church development and growth.

When we are developing our relationships in church not "to be apart" from the whole, and thus be distinguished from relationships in general in the surrounding context, we need to engage a relational process distinguished from the surrounding context's relational order and process. That is, church relations need to engage the relational

process of redemption and reconciliation imperative for these relationships to be the transformed relationships integrated together to be God's whole. To participate in and have an equalized share in life together as family in likeness only of the Trinity is a holy communion that, by its nature constituted by Jesus, is the relational outcome only from the equalization of redemption and the intimacy of reconciliation in family love. To partake of the whole of Jesus' life and to participate in his church in the relationships together of God's whole is the reciprocal relational response of nothing less and no substitutes—the only response compatible and congruent with his relational response of grace, as Peter experienced in his footwashing.

Conjointly, the church as equalizer cannot be relationally involved with the human diversity in the surrounding contexts of the world without first absorbing the human differences within its own family life by involvement in transformed relationships (equalized and intimate) together. To extend God's response of family love to the human relation condition, church function must be whole to make whole. Churches fail to be whole to fulfill its purpose as equalizer as long as its own members remain functionally apart in some aspect of this relational condition—even if unintentional or inadvertent. The equalizing of redemption and the intimacy of reconciliation are intentional relational practices for his church, in the process of which his church dissolves false human distinctions and absorbs legitimate human differences to be the whole of his family in the new relational order.

Yet, the church as equalizer is not about merely what to do in the life of the church and about developing more ministries for church growth and missions, as made evident by the churches in Jesus' post-ascension discourse on ecclesiology. This is still only about relationships and how to be involved in relationship together by family love. In his function as equalizer, Jesus' working priorities were not about goals to fulfill in a divine mission because his whole purpose was a function of relationship: its origin, its initiation, its enactment, its fulfillment, its outcome and conclusion. The embodied church who authentically follows Jesus as equalizer has purpose only in relationship and always functions involved in relationships: their condition "to be apart," their redemption, their healing, their reconciliation, their restoration and transformation.

Just as Jesus made redemptive change the relational imperative for these churches in his post-ascension discourse, the function of church as equalizer requires such change for churches today; otherwise, we will emulate their reductionist practices. While this may not require the theological reform undergone by the church council at Jerusalem, it does indeed call for the functional shift the early church undertook in church practice to transform their relationships together. This functional shift involves our approach to church life, church growth and missions. The trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love establish the working priorities necessary to build the relationships for his church to be whole as family in likeness—not of any type of family or any form of community, including those of the first-century Mediterranean world, though there is clear association to its patrilineal kinship group.⁴⁶ His church as family is in likeness only of the Trinity qua family. The functional integrity of the trinitarian relational context and process cannot be diminished or minimalized in any aspect of church practice, in order for relationships together to have the ongoing relational outcome to be whole in church life and to live whole in church growth, and thus to make whole in

⁴⁶ For a discussion of this correlation, see J. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*.

church mission. Anything less and any substitutes are irreconcilable to his church as family and incompatible for his church family as equalizer.

The defining call and commission of his followers, who have been equalized to be his family together, constitute his terms for function in the new relational order as equalizer. His conjoint call and commission embody the relational significance of his church to be whole in transformed relationships together, the experiential truth of which is necessary to embody the functional significance of his gospel to make whole the human relational condition. The church as equalizer vulnerably embodies his gospel with the working assumptions of both redemption and reconciliation (Lk 24:46-47), thus it qualitatively embodies the complete sanctified Christology of the whole of Jesus and the full soteriology of his salvific relational work. The whole of who, what and how Jesus embodied, and the whole of whom he saves, what he saves them to and how he saves them, this whole embodies the church as equalizer. Its authentic practice is God's whole on God's terms, which fulfills Jesus' formative family prayer, just as the Father sent his Son with nothing less and no substitutes.

Functional Implications

In response to the opening questions of this chapter, I have sketched a conclusion that the function of Jesus' identity as the light of the world illuminated the only alternative for the ontology of human persons and the social design of humanity which is definitive for them to be whole: the qualitative new relational order of his church as family together. The hard question for us now is what do we do with his alternative, that is, specifically in terms of our prevailing human self-definition, our pervasive relational practices and relational order, and, interrelated, our predominant church practices?

All of us, persons and persons together as church, have made this decision in the past, knowingly or unknowingly, and are faced with this decision in the present, explicitly and directly, and will make this decision ongoingly in the future, intentionally or inadvertently. The question then is not about when we will choose but what we are choosing in our living as persons, with our engagement in relationships and by our practices as church. And the question revolves on the integrated issue in these three matters of being *God's whole on God's terms*. Jesus also made definitive that the only alternative to his only alternative is reductionism.

As Peter would attest, it is not easy to live whole among ourselves as church family and in our surrounding contexts, even though the theology to be whole and make whole may clearly be present. The functional implications of the church as equalizer in the new relational order as God's family could in itself take up volumes, much less a small section in a chapter. Yet, the functional and relational significance of Jesus' sanctified life and practice, and his gospel, remain vulnerably present and intimately involved by his Spirit for his church to respond to—ongoingly addressing churches for irreducible and nonnegotiable church practice, as if in further post-ascension discourse for our ecclesiology to be whole.

We need to openly face not only the human relational condition but the relational condition of church practice and make no reductionist assumptions for our practice. God's family love holds us to be accountable for authenticity. Thus, we have to seriously

embrace the relational reality in the metaphor of Jesus knocking on our church doors to be changed from any metaphorical condition of church as orphanage, if we are to be reconciled in transformed relationships together (both equalized and intimate) for authentic function in likeness of the Trinity. Jesus made it uncomfortably clear that our only alternative is some reduction of God's whole and renegotiation of God's terms, replaced by our substitutes, many of which closely emulate the reductionist church practices in Jesus' post-ascension discourse.

The interrelated issues of how we define our persons, how we engage in our relationships and thus practice church always involve three vital aspects for all practice: (1) the significance of our person (and persons together as church) presented to others—signifying the integrity of *who* is presented; (2) the quality of our communication (including implied relational messages)—signifying the qualitative substance of *what* is communicated and its congruence with *who* is presented; and (3) the depth level of relationship we engage—signifying the qualitative extent of *how* we're involved, which can qualify the quality of (2) and the significance of (1). As we examine these three aspects of our practice along with the interrelated issues involved in church practice, we can better understand if how we function as church is congruent with the relational function of the Trinity or has shifted to a reductionist substitute. This will certainly challenge what we are filling our churches with, or even face us with why persons don't respond to our church practice, both from outside and inside a church. Moreover, it will hold church leaders accountable for not only *who* fills our churches and *what* they lead, but also for *how* they lead. For example, maintaining distinctions and role differences are convenient means to promote or reinforce separation in relationships together, and also are comfortable positions to keep relational distance without vulnerable involvement with other members.

Jesus' working assumptions and priorities served only to make relationships together whole. The human condition is a relational condition, and human persons (both in the world as well as in the church) need relationship to be whole. No other priority and function are primary for Jesus and can have legitimate primacy for his church and his gospel. While he functioned in this primacy of relationship, many unconventional, unorthodox and counter-cultural things happened—namely in relationships, which appeared uninformed or ill-advised; his practices can certainly make following Jesus uncomfortable, if not avoidable. Essentially, it can be suggested that Jesus was not an efficient missionary or church planter, that is, in terms of how efficiency controls function today and becomes an unwritten policy of church operation. This simply signifies the incompatibility of reductionist practices with Jesus' sanctified life and practice to be whole and make whole, God's whole only on God's terms.

This calls for a fundamental paradigm shift in our approach to church life, church growth and church mission, which in Jesus' working assumption necessitates a qualitatively new perceptual-interpretive framework. More importantly, Jesus assumes that this condition and any related relational condition "to be apart" in churches need repentance for the turn-around change of redemption, which assumes the need for reconciliation, which assumes the need for the relational grace of the whole of God. This grace embodied by Jesus transforms persons for transformed relationship together with family love, thus defining the only priority of function constituting the very heart of the life of his church in the new relational order.

God's grace demands from us reciprocal relationship in nothing less and no substitutes than God's whole on God's terms. As Jesus' vulnerable response to the human condition fulfilled, human persons—with whatever distinctions and of whatever differences—don't need a gathering in an orphanage but need the relational belonging in family, the whole of God's family. What are we choosing by our church practice?

Chapter 9 The Trinity in Christology with Pneumatology

One of the main characteristics of a complete Christology is not being overly christocentric. That is to say, when Christology is only about Jesus, it is not about the whole of Jesus but focused on only part of his person, notably on what he did, on his teachings and example. The whole of Jesus vulnerably embodied Jesus' whole person throughout the incarnation, as we have observed and examined throughout this study. Conjointly, the whole of Jesus' whole person uniquely embodied the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of God, the Trinity. Christology remains incomplete when it does not encompass both Jesus' whole person throughout the incarnation and the whole of God whom his whole person embodied.

Moreover, by involving us directly in the trinitarian relational context and process, the whole of Jesus involves us in God's story, that is, the whole of God's thematic relational action in response to the human condition. We cannot perceive the whole of Jesus apart from God's story or we reduce the whole of *who* and *what* Jesus embodied as well as the whole of *how* he functioned. This reduction signifies a recontextualization of Jesus which relegates him to our situations and circumstances in history—just as many Jews did with their messianic hopes. We need to discuss further the trinitarian dimension of Jesus' embodiment in God's story.

This chapter integrates the Trinity into Christology and attempts to make this complete Christology the critical antecedent for the primary formulation of trinitarian theology—which in turn necessarily provides the integrating basis for church function in likeness of the Trinity. For this theological process to have this functional outcome, we will also need to reestablish the relational and functional significance of the Holy Spirit (pneumatology), who tends to be the forgotten *person* in Christian thought and church practice.

The Trinitarian Shape of Christology

John the Baptist testified that “I saw the Spirit...remain [*meno*, dwell] on him” at Jesus' baptism (Jn 1:32, cf. 3:34). From there, Luke's Gospel records that Jesus was full of the Spirit and led by the Spirit (Lk 4:1,14). These early accounts made evident the presence and function of the Spirit in Jesus' embodied life and practice, which Jesus himself confirmed (Lk 4:18, cf. Is 11:2; 42:1); and their function dynamically continued in Jesus' post-resurrection interactions (Acts 1:2) and continues in his post-ascension involvement (Acts 9:17; 13:2; 16:7). In essence, the Spirit *meno* with Jesus together to constitute the trinitarian relational context and process. When Jesus told his disciples that he will send the Spirit to them as his relational replacement not leaving them as orphans (Jn 14:18), he pointed to the relational ontology between him, the Spirit and the Father (Jn 15:26; 16:13-15). This ontology that the trinitarian persons have in common as *One* is what Jesus vulnerably disclosed about his Father and him.

As discussed previously about Jesus himself not being overly christocentric in his life and practice, he consistently disclosed that he was indeed all about the Father. He

came to reveal the Father (Jn 17:6,26, cf. 1:18), everything he did was from the Father (Jn 5:19-20) and all he said was for the Father (Jn 12:49-50). Beyond merely his embodied purpose and function, however, is the implied nature of *who* they are and *what* they are in relationship together. There are two clear overlapping statements Jesus disclosed to define his relationship with the Father: (1) “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30; 17:11,22), and (2) “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jn 10:38; 14:10-11,20; 17:21). We need to understand Jesus’ definitive declarations both ontologically and relationally, thus expanding on the Greek concept of *perichoresis* in trinitarian theology.⁴⁷

The doctrine of the Trinity emerged in the fourth century as a response to theological conflict and reductionism. Arius specifically taught that Jesus was subordinate to God in substance (*ousia*) and was created (begotten by the Father). The Council of Nicea (the Nicene Creed in 325) countered that Jesus was begotten (i.e., generated, not created) from the substance of the Father, of the same substance (*homoousios*) with God. In further response to another form of Arianism (from Eunomius: divine substance is unbegotten and only belongs to the Father), the Cappadocian fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, between 358-380) formulated the distinction between the same substance of God and the different persons (*hypostasis*) of God, thus establishing the doctrine of the Trinity: one God existing in three persons.⁴⁸

Essentially, from the fourth century into the twenty-first, we observe one aspect of God emphasized over another (e.g. the oneness of God or the divine threeness), and some aspect of God reduced (e.g. God’s substance [*ousia*] or the persons/personhood [*hypostasis*] of God), as well as redefined or ignored (e.g. “begotten” or the relationality of the Trinity). If not in theology most certainly in function, these perceptions and interpretations profoundly affect how we define God—namely in the ontological and relational nature of the whole of God. I suggest that much of this theological difficulty can be resolved or prevented if trinitarian theology emerged first and foremost from complete Christology. This is the compelling antecedent Jesus’ vulnerable disclosures made evident about him and the Father, which involved the Spirit together.

Jesus’ first declaration of “I and the Father are one” (*eis eimi*) essentially revealed the dynamic existence (*eimi*, verb of existence) of their persons dwelling in (*eis* in accusative form) each other together. *Eis eimi* signifies the ontological oneness of the trinitarian persons in qualitative substance (*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 wholly 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 God in who and what God is and how God does relationship.

⁴⁷ For an overview of *perichoresis* in trinitarian theology, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

⁴⁸ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2004), 252-69. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, ed. *Freeing Theology: the Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993) 85-87. Stanley J Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 7-8.

This raises two related theological issues to be aware of 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 personhood (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. The second issue involves reducing the whole of the Trinity (beyond our context in eternity called the immanent Trinity) into the so-called economic Trinity (directly involved with us in revelation for salvation) so that the eternal God loses mystery.⁴⁹ This is not to imply two different Trinities but to clarify that God's self-revelation is only partial 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 what is important about our persons and our relationships together in order to be whole in likeness of who, what and how God is.

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 their essence, on the one hand, if you see one trinitarian person you have seen them all; while on the other, to see the whole of the triune God 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 (*homoioima*, cf. Rom 8:3) the Father but is the exact copy (*charakter*, cf. Heb 1:3) of the Father.

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" (*eis eimi*) is the same ontological oneness among his followers "just as" (*kathos*, in accordance with, have congruity with) their ontological oneness (*eis 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 which overlaps with their ontological oneness (*eis 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, thus signifying their relational oneness constituted by their intimate involvement with each other in full communion—just as their relationship demonstrated at his baptism, in his transfiguration, in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, along with the presence and function (*meno*) of the Spirit. This deep intimacy in relationship together (*en eimi*) is conjoined in the ontic qualitative substance of their ontological oneness (*eis eimi*) to constitute the trinitarian persons in the interdependent relationships together to be the whole of God, the Trinity qua family. The conjoint interaction of the ontological One and the relational Whole provided further functional understanding of *perichoresis*.

Their ontological and relational oneness uniquely constituted the embodied Word the only one (*monogenes*) 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

⁴⁹ For a discussion on these distinctions of the Trinity, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*.

relational aspects and functions provide the remaining basis for Jesus' claim that if we truly see him we see the Father.

It is important to grasp that in Jesus' claim of 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 God's triune being as well as what matters most to God. God's self-disclosure embodied in Jesus was the who and what of the whole of God, and about how God only does relationships to be Whole. It is in this trinitarian relational context by this trinitarian relational process that the whole of God's thematic action is extended in response to the human condition for relationship together as family in family love. While those who respond back cannot experience ontological oneness (*eis eimi*) with the whole of God, they can have in reciprocal relationship the experiential truth of relational oneness (*en eimi*) together with the Trinity. The experiential truth of *en eimi* with the Trinity is the definitive basis for Jesus' followers to have *eis eimi* with each other together as his church for the ontological oneness to be whole in likeness of the Trinity (*kathos*, in congruence with the Trinity, Jn 17:21-22). The whole of Jesus embodied who, what and how the whole of God is in his relational work of grace only for relationship together and to make relationships together whole, God's whole on God's terms. His formative family prayer constitutes his followers together in this qualitative relational significance that matters most to God. Therefore, his church lives "ontologically one," *eis 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.

Trinitarian Uniqueness in Christology

In the big picture of John's Gospel, the embodied Word is constituted in the whole of God and the whole Word is given full context even before creation and human history (Jn 1:1-3). This set into motion the whole of God's desires and subsequent action in self-revelation, ultimately in the embodied Word (Jn 1:10,18, cf. Heb 1:1-2, 1 Cor 8:6). God's self-revelation (which is not total) is about the whole and holy God and about how this God does relationship. Yet the relational context and process of God's self-disclosure are always related to us, directly or indirectly. Though revelation is about God, God is focused on us. In other words, revelation in both the embodied Word of God and the canonical Word of God is about how God does relationship *for* us and *with* us. This is true about God's desires even before creation (for us) as well as God's action since (with us).

Whether before or after creation, God's action in relation to us is how God does relationship. This suggests how the triune God is throughout eternity because the righteous God cannot be inconsistent with the revelation of how God does 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. Definitively, we can only talk about God in terms of how the Trinity is with us—both before creation in anticipation of us and after.

Yet, we also need to distinguish that the triune God does relationship in two distinct relational contexts. One context is totally within the Trinity and their

relationships together. The other context is the Trinity's relational involvement with us. Both contexts still involve the trinitarian relational context of family, and how God does relationship is consistent for both contexts. Moreover, both contexts still function by the trinitarian relational process of family love. The enactment of family love, however, in the latter context requires a different relational process. Understanding the different relational processes is critical for our understanding of the Trinity and trinitarian uniqueness, conjointly for grasping how we need to do relationship with the whole of God and with each other together to be whole.

For the whole and holy God to do relationship with us involves a very distinct relational process appearing both paradoxical and incompatible, which informs us of what matters most to God and thus how God does relationships. In ultimate relational response to the human condition "to be apart," the Father extended his family love to us in the embodied trinitarian person of the Son (Jn 3:16-17). Yet, unlike how the trinitarian persons love each other in the Whole by a horizontal relational process between equals, the natural inequality between Creator and creature necessitates a vertical relational process; this vertical process seems to preclude intimate involvement *en eimi* as family together to be whole. Conjointly, 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 framework would 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 for an outcome beyond this—namely for what Jesus saves us *to*.

More importantly and significantly, God pursues us from a qualitatively different context (holy or uncommon) in a qualitatively different process (eternal and relational) to engage us for relationship together in his relational context of family and process of family love. That is to say, unlike the Trinity's horizontal involvement of family love, God had to initiate family-love action vertically downward to us in response to our condition "to be apart" in order to reconcile us to come together in relationships *en eimi* the whole of God. The mystery of this response of God's grace can only be understood in a vertical process; this must be distinguished not only from the horizontal relational process of how the Trinity loves among themselves, but also from the horizontal process implied in the reductions of the vertical process signified by renegotiating 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). Yet, without God's family-love initiative downward, there would be no compatible relational basis for God to connect with us or for us to connect with God, both initially and ongoingly.

In this qualitative relational process, the whole and holy God can only love us by a vertical relational process because of the inherent inequality between us. God can only do relationships as God, which Jesus embodied, and never on any other terms, specifically ours which points to not having ontological oneness (*eis eimi*) with God. Nevertheless, in spite of God's obvious distinguished ontology and superior position and authority, in loving us downward the Son came neither to perpetuate nor to expand the quantitative and qualitative differences between us, though his working assumptions never denied the extent of those differences. Nor did he come to condemn us to or bury us in those differences (Jn 3:17). In the qualitative difference of God's family love, the

whole of Jesus vulnerably disclosed how God does relationship for relationship together to be whole, which the Spirit's relational work extends for us to experience further and deeper to completion. It is vital for us to understand the implications of this qualitative relational process engaged by the whole of God (cf. Jesus' footwashing)—both in our relationship with the Trinity and in our relationships together as church, then in our relations with others.

For the eternal and holy God to be extended to us in family-love action downward required the mystery of some sense of “reduction” of God (cf. Jn 17:4-5), suggesting a quantitative-like reduction (not qualitative) of God. The action of God's family love downward underlies the basis for the functional differences in the Trinity revealed to us in the Scriptures—functional differences present in the Trinity even prior to creation yet only about God in relation to us (Jn 3:16, cf. Rom 8:29, Eph 1:4-5, 1 Pet 1:2, 1 Jn 4:9-10). These differences among the trinitarian persons appear to suggest a stratified order of their relationships together. Jesus indicated that “the Father is greater than I” (*meizon*, greater, larger, more, Jn 14:28) only in terms of quantitative distinctions for role and function but not for qualitative distinction of their ontology. There is indeed a stratification of function in the Trinity, yet their different functions only have significance in the relational process of enacting family love downward to us. Their functional differences correspond to the economic Trinity, and Scripture provides no basis for a stratified order of relationships in the immanent Trinity in eternity. In other words, their functional differences are provisional and cannot be used to define the relational ontology of the totality of God. To make that application to the eternal triune God can only be an assumption. What the embodied whole of the Word of God vulnerably disclosed helps us understand the Trinity sufficiently to preclude such an assumption.

As the Word of God who created all things, the Son embodied the most significant function of subordinating himself to extend family love downward (cf. 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 which claims Jesus is less than God in deity, being or substance (*ousia*). Despite any apparent sense of quantitative reduction of God to enact family love downward, the incarnation was the nothing-less-and-no-substitute God revealing how the whole of God does relationship.

The relational context and process of God's focus on human persons (even before creation) and involvement with us (during and after creation) constitute the functional differences in the Trinity necessary for God to love us downward. Each of the trinitarian persons has a distinct role in function together as the whole of God to extend family love in response to the human relational condition “to be apart” from God's whole. Thus it is in this relational context and process that the Trinity's functional differences need to be examined to understand the significance of trinitarian uniqueness. There are two approaches to the Trinity's differences that we can take. One approach is a static and more quantitative descriptive account of their different functions and roles in somewhat fixed relationships. 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 the primary focus on leadership and roles remains in human contexts, though who occupies them is open to both genders.

The other approach to the Trinity's differences is more dynamic and qualitative, focusing on the relational process in which their differences occur. While this approach fully accounts for the different functions and roles in the Trinity, the relational significance of those functions involves how each of the trinitarian persons fulfilled a part of the total vertical relational process to love us downward as the whole of God, not as different parts of God. In this qualitative approach, the primary significance shifts from authority (or leadership) and roles to love and relationships. 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 of God's primary function of love and relationships. And, as Jesus made evident in this discourse, central to a church's assessment is the awareness of the influence of reductionism.

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 aspects of persons and relationships and the dynamic process in which they are involved. This requires redefining persons not based on what they do (notably in roles) or have (namely authority) but on who and what they are in qualitative significance together, thus understanding relationships as a functional process of the relational involvement in family love between such whole persons (unreduced by what they do or have) and not as relationships based merely on authority and roles (essentially reductionist distinctions). These qualitative relationships help us understand what is necessary to be whole as constituted in the Trinity, and thus for the church to live whole in likeness of the Trinity.

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 focus does not account for the variations which 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 focus account for the dynamic relational process in which all of this is taking place—the process necessary for roles to have relational significance; for example, examine Jesus' intimacy with the Father at Gethsemane and assess its significance for his role to die on the cross.

Moreover, when the primacy of the Father's authority and role is emphasized as defining his person and also as constituting 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 (*eis eimi*) of the triune God, the ontological One. Conjointly, this imbalance created a further assumption or inadvertent perception of the Son's and Spirit's roles being "different thus less" than the Father's, thus operating in stratified relationships preventing the relational oneness (*en eimi*) necessary for the whole of God, the relational Whole. This points to the second implication for the Trinity, that such primacy of the Father also tends to imply a person who exists in relationships together 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 nature of God as constituted in the Trinity, the relational nature which is at the heart of who, what and how the whole of God is.

These two implied conclusions (or variations of them) about the Trinity are problematic for trinitarian theology, notably when integrated with 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 functionally 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 whole of God and God's thematic response to the human condition. God's self-revelation is about how the whole of God does relationship as the persons of the Trinity in response to us for relationship together in God's whole—the ultimate disclosure and response of which were embodied by the whole of Jesus.

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 God's family love and the redemptive means for adoption as the Father's very own in his family together. 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 One and Only" (*monogenes*) of God. Does this define fixed roles in a hierarchy or does it signify the relational process of the whole of God loving downward necessitating subordination among the trinitarian persons, in order to make a compatible relational connection with us, and thus us with God with the relational outcome of belonging to God'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 which involve more than order and includes how relationships are done. Stratified relationships can range from the oppression of power relations at one extreme to degrees of defined separation in relations, or merely to distance in relationships caused by such distinctions and differences, intentionally made or not. At whatever point in this range, 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). 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 Trinity, is what the whole of Jesus embodied in his life and practice throughout the incarnation. Though unique in function by their different roles in the whole of God's thematic response to the human condition, what primarily defines their trinitarian persons are not these role distinctions. To define them by their roles is to define the trinitarian persons by what they do, which would be a qualitative reduction of God. This reduction makes role distinctions primary over the only purpose for their functional differences to love us downward, thereby reducing not only the qualitative substance of the Trinity but also the qualitative significance of what matters most to God, both as Creator and Savior.

Conjointly, role distinctions neither define the trinitarian persons nor determine their relationships together and how they do relationships with each other. God's self-disclosure is about God's relational nature and function only for relationship together. As disclosed of the persons of the Trinity, namely in the narratives of Jesus, the following relational summary can be made: The Father is how God does relationship as family—not about authority and influence; the Son is how God does relationship vulnerably—not about being the obedient subordinate; the Spirit is how God does relationship in the *whole*—not about the helper or mediator. In their functional differences, God is always loving us downward for relationship together—to be whole, God's relational Whole.

Yet, we cannot utilize how each trinitarian person discloses an aspect of how God does relationship in loving downward in order to make reductionist distinctions between them by which to define their persons and determine their relationships. Just as we reduce defining persons (most notably to what we do) and relationships together (e.g. to role functions and behavior), this becomes reductionism of God. Likewise, reducing the whole of each trinitarian person to the particular function each one enacts in loving downward for relationship together to be whole becomes a reduction of how God does relationship as family; this thus reduces the primacy of the whole of God's desires, purpose and actions for redemptive reconciliation from our condition as well as ongoing tendency "to be apart." Furthermore, this reduction removes trinitarian uniqueness from the relational context of the eschatological big picture and from its relational process constituted by the primacy of how God does relationship within the Trinity and thus in relationship to us. What constitutes this primacy in the Trinity's relationships is how they function in their relationships *in* the whole of God *as* the whole of God and *for* the whole of God. This functional-relational oneness of the whole of God is not signified 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.

The emphasis on authority and roles, however well-meaning, does not give us this primacy for relationships together to be whole as family, nor is it sufficient to reconcile us from being apart—even if our condition "to be apart" only involves relational distance minimizing intimacy in our relationships. The relational consequence of this emphasis strongly suggests relational and emotional orphans functioning in church as orphanage—no matter how successful and well-respected church practice is, as clearly exposed in the churches in Ephesus and Sardis by Jesus' discourse. Jesus disclosed definitively that this is not the likeness of the Trinity by which his church functions to be whole.

As the embodiment of the whole of God and God's thematic relational action, Jesus is the relational and functional keys to the likeness of the Trinity necessary for the functional significance of his gospel and the experiential truth for his church. His declaration to be in the Father and the Father in him (*en eimi*) was not simply to inform us of the whole of God (*eis eimi*) but to provide the primary means to truly know and experience the whole of God and relationally belong in God's family. As we grasp this complete Christology, we more fully understand the deeper significance of his designation as "the One and Only." This primacy of relationship within the Trinity is signified only by their intimate communion and family love (Jn 3:35; Mk 1:11, Jn 5:20, Mt 17:5, Jn 14:31). Relationships of intimate communion and family love are both sufficient and necessary to constitute the whole of the triune God (*homoousios*) as well as to define the significance of the trinitarian persons (*hypostasis*) and to determine their relationships together (*perichoresis*). This intimate communion of family love is what matters most to God because it reflects what's most important in God and represents what's most significant of God—not authority, different roles, unique functions. And this is the depth of what "the One and Only" foremost wants us to experience in relationship together *en eimi* with the Trinity, the relational Whole, and thus as his authentic followers live *eis eimi* each other for the ontological oneness of his church in likeness of the Trinity, the ontological One—in fulfillment of his formative family prayer (Jn 17).

Our intimate relational involvement of family love signifies both the relational oneness with the Trinity while participating in the life of the triune God, and the relational and ontological oneness of his church living to be whole in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity. This relational oneness is not about a structure of authority and roles, or a context determined by such distinctions, but oneness only from the function of relationships in the intimate relational process of family love. These ongoing dynamic relationships of family love, however, necessitate by its nature the qualitative substance of God (Mt 5:8) and thus relationships only on God's terms (Jn 14:21; 15:9-10; 17:17-19). Intimate communion with the whole of the triune God cannot be based only on love, because God is holy. This relationship requires compatibility of qualitative substance, and therefore the need for our transformation in order to have intimate relationship with the holy God. God's love downward does not supersede this necessity, only provides for it. Conjointly, the whole of God's relational work of grace constitutes the redemptive reconciliation for our relationships in his family to be transformed to equalized and intimate relationships together necessary to be God's whole on God's terms.

In creation, God constituted the human person in the image of the qualitative substance of the whole of God signified by the function of the heart, not in dualism but in wholeness (Gen 2:7). The trinitarian persons and human persons in likeness cannot be separated or reduced from this qualitative substance and still be defined as whole persons. This wholeness signified by the heart is what the Father seeks in worshippers (Jn 4:23-24) to be in his presence to experience him (*horaō*, Mt 5:8), and what the Son searches in church practice for authenticity (Rev 2:23). This qualitative substance is necessary for the primary definition of the person, both trinitarian and human, not the secondary definition of what they do (roles) or what they have (authority), and thus is vital for both human ontology and the ontology of the Trinity.

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

This lack in trinitarian theology creates a gap in understanding the Trinity and thus a gap in church practice based on likeness of the Trinity. Complete sanctified Christology helps us better grasp the qualitative significance of God to more deeply understand the relationality of the Trinity.⁵⁰ In trinitarian theology, the predominant explanatory basis for relationality has been the Greek idea of *perichoresis*: the interpenetration of the trinitarian persons in dynamic interrelations with each other. The importance of *perichoresis* is certainly critical for our perceptual-interpretive framework (notably of Western influence) and it may be a conceptually more complete term to define the ontology of the Trinity. But this idea of relationality needs further and deeper understanding because it lacks the functional clarity to be of relational significance both to more deeply grasp the whole of God and to intimately experience who, what and how God is in relationship together. The Eastern church, rooted in trinitarian theology from the Cappadocians, appears to lack this functional clarity in their ecclesial practice based on the Trinity.⁵¹ If this is accurate, I suggest that this is 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 thus unintentionally minimizing intimacy together. This would not be the likeness of the Trinity. The whole of Jesus provides this clarity in how he vulnerably functions with his person in relationships throughout the incarnation, for which he holds his church accountable by family love as demonstrated in his post-ascension discourse on ecclesiology to be whole (summarized in Rev 3:19).

Without this clarity to establish relational significance, our Christian life and practice functions less relationally specific in involvement with the whole of God—though the intention may be there—and thus we practice church apart from (lacking involvement in) the relationships necessary to be whole as God’s family constituted in the Trinity—even though the idea may be understood. The lack of functional clarity has further ramifications for how the human person is perceived in the image of God and how our persons together were created in likeness of the Trinity, both of which are necessary for *imago Dei*. And the absence of clarity affects how those persons in God’s image

⁵⁰ For a broader development of this 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>.

⁵¹ 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).

function in relationship together necessary to reflect the Trinity's likeness, as well as to represent God's whole and build God's family. This lack opens the door to and tends to result in ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of the whole with reductionist substitutes. This is not the door that Jesus' relational and functional keys open (as he told the church in Philadelphia, Rev 3:7); which is why Jesus still knocks on many church doors for relationships together to be made whole—just as he did with the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:19-20).

The need for our fuller and deeper understanding of the Trinity goes beyond to be informed of God, which *perichoresis* merely tends to do. We need this understanding to experience the whole of God for relationship. This is the only purpose of God's self-disclosure vulnerably embodied in the whole of Jesus, making Christology the necessary antecedent for trinitarian theology. In the incarnation, the whole of God ultimately coheres for this relationship together, which Jesus intimately disclosed in functional clarity and experiential truth: to be relationally involved with God as whole persons together in the whole of God's family constituted in and by the Trinity. The authentic experience of this relational reality of God's whole without reduction of its truth has been the integrating theme of the Trinity's response to our human condition "to be apart" from the whole ever since the creation of the first human person. Indeed, the whole of God's desires were formulated even before creation to restore us to the whole in the new creation, to be completed by the Spirit in God's eschatological plan concluding with the Son partaking of the last Passover cup (cf. Mk 14:25).

As the Son fulfilled his earthly function to vulnerably embody God's family love downward to constitute his authentic followers in the whole of God's family, his relational replacement, the Spirit, extends this family love by his cooperative relational work to bring their new creation family to its ultimate relational conclusion. Trinitarian uniqueness emerges and coheres in sanctified Christology, which establishes the relational significance of the Spirit and provides the framework for pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit).

Integral Pneumatology: the Forgotten Person

As noted earlier in this chapter, the Spirit's presence and function dwelled (*meno*) with the embodied whole of Jesus together to constitute the trinitarian relational context of family and relational process of family love in ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the Father—an irreducible relational dynamic ongoingly integrated through post-resurrection and into post-ascension. While the Spirit is certainly an integral member of this triangulated context and process, his person and function in the Trinity tends to be minimalized and often functionally ignored. When given attention, what tends to be paid attention to are various functions related to the Spirit without the person. This reduces both the Spirit as an integral person in the Trinity and thus the Spirit's involvement as person in relationship together with the Father and the Son. The functional repercussion, if not theological conclusion, from this is a binitarian view of God focused on the Son alone with the Father. When the Spirit is reduced from personhood, the Spirit's person is lost in the whole of God, thus relegating the Spirit at most to some dynamic between the Father and the Son—for example, an impersonal

dynamic of “love.” Yet, the Spirit grieved like the other trinitarian persons, and this makes evident the involvement as a person (Is 63:10, Eph 4:30).

Moreover, reduced from personhood, the Spirit only functions apart from the primacy of relationships and what the Spirit does no longer has the qualitative significance of relational work, thus only involves the quantitative aspects such as guiding in cognitive truth, providing spiritual gifts and empowering to do things. Whatever reduction or variation takes place, the relational consequence for the Spirit is to be “the forgotten Person,” or even the lost Person in the whole of God.

When the Spirit is reduced from personhood, however, and the Spirit’s function is without relational significance, this condition implies a condition about Jesus. This is a condition in which the Spirit serves a Jesus who has been reduced to his teachings, principles and example in an incomplete Christology for a truncated soteriology with an ecclesiology that is not whole. Essentially, the Spirit can be no less in substance and no more in significance than what, who and how Jesus is. Pneumatology is conjoined to Christology and is contingent on it. In other words, as Jesus goes so goes the Spirit. When the whole of Jesus embodies the whole of God and vulnerably discloses the whole and holy God only for relationship together to be God’s whole, then the Spirit’s person, presence and function extends the relational Whole as the ontological One with the same qualitative substance and relational significance as the Son to complete our relationship together of God’s whole. This was the what, who and how of the Spirit that the whole of Jesus definitively disclosed.

In Jesus’ vulnerable interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well in which he intimately disclosed God’s strategic shift, he offered her living water (Jn 4:10,14). While he continued on to disclose the Father’s intimate desires for communion in relationship together, we must not overlook the relational significance of the living water. Later, John’s Gospel informs us that the living water is the Spirit (Jn 7:38-39, cf. Rev 22:17)). Jesus did not reduce the Spirit from personhood with the metaphor of living water; that would have reduced his own person since the Spirit dwelled with him in relationship together. Rather, Jesus disclosed to the Samaritan woman the strategic shift of God’s thematic action, in which the living water pointed to the Spirit’s person who together with Jesus constituted the trinitarian relational context of family and trinitarian relational process of family love. In conjoint involvement, they functionally and relationally embodied God’s strategic shift for intimate relationship together. Therefore, Jesus opened to her access to the whole of God for relationship together with all the trinitarian persons. Though the Father was highlighted in this interaction, all three trinitarian persons were extended to her. And in Jesus’ definitive disclosure, we must not overlook or reduce: (1) the emerging person of the Spirit integral to the whole of God for relationship together, and (2) the emerging relational significance of the Spirit’s person in Jesus’ salvific work, whose relational significance further increased namely for what Jesus saves us *to*.

The increased relational significance of the Spirit’s person emerged as Jesus’ salvific work approached the critical steps to its climax. Jesus disclosed to his disciples in his so-called farewell discourse that his whole person embodied the Truth for relationship with the Father—relationship together as the whole of God’s family (Jn 14:6). After startling them with the intimate disclosure of the Father (14:9-11), he further disclosed that the Spirit’s person will soon replace his person as this truth (14:17, later 15:26; 16:13). It is crucial to grasp both *what* is replaced and *who* replaces.

Jesus as the Truth was always for the purpose of relationship and functioned only for relationship together to be the whole of God's family (see Jn 8:32,35-36). His well-known discourse on the truth is usually taken out of its relational context of God's family by reducing the truth to the cognitive aspects of propositional truths and orthodox doctrine. Additionally, Jesus' person tends to be reduced to his teachings, thus reducing the qualitative whole of his person to quantitative parts of him that disciples follow in a reductionist discipleship without relational significance to his person (contrary to what 8:31 makes definitive, cf. Jn 12:26). Jesus' whole person embodied the Truth only for relationship together in God's family; and this is *what* is replaced.

This is *what* Jesus focused on when he disclosed "I will ask the Father and he will give you another" (Jn 14:16). The term "another" (*allos*) means another of equal quality, not another of different quality (*heteros*). The Spirit then is defined by the Son as of the same qualitative substance and as equal to himself, that is, as whole person in full personhood; this is *who* replaces. The Spirit's person as truth needs to be understood in function as the Son's relational replacement whom the Father gave as "another" in lieu of the Son; Paul later described them in a relational sense as interchangeable (2 Co 3:17-18).

Yet, "*who* replaces" needs to be in conjoint function with *what* is replaced to maintain compatibility and congruence. The Spirit's whole person functioned in the trinitarian relational context and process as the Son's relational replacement and as the relational extension of the Father only for relationship together as God's family (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). Therefore, as *who* replaces, the Spirit of truth must not be reduced from personhood to no longer be *allos* of the whole of Jesus. As *who* replaces *what* is replaced, the Spirit's person as truth cannot reduce truth from the relational significance of Jesus as the Truth. Just as the Truth cannot be reduced to his teachings and cognitive knowledge, the Spirit's function must not be reduced merely to a guide in cognitive truth, a helper, counselor, empowerer for the individual. These become reductionist functions when the Spirit is utilized only for these ends, and a misuse of the Spirit's person. Jesus defined the Spirit as *who* replaces *what* is replaced: "the Holy Spirit...will remind you of everything I have said to you" (14:26), "the Spirit of truth...will testify about me" (15:26), "He will not speak on his own...only what he hears...taking from what is mine...all that belongs to the Father is mine...and make it know to you" (16:13-15). Thus, he definitively disclosed the whole of the Spirit's person with the same functional and relational significance as his person: the truth and self-revelation of the whole and holy God only for our relationship together to be whole as God's new creation family in likeness of the Trinity.

The whole of the Spirit's functional and relational significance emerges and converges in Jesus' definitive enactment of family love: "I will not leave you as orphans" (14:18). The Spirit's person with full personhood in the relational ontology of the Trinity completes this family love to make functional our relationships together in likeness of the Trinity and thus to consummate Jesus' formative family prayer. The whole functional and relational significance of the Spirit's relational work conjointly involves convicting of sin, redeeming and sanctifying for what Jesus saves us *from*; in the same process, by the nature of *what* is replaced, the Spirit's work is further conjoined with reconciling, transforming and perfecting what Jesus saves us *to* for our relationships together to be the whole of God's family, and for us together to live God's whole and to make God's whole in the human condition throughout God's eschatological plan. For church function to be

in likeness of the Trinity, it must (*dei*) by its nature ongoingly practice in relational cooperation with the Spirit. Therefore, as *allos* for the Son, the Spirit of truth is: (1) the *functional truth* only for this relationship together, (2) only the *experiential truth* for this relationship together to be whole, (3) the *relational truth* for this relationship together to be only God's whole on only God's terms, and thus (4) the only *definitive truth* for our relationships together to be Jesus' church and not relationships in a mere gathering of relational and emotional orphans signifying a virtual orphanage.

Furthermore, as Jesus disclosed, "the Spirit of truth will guide you into all truth...and will tell you what is yet to come" (Jn 16:13). "Guide" (*hodegeo*, lead, explain, instruct) us in all the above truth for relationship together to be whole, and conjointly "tell" (*anangelo*, declare freely, openly, eminently) us the big picture "to come." The verb *erchomai* (to go, to come) implies motion from the Spirit's person to the person of the Son who is to come (cf. v.14), the relational process in which the Spirit is directly involved (as indicated by *erchomai* in Gk middle voice). Yet this is not merely about informing us, because God's truth and self-revelation are only for relationship. As the "who replaces," the Spirit's person is only involved in *what* is replaced. The Spirit's disclosure is only about the unfolding, completing and concluding of the whole of God's family in God's eschatological plan and final thematic action in response to the human condition to be whole. Eschatology (doctrine of last things) functionally emerges with the Spirit and involves the relational process of the Spirit's reciprocating movement (*erchomai*) to the Son for only this eschatological relational conclusion, not a mere eschatological event. Thus, the Spirit of truth additionally functions as (5) the *eschatological truth* for church function within the big picture to be in likeness of the Trinity in movement to our ultimate communion as family together with the whole of God consummated by the Son's return. For church function to be in likeness of the Trinity both in its immediate life and practice and conjointly within God's eschatological big picture, it must ongoingly engage the whole of the Spirit of truth.

If we reduce soteriology only to what Jesus saves us from, or we don't grasp what Jesus saves us to, then we will not take seriously the relational significance of never being left as orphans. This would mean that we have not adequately understood the truth of the Spirit nor have authentically experienced redemptive reconciliation with the embodied Truth in relational progression to the Father (as Jesus made imperative earlier, Jn 8:31-32,35-36). Complete sanctified Christology involves Jesus' full salvific work for adoption to relationally belong to the whole of God's family as the Father's very own daughters and sons in transformed relationships together. Adoption (however the term is perceived) is the trinitarian relational process of family love to be constituted together in the trinitarian relational context of family. The Father replaced the Son with the Spirit's person to consummate his family so that we would not have to live in the relational condition as orphans. Jesus also disclosed that the Spirit's definitive feedback (*elencho*, to expose, rebuke, refute, show fault, convince, convict, Jn 16:8-11) directly addresses the barriers to relationship together—namely our sin of reductionism, our difficulties in counting on God (for relational righteousness) in Jesus' embodied absence, and our unawareness and susceptibility to reductionism's counter-relational work promoted by Satan. Without the functional and relational significance of the Spirit's person in our church life and practice, we have no other basis and means to be God's whole on God's terms. Moreover, without embracing the *eschatological truth*, a church struggles to find

its place, purpose and function beyond itself locally to the whole of God's family in the eschatological big picture.

The personhood of the Spirit signifies that the Spirit's presence engages us in *interpersonal* relationship, and that the Spirit's function is involvement with us in reciprocal *interpersonal* relationship. The relational work of the Spirit's person is not unilateral but only in cooperative reciprocal involvement with Jesus' followers as family together. Despite his embodied departure, Jesus definitively asserted the ongoing truth of his church family not having to experience the relational condition of orphans only because the Spirit would replace him to extend and complete the relationships together necessary to be the whole of God's new creation family. Yet, the mere presence of the Spirit's person engaging us in interpersonal relationship is not sufficient for this relational outcome and conclusion; it is necessary for this but not sufficient for this. This is a crucial distinction to grasp about the Spirit's involvement, both for its necessity and the nature of its sufficiency.

That is to say, the Spirit's person is present to be involved in relationship which by nature involves reciprocal relationship together—not unilateral relationship, not optional or arbitrary relationship, nor negotiable relationship selective to our terms. Thus, Jesus' intended relational outcome of the Spirit's involvement in relational work is somewhat contingent on our compatible reciprocal involvement in the relationship; in this limited sense, whether the Spirit's relational work is sufficient can be in part measured by the extent of our relational reciprocity. This is not to say that we are the significant cause of the outcome of the Spirit's relational work, but only to indicate that the Spirit does not work unilaterally and impose any outcome or conclusion on us as in power relations. This cooperative-bilateral relational approach is evident in the metaphor of the Son knocking on church doors, not breaking through them to impose himself, for relationship together to be whole (just as he knocked on the church door in Laodicea, Rev 3:20)—which also needs to inform how church leadership is approached (cf. Mk 10:42-44). Consequently, though the Spirit's person is always present and ongoingly relationally involved intimately with us, the Spirit's person can be ignored or even forgotten, namely in functional and relational significance.

To ignore the whole of the Spirit's functional and relational significance, or even not to consistently pay attention to the Spirit's person—including misusing the Spirit's person with selective reductionist functions—must be realized as consequential for church life and practice. When our focus ignores or pays attention to the Spirit in this way, we are using the very lens from which orphans are the relational consequence, however unintentional and despite good intentions, which nevertheless is contrary to the Son's definitive enactment of family love not to leave us in that relational condition.

Christology is not complete without this integral pneumatology, nor can soteriology be full, ecclesiology be whole and eschatology be functionally clear without the Spirit of truth, the *allos* who is never forgotten by the Father and the Son. This is the ontology of the whole of who, what and how God is—ongoingly vulnerably present and intimately involved with us only for relationship together. Ongoingly involved with us intimately in family love, by which the Trinity holds us ongoingly accountable to be in likeness, just as the Son clearly made evident for church practice to be whole (Rev 3:19).

Functional Implications

We are challenged in the most basic aspects of Christian belief—perhaps challenged uniquely today in a modern surrounding context more complex than in any period of history. Yet, any fog of modernity should not obscure our perception of the human condition shared by all of us, a condition whose essential nature as a relational condition has not changed since creation. The whole of God created the human person to be in the image of the qualitative substance of God and created the relational design of human persons together to be whole in likeness of the Trinity; both are necessary to constitute *imago Dei*. The embodied Word as Creator fulfilled the function of this human ontology by redemptively reconciling us back to the whole of God's creation as constituted in the Trinity qua family.

The embodied Word didn't leave us in the dark about the Trinity's likeness. As the Light, he embodied the full significance of both the created human ontology as the whole person and the created relational ontology of persons together. As the Truth of God's vulnerable self-disclosure, he constituted his followers in relationship together as his new creation family. The whole of God's new family is signified by his church in likeness of the Trinity. Extended conjointly by the Spirit of truth, his church in likeness of the Trinity is the only church Jesus constituted, and thus the only church that has functional and relational compatibility to and congruence with the Son, the Spirit, the Trinity. Anything less and any substitutes have no functional and relational significance to God and for the human condition.

We need more vulnerably to engage this whole Truth, not merely the propositional truths and doctrines of our beliefs, and start responding to the truth that his church in likeness of the Trinity is neither optional nor negotiable to our variations. If we hold to the truth and authority of the Word, necessarily both embodied and written, then we have to embrace the *whole* of Jesus in sanctified life and practice, which includes his truth about his family (implied in his discourse on his kingdom-family, Lk 11:23): Any practice less than whole conjointly of the human person and persons together as church is only an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism.

This points to a similarity in the condition of Western churches and Eastern orthodox churches despite their different emphases and practices. Whereas Western churches tend to focus on Christ and the cross for an individual faith in church practice, Eastern churches look to the Trinity and the church as community, thus a communion with God, for example, through icons and the corporate context of church liturgy. Their focus and practice essentially represent two ends of a spectrum, yet both similarly suffer from an incomplete Christology and an ecclesiology needing to be made whole. Generally speaking, the West focuses on the work and teachings of Christ apart from the whole of Jesus' person, thus using this reductionist ontology for person and church and tending toward epistemological illusion embedded in individualism. The East sees Christ in the Trinity and thus in the church, yet their working ontology lacks the involvement of the whole person necessary for their relationships together to be whole, consequently tending toward ontological simulation embedded in their traditions of church practice. Beyond these examples, the influence of reductionism common in many church practices ongoingly challenges the integrity of the whole of God's family and the authenticity of his church in likeness of the Trinity.

In this twenty-first-century world, his church is further challenged today, and the issue is who and what will significantly meet this challenge and how. All the global changes and instability experienced since the latter third of the twentieth century have created much more uncertainty in our lives, collectively and even individually, with 9/11 and the so-called war on terrorism in this century only adding to this. With the extent of the changes taking place around us—including repercussions from climate changes—relational changes are the most critical. Globalization has been forcing us to think more about the interrelationships beyond our provincial boundaries and comfort zones; for example, the West is faced with the increasing shift of global economic power emerging in this century to Asia (namely China and India) and needing humbly not only to acknowledge this shift but also to change for harmony with it. Additionally, emigration (voluntary and involuntary) has affected all our lives in one way or another, even in our neighborhoods and perhaps our churches. At no other time in history have groupings of persons “faced” so many other persons different from themselves than exists today; and the global projections indicate only this further trend. This has created *a relational ambiguity* between, on the one hand, the spreading phenomenon of globalization and, on the other, the increasing fragmentation of relationships in the midst of this diversity—the relational ambiguity of which is compounded by the virtual simulation and illusion of communication generated by electronic technology.

The church lives within this world today whether it chooses to function in it or not. Apart from physical attributes (viz. skin color, sex), human diversity is the product of human constructions (including race, ethnicity) making distinctions between persons/peoples, which, intentionally or unintentionally, effectively cause some degree of separation in relationships. What a church does with all these human differences depends on how it lives. Churches are influenced by and participate in the human construction of distinction making. When roles, functions and spiritual gifts in church operation do not serve for relationship together to be whole but rather serve to define persons in a church, they become practices inadvertently reinforcing the counter-relational work of reductionism. Essentially, reductionist distinctions within church life and practice only amplify human differences making relationship together difficult and stratified.

Though the trinitarian persons fulfill different roles and functions to love us downward for relationship together to be whole, they cannot fulfill their relational purpose and have this joint relational outcome unless they function whole (*eis eimi*) in the primacy of their relationships together (*en eimi*) for the relational Whole as the ontological One—not by giving primacy to their different roles and functions. Likewise, though there are different roles, functions and spiritual gifts in the church body, we cannot use these to draw distinctions between us to define who and what we are, just as we cannot for the trinitarian persons. To define human or trinitarian persons based on distinctions of role and function would reduce their persons and create barriers to the intimacy in their relationships together necessary to be whole. For us as church, we cannot function whole (*eis eimi*) in our relationships together (*en eimi*) unless we are redemptively reconciled to transformed relationships both equalized and intimate, just as constituted in the Trinity. Having a different role, function or spiritual gift only provides us in a church family with a uniqueness (primarily quantitative) in *what we do and have* but they do not define the specialness (qualitative) in *who, what and how we are*. Christian function in his church body is unique to individual persons but not special to

those persons. Full Christian identity, on the other hand, which defines us as the whole of his church is special but cannot be unique to individual persons.

This is his church in equalized relationships necessary for the intimacy together to be whole as his new creation family in likeness of the Trinity. Whether in the first century or the twenty-first, his church is called to come together in the transformed relationships to be whole, and conjointly is sent to live whole so that the globalizing world may know the relational truth of God's whole (Jn 17:23), and further sent to make whole so that this world will respond back for the experiential truth of belonging in God's whole (Jn 17:21). Therefore, his church is about the whole of Jesus in sanctified Christology. His church's function is only about the ongoing fulfillment of Jesus' formative family prayer, in which the Trinity and ecclesiology converge, cohere and relationally progress to the eschatological relational conclusion.

Jesus has definitively defined and determined who and what will be significant in meeting the challenge of his church to fulfill his prayer, and how. As clearly as churches today are challenged both within its life and practice and in the world, we must make no assumptions for churches, and thus must openly consider how much churches may likely be threatened by the whole of Jesus in sanctified Christology and Jesus' prayer, and subtly be resistant to redemptive change, while relationally uninvolved with the Spirit. Jesus keeps knocking.

Chapter 10

Eschatology: as Doctrine or *Truth*, as Event or Relationship

The whole of Jesus in sanctified Christology embodied the triune God and the whole of God's thematic relational action in response to the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole. Jesus ultimately fulfilled God's response by embodying the Truth in vulnerable disclosure of God's action only for relationship with the Father to be whole together as God's family. Furthermore, Jesus' relational work did not cease with the resurrection. The whole of Jesus in sanctified Christology continues beyond his ascension. And essentially, the first words Jesus said to Peter and the last words he told him before his ascension point us to the last things ahead: "Follow me" (Jn 21:22) in the relational progression to the Father.

The last things to come (eschatology) critically involve the relational conclusion of discipleship, in which the authentic following of Jesus in ongoing relational progression to the Father constitutes eschatology in the trinitarian relational context and process. This dynamic, which Jesus continues to engage post-ascension, both calls into question our view of eschatology as doctrine or *truth* and challenges our understanding of the last things as event or relationship. This chapter seeks to bring clarity to and the necessity of eschatology only as *truth* for relationship in ultimate conclusion, and thus also to provide deeper understanding of what is both "now" and "not yet." This will involve rooting eschatology in complete sanctified Christology to integrate with the full soteriology and the ecclesiology of the whole by the integral pneumatology in coherence with the whole of God's thematic relational action in response to the human condition—the last chapter of salvation history in God's story.

Eschatology as *Truth*

During the week of equalization and passion, Jesus made intimate disclosures to his disciples. When he responded to Thomas for a deeper epistemology by disclosing that he embodied Truth, this critical interaction was initiated by his further intimate involvement with his disciples' troubled hearts (Jn 14:1-7). In this vulnerable moment precipitating Thomas' question, he disclosed where he was going and that they knew the way. That is, they would know *the way* if they knew *the Truth*, which they made evident they did not deeply know by the relational epistemic process (14:9). As the Truth, Jesus only disclosed the Father to them for relationship together as his family. In these vulnerable moments on the eve of the cross, Jesus intimately responded to their troubled hearts by providing them the basis to be able ongoingly to trust God and him, to count on him in his absence (14:1). Certainly, the disciples were highly concerned about what was going to happen to them as a group and their messianic hopes for Israel (Acts 1:6). What followed helps us understand the quantitative lens used by the disciples limiting their focus and the qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework necessary for clarity of the last things ahead.

The basis to trust him that Jesus provided for them began: first, by disclosing a metaphor of his Father's house (*oikia*) with many rooms (*mone*, a habitation, from *meno*), where Jesus is going to prepare a place for them (which overlaps with *mone* in a subsequent disclosure, Jn 14:23); then Jesus addresses any uncertainty about their future status by asserting definitively that "if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (Jn 14:2-3). The deep relational message, in other words, that his disciples needed to receive in their troubled hearts is: This Jesus in post-ascension is not only a person in the past tense but even more importantly is also actively involved in the present. This was not to inform them about events to come but to continue building their relationship together as family (cf. Rev 21:22).

After disclosing this initial basis to trust him for the last things to come, he implied that this should not be such a mystery and relationally ambiguous to them because they know *the way* to where he's going (14:4). What Thomas and Philip said in response to Jesus (14:5,8) made evident where the disciples were focused: knowledge of the place where Jesus was going and visual verification of the Father. This quantitative lens—which, on the one hand, is somewhat reasonable, while, on the other, overly depended on reason from knowledge and sight, thus obscuring the qualitative—limited their perception of Jesus' person and their interpretation of his significance. The whole of Jesus embodied the Truth to disclose the whole of God only for relationship together. Thus, the Truth vulnerably discloses the whole of God only in a relational context and process, and the Truth of the Word intimately communicated the whole of God only with relational language. That is, what Jesus, the embodied Truth and Word, discloses—in the significance of his person presented, with the quality of his communication, and by the depth of relationship he engaged—must be understood as relational terminology and speech in his relational context and process. And as the Truth, everything Jesus said about the last things to come is only relational language. Eschatology is the relational language of the Truth, who is both the agent and action of eschatology; this is the perceptual-interpretive framework necessary for eschatological clarity. In other words, with Jesus' agency of the last things, eschatology must be perceived, received and responded to by "listeners" (readers) in his relational language intended for his relational context and process.

Jesus' intended purpose for his disclosures of eschatology as *truth* is not about merely cognitive information, and thus mere doctrine. His primary intention with his relational language for eschatology is to communicate only about relationship together to be God's whole and, conjointly, to live and make whole in the remaining days to this relational conclusion of the last things—the relational conclusion of which *the Truth* is guarantor. Thus, his metaphor about the Father's house with many rooms is not about a place per se; and his assertion that they have seen the Father is not about another embodied person. Where he is going is back to the Father in intimate dwelling together as family (cf. Jn 17:5), in which his authentic followers will also participate in intimate dwelling together "to be with me" as family. Furthermore, the Father is not in a non-relational transcendent state who needs to have visual verification of his existence, presence and involvement in order to be trusted. The Father's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement has been active all along, making a strategic shift in the embodied Truth of the Word fully exeging the Father (Jn 1:18) for relationship together, which he

reinforced at his Son's baptism and transfiguration—most notably with the relational imperative to “Listen to my Son.” Therefore, his disciples have not only directly perceived (*horao*) the Father but also have come to know him (*ginosko*, 14:7), if they have indeed experienced (*ginosko*) Jesus in relationship together in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. Because Jesus constitutes them in the relational context and process of the Trinity, his followers know the relational way to where he is going to his Father for complete communion in relationship together as the whole of God's family.

They know the Father and the way to the Father to experience this ultimate relational conclusion, as long as they follow the whole of the Truth by ongoing relational involvement in his relational context and process. If they only follow quantitative parts of the Truth such as his teachings, principles and example, then they will focus on quantitative things like “place” and visual verification and lose understanding of the relational significance of his whole person, and thus lack eschatological clarity. The early disciples' quantitative lens of the Truth was insufficient to grasp eschatology and incompatible to experience the relational significance of the last things.

Eschatology is the dynamic unfolding of discipleship and the ultimate outworking of following the whole of the Truth in the relational progression to the Father for its consummate relational conclusion in God's family. The key to eschatology is the whole of Jesus who continues to constitute the relational progression to the Father by “going back to the Father” in post-ascension (Jn 16:5,10,17,28; 7:23; 14:28)—the functional key for grasping the last things and the relational key to experience its relational significance. These functional and relational keys of post-ascension Jesus are present and operational for his followers through his relational replacement.

In further response to their hearts, Jesus provided his followers with the main basis for their ongoing relational involvement in the trinitarian relational context and process for the last things ahead: the Spirit of truth, notably as eschatological truth, who is the embodied Truth's relational replacement to complete God's family in relational progression to its eschatological relational conclusion. The Spirit of truth further discloses that the whole of Jesus continues beyond ascension to fulfill the Truth for relationship together as God's family (Jn 16:12-15)—to be with him together with his Father, just as he promised (14:3) and as he ongoingly intercedes on behalf of his followers for the last things (17:24). The Spirit of truth is *who* replaces *what* was replaced as the embodied Truth. Conjointly, the Spirit's person fulfills this function as the eschatological truth by also further constituting Jesus' followers in the relational progression of the Truth's post-ascension action in the things to come—most notably in the trinitarian relational process of family love by the Father and the Son making their dwelling (*mone*) with them even before the last things (14:23, as prelude to 14:2). As the relational replacement for the embodied Truth, the Spirit as the eschatological truth “will guide you into all truth” (16:13), that is, also as the functional, relational, experiential and definitive truths (discussed in the previous chapter), conjoined with the Truth's post-ascension action with the Father. Thus, the Spirit of truth is crucial for what his followers together will experience in the last things to come.

Even in the post-resurrection period just prior to Jesus' ascension, his disciples focused on quantitative matters for the time ahead over the qualitative significance of relationship together. They asked him if he was going to restore the kingdom to Israel “at

this time” (*chronos*, Acts 1:6). In response, Jesus essentially reiterated what he had disclosed to them earlier in his Olivet discourse on eschatology: No one knows those quantitative details except the Father, who establishes them by his role and function in the Trinity (Acts 1:7, Mt 24:36). More importantly, Jesus’ response, “It is not for you to know the times,” implies an imperative not to frame eschatology in quantitative time (*chronos*), which is a reductionist tendency to perceive and define the last things in quantitative terms; that is, to define eschatology by when the last things happen, what things will happen, and in what sequence these events will occur. Eschatology certainly includes *chronos* but its significance neither involves *chronos* nor ends with it, thus must not be framed within *chronos*.

Rather Jesus continues to call them with the relational imperative to follow him in the relational progression to embrace the qualitative significance of the last things in cooperative reciprocal relationship with the Spirit as the experiential truth, who will further constitute them in the eschatological truth of the relational progression to the Father and the Son to come. These are the qualitative and relational foci which provide the primary significance of eschatology. The Spirit of truth in conjoint function with the Truth in post-ascension constitute the qualitative and relational significance of eschatology; and they are necessary to be ongoingly involved with for eschatological clarity in the unfolding, completing and concluding of the whole of God’s family in God’s eschatological plan and final thematic action in response to the human condition to be whole. Therefore, after Jesus’ introductory discourse on eschatology, eschatology functionally emerges with the Spirit of truth and involves the relational process of the Spirit’s reciprocating movement (*erchomai*, Jn 16:13) to the Son to come for only this eschatological relational conclusion—emerging not as mere doctrine or event.

When Jesus shifted their focus of eschatology from quantitative information and cognitive knowledge, he called (and calls) his followers to embrace eschatology in *the truth*, not in mere doctrine, and to respond to eschatology as the truth for relationship, not for mere event. *Truth*, as who was embodied, as who replaces, as who continues in post-ascension, is only for relationship together within the context of history climaxing in the eschatological relational conclusion of God’s big picture plan and response to the human relational condition “to be apart” from God’s whole from the beginning of creation. *Truth* and eschatology converge in the whole of God’s thematic action (God’s story) and are irreducibly and inseparably integrated into the relational context and process of the triune God’s story; see the Apocalypse of John’s introduction of this trinitarian disclosure for the last things (Rev 1:1,5b-6).

It is this relational context and process in which Jesus constituted his followers together, his church as family in likeness of the Trinity. His church lives together whole within the Trinity’s story, and together must (*dei*) by its nature see its situations and circumstances in this relational context and must define and determine its function by this relational process. They will be tested in this since Jesus told them of being rejected/persecuted because of belonging to his family and not to the world (Jn 15:18-21, Mt 24:9-14, Rev 2:10), and of having distress in this world (Jn 16:33, Mt 24:21-22). Nevertheless, they must define themselves by who, what and how they are together in his relational context, not defined by those situations and circumstances, and thus must continue by this relational process to determine their function together to live whole and make whole (Mt 24:13-14).

Their wholeness and well-being is the peace Jesus constitutes them in together as the whole of God's family, in which his Spirit will further constitute and deepen them to be and live God's whole and make God's whole for the last things and the Son to return (Jn 14:27; 16:33, cf. Rom 8:15-17,35). It is imperative for the church to work cooperatively with the Spirit as the eschatological truth, without whom the church struggles to fulfill its place, purpose and function beyond itself locally to the whole of God's family in the eschatological big picture. Thus, ecclesiology of the whole is functionally integrated with this relational dynamic of eschatology, just as the Truth in post-ascension constituted the church in Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-12). For his church to be anything less and to practice any substitute is reductionism; and perhaps the greatest test his church faces in these days is the sin of reductionism and its counter-relational work—as Jesus' post-ascension discourse on ecclesiology to be whole suggests.

Indeed, eschatology cannot be reduced to doctrine and event but is significant only as *the truth* for relationship together to be, to live and to make the whole of God's family. We need to discuss further this relationship in the last things ahead.

Eschatology as Relationship

When Jesus formalized the new covenant relationship at his last Passover meal, this highlighted the intimate communion they shared in relationship together. While Jesus said he would not partake of this meal again until they share it together in my Father's kingdom-family, they were to continue to practice this communion (1 Cor 11:24-25). Yet, this ritual was neither a memorial to the past nor merely a symbol of hope for the future. This ecclesial act was (and is) to highlight the present, that is, to highlight their present intimate communion in relationship together and ongoing participation in his post-ascension life—participating not as orphans in an orphanage of a relationship past, but only in the present experiential truth of intimate relationship together as his family, which is engaged in the relational progression to its consummate relational communion. This distinction between the past and the present is crucial for his church's ongoing relational significance. Likewise, to jump from the past to the future opens a critical gap which only the present can fulfill, since the future emerges from the present of his church's functional significance in relationship together.

This was illustrated initially by the disciples' difficulty in maintaining relationship together in the present when Jesus went to the cross. The line between the present and past was blurred with the present fading into the past; as the past became imminent, its connection to the future left a huge gap for them. This happened to them because they had let go of (*aphiemi*) relationship together in the present: "You leave me alone" (Jn 16:32). They left Jesus relationally in the present and "scattered each to one's own," despite their claim to "believe that you came from God" (Jn 16:30)—implying their belief that Jesus was "going back to the Father" (16:28) to fulfill what he said about their relationship together as family. Their actions further demonstrated both the inadequacy of believing the cognitive knowledge of eschatology as mere doctrine, not as *the truth*, and the insufficiency of merely understanding information about eschatology as event, not as relationship. Communion in relationship together is the experiential truth of the present reality, which is rooted in the historical past but never past tense and which is always

growing to the certainty of the future but not reduced to the future. And the certainty of the future is a function of relationship based on the validity (faithfulness) of the post-ascension Truth in the present, who constitutes the future of relationship together as family.

While many thought Jesus' return was imminent, Jesus never disclosed that but made it an imperative not to reduce their focus to *when* (*chronos*). Jesus doesn't want his followers focused on the future, but to live in the present progressing to the future. This is a relational imperative to ongoingly be involved in the relational progression together as family to this relational conclusion and reunification. Their communion together is not a "communion in waiting" but the transformed communion together of God's family vulnerably involved in the qualitatively distinguished relational function both to live whole in the new relational order and to make whole the human condition in the existing relational order. This definitive relational progression will be consummated at the eschatological relational conclusion of God's thematic action. Thus, for church practice to be whole in relationship together, his church cannot be passive and isolationist, nor be self-autonomous and self-determined in the days unfolding, and needs to be functionally compatible and congruent with the relational progression of eschatology as relationship, not event.

This relationship in the last things is a reciprocal relationship. God does not do all the relational work nor are we responsible to make things happen. Eschatology as relationship does not suggest that events will not happen. Certain last things will definitely happen for which the whole of God will account. The details of those things, however, are secondary to the person(s) we are accountable for in relationship together and who needs to define and determine our function in the days unfolding.

In further eschatological discourse on the Mount of Olives (Mt 24:4-25:46, known as the Olivet discourse), Jesus identified a key relational characteristic in the end (*telos*) days: "Because of the increase of lawlessness [*anomia*], the love of most will grow cold" (Mt 24:12). *Anomia* is not merely about the absence of the rule of law. God's law is God's desires and terms for relationship together, not a mere code of behavior. *Agape* love is not about what to do (e.g. sacrifice) but about how to be involved with other persons in relationship together. *Anomia* (even today as postmodern assumptions) and *agape* are incongruent, and thus are incompatible to function in relationship together. That is, when God's desires for relationship together to be whole are not responded to on God's terms, relationships become self-autonomous and self-determined, thus embedded in self-interest (*anomia*), rather than based on involvement with each other in relationships together by family love (*agape*). *Anomia*, commonly masked by the epistemological illusion of individualism, is involved in counter-relational work, which by its nature reduces qualitative involvement with other persons (*agape*) in relationship together—despite the performance of ontological simulations such as doing things with others in shared space, time and activity. In other words, doing relationship on our own terms is essentially in practice a form of *anomia*, in which *agape* involvement in relationship together grows distant and cold. Such relationships at best are sustained only by the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of reductionism.

In contrast to those whose love has grown cold, there are those who continue to dwell under (*hypomeno*) the primacy of relationship together to be whole as God's family—what Jesus saves them *to* (*sozo*, Mt 24:13). In their discipleship "call to be

whole” and conjoint commission “sent to be whole,” they embody the gospel of God’s kingdom-family to live whole (“as a witness,” *martyrion*) and to make whole (“proclaim,” *kerysso*) “all nations” without distinctions and stratified relationships in God’s family (24:14, cf. Jn 17:21-23). This is his church living in relationship together as family to be whole in likeness of the Trinity, who are vulnerably involved in the relational progression with the functional significance of the gospel and what Jesus saves them *to* for the purpose to make whole God’s family in the days to the *telos* (cf. Jn17:18).

Since only the Father knows the schedule of the *telos* (Mt 24:36), Jesus’ eschatological discourse was not about locating his followers’ position in a grand narrative plan. This was only about participating in the whole of God’s life and final thematic action, the heart of which was always relationship—ongoing relationship together progressing to consummate relational conclusion in their ultimate relational communion. Therefore, after disclosing further aspects of the last things, the main functional and relational practice Jesus made imperative for the present progressing to this future was: “keep watch” (Mt 24:42,43; 25:13, Mk 13:34,35,37, cf. Lk 12:37). The significance of “keep watch” (*gregoreuo*, to watch, refrain from sleep) is not easily understood in his discourse since it is set within three parables about alertly waiting for the owner of the house (Mk 13:34-36), also for the Son of man (Mt 24:43-44) and the bridegroom (Mt 25:1-13). Such a focused wait would involve being ready for this person’s future return or suffering the consequences, namely some judgment. Yet Jesus did not want his followers focused on the future waiting for his return (cf. Acts 1:7-8); this was not the intent of his present imperative to “keep watch.”

The functional significance of *gregoreuo* emerged two days after his Olivet discourse when his disciples returned with Jesus to the Mount of Olives at Gethsemane. This narrative illustrates a paradigm for function in the eschatological days at hand. In this most vulnerable moment for Jesus, he did not suggest to Peter, James and John, or request of them, but made intimately necessary for them: “Stay here and keep watch with me” (Mt 26:38). This was not about merely keeping awake to observe what was to happen, which these disciples demonstrated an inadequacy to do even that. The primary issue was not about what his followers do in mere behavior but only about the primacy of relationship together. “Stay here” (*meno*, to remain, dwell), while Jesus went over there to pray, was not a spatial matter. *Meno*, as Jesus made definitive moments earlier in the metaphor of the vine and branches (Jn 15:5-8), was only about the function of relationship together in distinct intimate involvement. Thus, with *meno* Jesus made necessary for them: “*remain* in our relationship and *dwell* in it ongoingly together, and despite our spatial separation *keep your intimate involvement with me* as I go to be with my Father.” *Meno* conjoins with *gregoreuo* for a paradigm providing the functional significance for his followers to “keep watch” as the Son (bridegroom, household owner) in post-ascension is with the Father to bring their family to ultimate relational communion.

Gregoreuo is the present relational imperative of ongoing intimate relational involvement, which neither defines his church’s identity merely in waiting nor determines his church’s function as merely doing good deeds (as the churches in Ephesus, Sardis and Thyatira learned later in Jesus’ post-ascension discourse). This is his church in the present who is relationally involved in reciprocal relationship with the whole of God to be whole in intimate communion as family in progression to their

ultimate relational communion. This ultimate relational communion is eternal life together as God's family (Mt 25:46, Jn 17:2). As Jesus told Nicodemus, this is a new creation in transformed relationship together as kingdom-family (Jn 3:5-7), which is a gift of grace of God's family love (*agape* involvement, Jn 3:16, cf. Jn 1:12-13). Yet, eternal life is not about a place in eternity for the individual (cf. a reductionist reading of Jn 14:2) but about only intimate involvement in relationship with the whole of God to know God and participate in God's life—intimately *knowing* the Trinity in relationship together just as Jesus made definitive of eternal life (Jn 17:3). And intimately knowing the Trinity is not only for the relationship in the future but has already begun in intimate relationship together as family in the present, just as Jesus further constitutes in his formative family prayer (Jn 17:26, cf. 14:23).

Ongoing intimate relational involvement with the Trinity is the foremost dimension of the present relational imperative of *gregoreuo*. There is another overlapping dimension of relational involvement which Jesus disclosed in two other parables in his Olivet discourse (Mt 24:45-51; 25:14-30). These parables focus on being faithful servants essentially as they “keep watch” in these days. It is critical that this is not reduced merely to what we do in practicing stewardship and exercising spiritual gifts and other resources. The primary issue in these parables continues to be about relationship.

To be relationally involved with the whole of God and participate in God's life means necessarily by its nature to be involved in God's thematic action responding to the human condition (cf. Jesus' commission of his followers in congruence with his commission by the Father, Jn 17:18). This extends the relational involvement of God's family to the human condition. In contrast to a church in waiting or merely observing, in provincial operation or reductionist practice, his church is relationally involved in reciprocal relationship with the whole of God to be whole together in triangulated involvement with the surrounding contexts of the world to make whole the human condition. As Jesus constituted in his formative family prayer, his church is both called to be whole in the trinitarian relational context of family and sent to be whole by the trinitarian relational process of family love. This conjoint function of call and commission is based on only ongoing relationship together, notably including the Spirit who further constitutes his church; his church's function is not based on the extent of their service, no matter how faithful and well-respected, which those churches in Ephesus, Sardis and Thyatira in Jesus' post-ascension critique had reduced their practice to. This is the other overlapping dimension of *gregoreuo* in ongoing relational involvement which Jesus makes the present relational imperative for his followers together to be whole, to live whole and to make whole in the days to *telos*.

Jesus had anticipated the ongoing challenge to God's whole from reductionism and its counter-relational work in its final days of *chronos*, and how “the love of most will grow cold,” as he disclosed much earlier in two parables about judgment of those whole or not at the end of the age (Mt 13:24-30, 37-43, 47-50). He added another parable of judgment to close his Olivet discourse (Mt 25:31-46). This parable is directly interrelated to the four other parables in this discourse and thus coheres with the two overlapping dimensions of *gregoreuo*. The judgment is focused on the needy, the poor and the dispossessed and is made about those who responded to them or not. Yet the issue cannot be reduced merely to acts of service or not, which is how this tends to be interpreted or perceived (cf. Jn 12:8). As we discussed about the overlapping relational

involvements of *gregoreuo*, this defines those who are involved in relationship with the whole of God to be whole together as family and conjointly who were involved with other persons in the human condition by family love to make whole for God's family. This is about the relationally righteous (v.37a) who functioned true to their identity as God's family (vv.34a,40), and thus who further embodied the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition "to be apart" from God's whole. These relationally righteous belonging to God's family are the daughters and sons who relationally progressed to their ultimate relational communion to embrace their family inheritance (*kleronomeo*, vv.34b,46b): eternal life together in relational communion as the whole of God's kingdom-family—the new creation now complete in the new Jerusalem, the eternal context pointed to in Rev 21-22, which needed no temple for holy communion together "because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (*naos* a dwelling, 21:22) for direct ongoing intimate communion together.

What emerges about eschatology from the whole of Jesus in sanctified Christology needs to be understood as part of the definitive *whole*. Eschatology is not a doctrinal framework for mere events (however critical) but the relational framework of the trinitarian relational context and process necessary for the consummate progression of relationship together to be whole as God's family—the relational and experiential truth of which are both "now" and "not yet." This necessarily integrates eschatology with the full soteriology—functionally notable in the present with what Jesus saves *to*—and the ecclesiology of the whole by the integral pneumatology in coherence with the whole of God's thematic relational action to the human condition. In this relational framework, eschatology is the vital relational language of the Truth and must by this nature be perceived, received and responded to in its relational context and process. Therefore, as *the truth* and as relationship, eschatology is less about the last things and more about *the first things*. That is, *the first things* involves some chronology, given "the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Mt 25:34), which was signified in God's initial action during creation (Gen 2:18) forming the basis for the whole of God's thematic action in response to the human condition. Yet, more importantly involved in the relational significance of this, *the first things* is the function of: the preeminent priority of the whole of *the truth* for only the primacy of relationship together to be whole—God's whole only on God's terms, nothing less and no substitutes.

Functional Implication

This qualitative relational involvement together to be whole as family in likeness of the Trinity, this is the heart of God's desires and action, who made us in the image of the heart of God. This is only what the Father seeks from us to have intimate communion together in the crowning relational process of worship (Jn 4:23). This is only what the Son in post-ascension ongoingly searches for in all church practice (Rev 2:23b). His primary priority in these days to the end is not about truth as doctrine and maintaining doctrinal purity, nor about serving and faithfully enduring to the end—just as he critiqued those churches in practice in his post-ascension discourse for churches to be whole. In these days present not future, he calls churches to change: to "the things you did at

first”—“your first love” (Rev 2:4-5); because “I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God” (Rev 3:2); so “Here I am. I stand at your door and knock,” wanting to have intimate communion in relationship together (Rev 3:20).

Just as he called these churches for the last things and as the last pre-ascension words he told Peter, he calls us in the present to the only functional and relational significance our practice has to the future: “Follow me” in ongoing intimate relationship together for the relational progression to the Father in eternal life communion as his family. He made this definitive to Peter during the interaction with the rich young man on eternal life and the discipleship involved to it, in which Peter asserted the disciples “have left everything to follow you. What then will there be for us?” (Mt 19:27-29). Jesus’ promise is not a reward for sacrifice but is only about the relational response to be experienced with him in relationship together for the last things, which is partly fulfilled “now the present age” (par. Mk 10:30).

This qualitative distinction of “Follow me” is the only functional implication that emerges from Jesus’ discourse on eschatology—his relational language of the last things, who must be “listened to” and responded to in his relational context and process. And this is what he presently holds us accountable for by the trinitarian relational process of family love, in view of *the truth* that the whole of Jesus in sanctified Christology continues in post-ascension conjointly with his relational replacement who is also present and intimately involved in cooperative relational work with us for the consummate communion of relationship together as family—with the Father’s words still resounding “Listen to my Son!”

Chapter 11

The Whole in Theology and Practice

The revelation of God's story is the whole of God's thematic action in relational response to the human condition "to be apart" from God's whole. To complete God's story and fulfill God's thematic action, the whole of God and God's whole were embodied by the whole of Jesus, who is the way, the Truth and the life—the relational way of the whole of the Truth for the whole of life in intimate communion with the Father only in relationship together as the whole of God's family (Jn 14:6).

Christology is needed to have the clarity of God's self-revelation to fully distinguish God's story and wholly grasp God's action. Yet any and all Christian doctrine must be functional dynamically to be of qualitative significance. If doctrine properly functions dynamically in qualitative significance, it functions *in* the trinitarian relational context and *with* the trinitarian relational process. This is particularly vital for a full soteriology, which necessarily emerges only from a complete Christology. Thus, not any Christology will provide the clarity necessary for the whole of God and God's whole to be of significance for us qualitatively, functionally and relationally.

Moreover, any theology (or theory) must be conjoined with qualitative practice to have both epistemological significance *of* the whole of God's relational ontology as well as relational significance *to* the Trinity's presence and involvement. This strongly suggests that theological propositions and doctrines which do not transform how we see God, how we are involved with God and experience God become reductionist substitutes for the Truth and his relational way necessary for knowing the whole of God. Anything less of God's whole is always a form of reductionism, which is always consequential in counter-relational work.

The whole embodied by Jesus' whole person is what signifies sanctified Christology and what constitutes soteriology fully and ecclesiology wholly. Therefore, this *whole* must (*dei*) by nature constitute all Christian theology and practice in order to have coherence with God's story and to be compatible with God's thematic action. Wholeness in both our theology and practice is the conjoint relational and functional significance necessary to be congruent with God's whole on God's terms. This means that our theology and practice are not only identified as relational, nor merely talked about as relational, but are actually lived relationally in ongoing functional relationship with God.

The incarnation of the Word vulnerably disclosed God's whole and made definitive God's terms as irreducible and nonnegotiable. Yet, wholeness in Christian theology and practice easily become inconvenient (even threatening) in the academy and in churches. It is less demanding not to put the pieces of God's self-revelation into the whole (cf. the lack of *syniemi* by the disciples, Mk 8:17-19), and more convenient to be selective of only parts of the whole (cf. Peter's selection of part of Jesus, Mt 16:22, Jn 13:8), or essentially to ignore or reduce the whole whether in theology or practice (cf. Martha not pursuing what is primary, Lk 10:41-42). To the extent that this exists certainly indicates among Jesus' followers the further operation of a quantitative perceptual-

interpretive framework embedded in reductionism. Moreover, the incarnation of the whole of the Word also suggests “an evangelical paradox.” That is, even though evangelicals are not a monolithic group, it is paradoxical: As people of the Book, on the one hand, to uphold the full incarnation of the Word while, on the other, tending to have a theology and practice essentially based on and according to a disembodied Word lacking his whole person—even while immersed in the text (cf. Eze 33:31-32).

Jesus gives us no latitude to who, what and how he was. With the incarnation, the sanctified identity of the whole of Jesus in vulnerable self-disclosure is not the product of human construction and shaping—though it always had human context. Nor can the whole of God and God’s whole that he disclosed be subject to deconstruction or reconstruction and still have the functional integrity and relational significance of *the whole*.

There are some remaining aspects of the whole of Jesus which are necessary to mention to extend our discussion beyond this study, and most important to deepen our experience of knowing Jesus, the whole of God. This still involves grasping further and experiencing deeper the significance of Jesus embodying: “For them I sanctify myself in order that they also may be [*eimi*] embodied whole sanctified in *the truth*” (Jn 17:19).

Knowing the Whole

In his startling claim to his disciples that they know the way to where he was going, and that they know the Father and have seen him (Jn 14:4,7), Jesus made evident the critical distinction between an incomplete process of knowing and the complete epistemic process. This distinction can be simply stated as between knowledge (information) and knowing. In terms of the former, Thomas was correct in his epistemological logic to reply: “Lord, we have no knowledge, except some ambiguous information, of where you are going so how can we have knowledge of the way?” (14:5). Yet, Jesus was also correct in his epistemological premise for knowing him, and thus knowing the Father and the way (14:7). In other words, based on his vulnerable disclosure to them and ongoing intimate involvement with them, Jesus correctly claimed “You know the relational process for relationship together with the Father, to whom I’m returning to further be involved with.” Jesus makes clear that knowing is the relational outcome from the relational epistemic process of relationship together. Despite the disciples’ difficulty with being involved in this qualitative relational process with Jesus, they have been experientially exposed to it by him; and they were discovering the primacy of knowing him in relationship together over mere knowledge about him and its inadequacy to know the whole of God and God’s whole.

The issue of God’s self-disclosure in the relational epistemic process emerged earlier when the disciples asked Jesus why he spoke to the people in parables (Mt 13:10ff). Jesus made evident that the issue was not about comprehending knowledge by reason but about knowing from the communication disclosed in relationship together. His disclosures were not mere quantitative information observable (“seeing”) or discernable (“hearing”) by even the most astute mind. His disclosures involved relational language communicating God’s “secrets” which were not accessible to a general epistemic process. Thus, for example, whatever may be valid in natural theology can never define God’s

whole but, at best, can only point to it. Jesus' communication process was a qualitative experience of the whole person signified by the involvement of the heart in relationship together. This was the relational experience the disciples were exposed to with Jesus, and the relational epistemic process they were engaged in with him, albeit inconsistently since they often depended on their quantitative lens for "seeing" and "hearing" (13:11-17,34-35). Nevertheless, the disciples engaged Jesus in reciprocal relationship sufficiently to have him constitute them in his relational context and process necessary for relationship together to be whole in likeness of the Trinity.

The issue of knowing the whole of God and God's whole in self-disclosure was made further definitive in what is essentially the relational paradigm necessary for this relational epistemic process. The effort to learn about God is basically an either-or theological task based on either human rationality or God's revelation, or some combination of the two which tends to depend on the former in effect to shape the latter. When Jesus leaped for joy praising the Father "because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children" (Lk 10:21), he essentially delineated *the learning paradigm* for knowing him and his disclosures of the whole of God and God's whole.

"Little children" and "the wise and learned" stand not only in contrast but are in conflict—with the latter constraining, preventing or excluding the former, while the former frees and transforms the latter. "Little children (*nepios*) is a metaphor for the function of the whole person: an unassuming person merely being whom God created—with a heart open and involved, a mind free and adaptable to the improbable and uncommon; this "child-person" uses the mind simply in the likeness of the triune God, thus is compatible with the holy God's qualitative distinction from what prevails as *the common's function*; more importantly, this child-person's mind does not function apart from the heart in order to be vulnerably present with one's whole person and intimately involved in God's relational context and process for the relational epistemic process necessary to know the whole of God and God's whole.

While the mind of a child is considered immature and undeveloped by *common* standards (notably of "the wise and learned"), this metaphor points to the necessity of a perceptual-interpretive framework which is unrestricted by predispositions and biases. That is, even though we all have predispositions and biases, this child-person's lens is not controlled by them and thus can see clearly. Generally, as our mind develops, we also put on different lenses which tend to become increasingly restricting, and thus reductionist as demonstrated by decreasing imagination, creativity and spontaneity. This describes the contrasting and conflicting function of "the wise and learned": who depend on their rationality (*sophos* and *synetos*) without epistemic humility signifying the grace of God's self-disclosure, and thus, as those dominated by their mind, who fail to function as whole persons necessary by nature to engage the relational epistemic process—which is the qualitative involvement to vulnerably receive God's self-disclosures and relationally know the whole of God in relationship together in order to be God's whole as experiential truth, not as mere theological knowledge and doctrine.

When Jesus correctly claimed "You know the relational process to the relationship together with the Father with whom I'll be further involved," "little children" could also correctly claim "Yes, indeed!"; and they would shout in his dwelling also "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Mt 21:15) because they *know* they are not orphans and

relationally belong to God's family. Just as "the wise and learned" strongly objected to what these children were proclaiming, they could raise a polemic to correctly claim similar to Thomas: "How can we grow in practice of this qualitative relational process if we don't experience it with you or ongoingly stay involved with you in it?"

The embodied Truth, the Spirit of truth and the Truth in post-ascension are only disclosed and involved for relationship together to be God's whole. As Jesus made definitive, if we know *the truth* by the relational epistemic process of discipleship in intimate relationship together, the Truth will redeem us from the reductionist assumptions of the wise and learned and constitute us as the children of God's whole in family together (Jn 8:31-35). There is no other way to know the whole of God and to the experiential truth of God's whole. This applies to both church and academy.

Teaching the Whole

Perhaps the most important non-issue issue in Christology is separating Jesus' teachings from his whole person, leaving only disembodied teachings. By its nature, the incarnation cannot be reduced to redefine Jesus merely by what he taught or only by what he did. The incarnation embodied the whole of Jesus' person, as the whole of God, for the relationships together necessary to be God's whole as family. Contrary to prevailing views of discipleship, both in the ancient Mediterranean world and the modern world, Jesus did not merely embody teachings to follow, examples to emulate, even principles to embody. The whole of Jesus, signified in complete Christology and full soteriology, vulnerably embodied only the whole of God and God's relational response for relationship together, the embodiment of which was qualitatively distinguished in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. Anything less and any substitutes of the whole of Jesus disembodies him, his purpose and his function, and thus is a reduction of the whole he embodied—God's whole on God's terms.

The whole Jesus embodied was clearly evident both in *what* he taught and *how* he taught. Jesus' approach to teaching *the whole* was not about revealing (*apokalypto*) key knowledge and critical information because the content of *the whole* was about the whole person in relationship. What this involved for Jesus is vital for us to grasp both to more deeply experience his embodied whole and to further extend God's whole to others within the church and in the world. Jesus' pedagogical approach to teaching and learning, integrated into the relational progression of discipleship, not only needs to inform theological education in the academy and Christian education in the church but also to reform them.

The Three "ARE"s of Jesus' Pedagogy:

When Jesus told the Father that he disclosed (*phaneroo*) him to the disciples (Jn 17:6), *phaneroo* refers to those to whom the revelation is made whereas *apokalypto* refers only to the object revealed. *Phaneroo* signifies the necessary context and process of his disclosure of the whole of God and God's whole, whose content would not be sufficient

to grasp merely as *apokalypto*. How did Jesus constitute this context and process to fully disclose *the whole*?

John's Gospel provides the initial overview of Jesus' pedagogy, which is the functional framework for the qualitative significance of his disclosures. In the narrative of a wedding at Cana attended by Jesus and his disciples, he used this situation to teach his disciples about himself (Jn 2:1-11). This initially evidenced the three dynamic dimensions basic to his approach to pedagogy.

As a guest, Jesus participated in the sociocultural context of the wedding (an event lasting days). In response to his mother's request, Jesus appeared reluctant yet involved himself even further than as guest. In what seems like an uneventful account of Jesus' first miracle unrelated to his function and purpose, John's Gospel gives us the bigger picture made evident in his introduction (Jn 1:14). As the only Gospel to record this interaction, the evangelist uses it to establish a pattern for Jesus' ministry. The miracle was ostensibly about the wine but its significance was to teach his disciples.

When Jesus responded to his mother and got further involved, he made the whole of his person *accessible* to his disciples. This involved more than the quantitative notions of accessible language or words in teaching, or of making accessible one's resources. This deeply involved making directly accessible the whole of his person and the qualitative significance of who, what and how he was. In this social context Jesus did not merely reveal (*apokalypto*) his resources but most importantly disclosed (*phaneroo*) his functional glory to his disciples (2:11, cf. 2 Cor 4:6). The first aspect of his glory that Jesus made accessible to them was God's being, the heart of God. It was Jesus' heart, signifying his whole person, whom he made accessible to them. The whole person, signified by the function of the heart, constitutes the significance of *accessible* in Jesus' pedagogy. Anything less and any substitutes are essentially not adequate to be accessible to teach the whole. It is incongruent to be helping others understand wholeness while one is not functioning to be whole in the process. Therefore, *Accessible (A)* is the first dynamic dimension in Jesus' pedagogy necessary by its nature to be whole in order to teach the whole.

Phaneroo signifies the necessary context and process for making his whole person accessible. The miracle, self-disclosure, being accessible, all are not ends in themselves but in Jesus' purpose and function are always and only for relationship. More specifically then, *phaneroo* signifies the necessary *relational* context and process involved in his teaching. When Jesus disclosed his glory, he did not end with making accessible God's being, God's heart. The second aspect of his glory involved God's nature, God's intimate relational nature, witnessed initially between the trinitarian persons during his baptism. Jesus disclosed his whole person to his disciples for relationship together, thus disclosing the intimate relational nature of God. His functional glory, in his heart and relational nature, made relational connection with their human ontology as whole persons created in the image of the heart of God for relationships together in likeness of the relational nature of the Trinity. This also provides further understanding of the relational context and process of God's thematic relational response to the human condition and what is involved in that connection.

In this apparent unrelated social context, Jesus involved his whole person with his disciples in the most significant human function: the primacy of relationships. As he made his whole person accessible in this relational context and process, his disciples

responded back to his glory by relationally “putting their trust in him” (2:11). Their response was not merely to a miracle, or placing their belief in his teaching, example or resources. The context of his teaching was *relational* in the process of making accessible his person to their person, thus deeply connecting with the heart of their person and evoking a compatible relational response to be whole in relationship together. If his teaching content were only cognitive, this qualitative relational connection would not have been made. Anything less and any substitute from Jesus would not have constituted the relational context and process necessary to engage his whole person for relationship together to be whole, thus not fulfilling God’s thematic action in response to the human relational condition. Therefore, *Relational (R)* is the second dynamic dimension in Jesus’ pedagogy necessary by its nature to live whole in relationships in order to teach the whole, God’s whole.

When Jesus turned water into wine in this secondary social situation, he did not diminish the significance of his miracle or his glory. His disclosure was made not merely to impart knowledge and information about him for the disciples to assimilate. His disclosure was made in this experiential situation (albeit secondary) for his disciples to experience him living whole in life context, not in a vacuum. For Jesus, for example, merely giving/listening to a lecture/sermon does not constitute teaching—nor does listening to a sermon constitute learning. That is to say, his teaching was *experiential* for their whole person (signified by heart function) to experience in relationship. For this experience to take place in relationship, the whole person must be vulnerably involved. When Jesus made his heart accessible to be relational with his disciples, he also disclosed the third aspect of his glory involving God’s presence, God’s vulnerable presence. In the strategic shift of God’s thematic action, the whole of Jesus embodied God’s vulnerable presence for intimate involvement in relationship together, thus disclosing God’s glory for his followers to experience and relationally respond back to “put their trust in him.”

Human experience is variable and relative. For experience to be whole, however, it needs to involve whole persons accessible to each other in relationship by vulnerable involvement together. This was Jesus’ purpose in his teaching and his pedagogical approach. This was who, what, and how Jesus was ongoingly in his glory: *who*, as his whole person signified by the qualitative function of his heart; *what*, only by his intimate relational nature; and thus *how*, with vulnerable involvement only for relationship together to be God’s whole. Yet, the reality of relationally knowing (not knowledge about) the whole of God and relationally participating in God’s whole only emerges as experiential truth. Jesus’ teaching is not complete, nor is our learning complete, unless it is *experiential*. Therefore, to complete the three-dimensional approach, *Experiential (E)* is the third dynamic dimension in Jesus’ pedagogy necessary by its nature to integrate the other two dimensions of *Accessible* and *Relational* for the qualitative depth of the whole in order to teach the experiential truth of the whole.

The three *AREs* of Jesus’ pedagogy form a definitive three-dimensional paradigm to be whole and to live whole in order to teach the experiential truth of the whole. That is, this three-dimensional paradigm is to teach the whole as God’s whole on God’s terms, just as Jesus vulnerably embodied, relationally disclosed and intimately involved his whole person with other persons. From this overview, Jesus ongoingly demonstrated his three-dimensional pedagogical approach. This was evidenced notably in three examples which went against the norm in religious, cultural and social practice.

When Jesus was approached unceremoniously by a prostitute, he still made his person accessible to her person even in the context of her perceived overtures (Lk 7:36-50). In the process he vulnerably involved his whole person with hers for relationship in intimate love. Jesus used these intimate moments to teach her the experiential truth of God's grace, to affirm to her the experiential reality of her forgiveness, and to have her experience being made whole (*sozo*), God's whole. In another situation, Jesus took the initiative to make his whole person accessible to a Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-42). He increasingly involved his person vulnerably with hers for relationship with the whole of God. By this experiential relational process, he made accessible to her God's heart and taught her what God desires most: the whole person in intimate communion together. This provided her both the relational basis to be made whole in God's family and the experiential truth that God's whole is for all nations and persons without distinctions. The third example overlaps two situations. The first involved Jesus' calling of Levi (Mt 9:9-13) and the second was his call to Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10). Jesus initiated making his person accessible to both tax collectors for relationship. Moreover he involved his person vulnerably with them by participating in table fellowship together (a gathering of great significance in their time). In this experiential process, Jesus taught them what it means to be made whole and constituted them in the experiential truth that they have been redemptively reconciled to belong to the whole of God's family.

Jesus' pedagogy contrasted with the prevailing teaching practices in the ancient Mediterranean world and conflicts with any reductionist teaching approaches, notably in the modern Western world with its focus on cognitive knowledge and information through the quantitative lens from reductionism. Jesus' teaching of God's whole involves redemptive change and transformation to the *new*—not only for the whole person to experience as an individual but most importantly to experience in relationship together to be the whole of God's family. God's whole on God's terms is this new creation family relationally progressing to its ultimate relational communion together, which Jesus made imperative to be taught after he discussed a series of parables about the kingdom of God and the last things (Mt 13:52).

John's Gospel gives us this big picture in which Jesus ongoingly functioned yet remained vulnerably involved for intimate relationship together. The whole of Jesus' teaching only had significance in this definitive relational progression for this relational conclusion. And this is how any teaching of the whole of God's family needs to be functionally contextualized—and all the "trees" of life put into the "forest" of God's thematic action for the eschatological big picture and the ultimate relational communion together. For Jesus the only alternative is nothing less and no substitutes for the whole.

Moreover, teaching *the whole* must also involve the three *AREs* of Jesus' pedagogy to be compatible with the trinitarian relational context of family and to be congruent with the trinitarian relational process of family love. Anything less and any substitutes will be insufficient to be whole and to live whole in order to teach God's whole. This is what Jesus in post-ascension holds his church and the academy accountable for—God's whole on God's terms.

Building the Whole

In the midst of a globalizing world, other relatively recent issues of multiculturalism, pluralism and tolerance of human differences have become an increasing concern, effort and disappointment, even frustration, in the surrounding contexts of the world. This can also be said of churches, who have the most significant purpose and function to build the whole. Yet, in this world climate, churches and the academy must not get confused or misled about building God's whole on God's terms.

Complete Christology and thus full soteriology are the building ground for all Christian life and practice (cf. Mt 7:24-27). At the same time, for building God's whole Christology and soteriology as doctrine must fade into secondary matter and emerge as the dynamic functional framework for all theology and practice to be whole rather than reduced (or fragmented). The reduction/fragmentation of theology (e.g. into multiple non-integrated disciplines and sub-disciplines lacking interaction between them, even as systematic theologies lack coherence) and of practice (e.g. by redefining the ontology of the person and displacing the priority of relationships, namely to serve individualism and to do relationships on our terms), these reductions always involve a subtle shift into reductionist alternatives and substitutes, which emerge operating as ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of God's whole.

The genius of Satan has been to emulate theology and practice without the whole. He accomplishes this by promoting their outward quantitative forms (*metaschematizo*, cf. 2 Cor 11:13-15) to have the appearance of their qualitative significance in the whole. In other words, he masks the absence of wholeness in theology and practice by ontological simulation and epistemological illusion, thus reducing not only each within itself but separating them from each other. Does this describe the existing relationship between theology and practical theology which is causing estrangement between churches and the Christian academy?

Historically, God's people, the church and the academy have unknowingly struggled in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of God's whole, and at times knowingly struggled with them. The whole of God, by nature, purpose and function, is always opposed to them—even if there are some secondary benefits (cf. Jesus' post-ascension discourse on ecclesiology)—since reductionism is always positioned against any wholeness, namely God's whole. To help locate where we are today in this ongoing issue, we need to revisit the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9).

I suggest that the Tower of Babel is the ultimate metaphor for ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of wholeness, and the misguided effort to construct human unity basically from "bottom-up causation," that is, by human construction. The situation may seem somewhat perplexing since the people's intention was to build an identity of unity, that is, "make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the earth" (v.4). The term "scatter" (*napas*) overlaps with a variant use of *napas* meaning to separate. Their apparent intention was to be united rather than fragmented. It would appear that God also would not want them to be separated, that is, "to be apart" from the whole (Gen 2:18). But the Lord opposed their effort to construct human unity, confused their unified language (hence the name Babel), thus forcing them to scatter over the earth and to develop different languages. Why did God take this action given the people's intention and God's desires for creation to be whole?

This is an ultimate situation in human history to which the issue of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of the whole applies. Despite their intention not to be scattered, they already existed in the human relational condition “to be apart” from God’s whole. Whether they ignored their condition or denied it, their epistemological illusion pointed to their ontological simulation. Conjointly, in their bias they concluded that they could construct this whole/unity from the bottom up on their terms (hence a tower). God’s action was not to keep them in the relational condition “to be apart” but to deconstruct their ontological simulation and epistemological illusion in order to free them for the reality of their human condition to be acknowledged and for the truth of human ontology not to be reduced (v.6)—which otherwise would preclude the need for the grace of God, God’s thematic relational response to the human condition. God’s redemptive action in this situation opened the way for them to turn to God for “top-down causation” necessary to indeed make whole the human relational condition (cf. God making “your name,” Gen 12:2b)—with no illusion from *less* and no simulation from substitutes.

From this ultimate situation in human history, we fast-forward to another situation overlapping in this issue. A more profound moment in history than the Tower of Babel likely happened in Jerusalem during Jesus’ time. It can be suggested that the temple was more about the Israelites’ desires (notably David’s, 1 Ch 28:2, Ps 132:2-5) than God’s (similar to their wanting a monarchy for identity as nation-state, 1 Sam 8:19-20). His disciples’ admiration for the aesthetics of the temple points to how the temple in Jerusalem had become a human construction (Lk 21:5), simulating the whole of God’s people (Mk 11:17), which Jesus not only redeemed a day earlier but now predicted its destruction (Lk 21:6). The issue of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of God’s whole was lamented two days earlier by Jesus when he grieved over Jerusalem (Lk 19:41-44). In saying “If you had only known what would bring you peace,” Jesus exposed their human construction of wholeness (*shalom*) and pointed to the deconstruction of their ontological simulation and epistemological illusion.

This clearly demonstrates how God’s people can get confused or misled about building God’s whole on God’s terms. There exist today many ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of God’s whole which need to be deconstructed. Jesus did this as well for human persons in various situations (discussed throughout this study) in order to free them and open the way for persons to be made whole; and to be made whole conjointly involved the transformed relationships together (equalized and intimate) necessary to be whole as God’s family. And to live whole in transformed relationships together directly involves the life and practice of his church family in the new relational order—thus his accountability and deconstruction in his post-ascension discourse on ecclesiology to be whole.

On the one hand, building God’s whole on God’s terms is not complicated, though not to suggest that it is easy and without difficulty. If we are not building transformed relationships together in the new relational order, let’s not have any illusions that we are building God’s whole. Conjointly, if whole persons are not the ones who build these relationships together, we need to recognize our efforts as only our simulation of God’s whole on our terms.

On the other hand, building God’s whole on God’s terms is always compounded, confusing and a burden in the presence of the sin of reductionism. Moreover, we will

always lack coherence if we are pursuing an alternative or substitute for wholeness in our theology and practice.

Celebrating the Whole

God's whole on God's terms always involves making choices. Choosing what we will pay attention to and what we will ignore. Choosing what is a greater priority, what is important, what is secondary. Choosing what will define our person and what we will not let define us. Choosing how we will define others and how we will not define others. Choosing how we will be involved in relationships and how we will not do relationships. Choosing the uncommon (holy) over the common. Choosing *zoe* over *bios*, the qualitative over the quantitative. Choosing to live more by the opportunities of *kairos* than by the constraints of *chronos*. That is to say, choosing to be whole, to live whole and to make whole. Yet, these choices are not about human agency but about involvement in reciprocal relationship together in response to God's grace, the basis and ongoing base for relationship together to be whole.

Making these choices signifies celebrating the whole. With each choice, we celebrate God's whole and being whole in communion together. Making the choice may be difficult but what also emerges in making it is celebrating the whole of God as family together. This is the family responsibility which we humbly submit to and thankfully account for in the relational process of family love because we are "not left as orphans." Thus, we celebrate our redemption to be free to make these choices. We celebrate our transformation to make these choices in family love. We celebrate our reconciliation to make these choices for relationship together in God's family. In other words, by making these choices we celebrate being made whole to be whole in order to live whole and to make whole, God's whole on God's terms.

Making these choices conjoined with celebrating God's whole was ongoing in Jesus' sanctified life and practice. Two notable examples help us understand the importance of their convergence and the need for their conjoint function to enjoy the breadth of being whole and to experience the depth of living whole.

The first situation involved a tension in discipleship over the spiritual practice of fasting (Lk 5:33-39). The issue was that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fasted while Jesus' disciples ate and drank. When Jesus was challenged about this, he responded by presenting one of those choices for the whole: either engaging in spiritual tradition and faith practices *before* God (v.34), or enjoying intimate communion together (implied in table fellowship) *with* the whole of God. Jesus didn't dismiss spiritual tradition and faith practices as a means for relationship *with* God, but he dismissed them if they were merely ends for self-determination and justification *before* God (cf. Mt 6:16-18). Moreover, Jesus wasn't installing a new form of practice in place of tradition and older practices, which is often how this text is rendered.

The choice Jesus presented did indeed involve "new wine" and "new wineskins," that is, as the new creation family of God in transformed relationship together necessary to be whole in the new relational order in likeness of the Trinity. This is God's whole on God's terms, which is the primacy of this relationship together Jesus chose with his disciples as more important than any other spiritual practice. By making this choice to be

whole in relationship together, they celebrated God's whole and enjoyed the breadth of being whole—which for his disciples, at that time, was only an initial taste of new wine.

The second notable example happened when Mary anointed Jesus just before the week of equalization and passion (Jn 12:1-8). Mary's anointing (overlapping with the prostitute's as discussed previously) met with legitimate objection to redirect this resource to serve the poor (par. Mt 26:8-9). Jesus put this into perspective for his disciples, not merely in terms of his death and burial but more importantly in making the choice of God's whole. Serving the poor is important and necessary but not more important than involvement in relationship together, notably intimate communion of the whole person in full vulnerable involvement in relationship together. This was Mary's action and the choice Jesus made with her to live whole in relationship together. And we need to grasp the significance that this choice came at the expense of ministry. Moreover, ministries, such as ministry to the poor, often become substitutes for involvement in direct relationship together with God.

The choice to live vulnerably in relationship together to be whole is what the Father seeks (cf. Jn 4:23) and the Son searches for (cf. Rev 2:23b) and pursues in post-ascension (cf. Rev 3:20). The choice of the primacy of relationship together and building intimate communion together as family is the choice of God's whole on God's terms. Making this choice, as Mary beautifully made with Jesus, is the experiential reality of having *good news*, in which Mary's significance has yet to be established "wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world" as Jesus foretold (par. Mt 26:13). By making this choice on God's terms to live whole in vulnerable relationship and to build intimate communion together as family, even at the expense of ministry, they celebrated God's whole—which is indeed the experiential truth and functional significance of the gospel. Thus, in this choice and the celebration signified with it, they experienced even greater depth of living whole.

These two examples make evident the importance of making these choices and celebrating God's whole in conjoint function in order both to enjoy the breadth of being whole and to experience the depth of living whole. Making the choice and celebrating God's whole converge most definitively for his church in relationship together when they function in Eucharistic worship. This is the unique opportunity of God's new creation family to build intimate communion together. Yet, this unique opportunity is not a mere spiritual tradition and practice of faith merely engaged *before* God. Thus, *what* we participate in and *how* we participate are vital; that means even the logistics are important to help us build the whole. This communion is a qualitative function only of relationship, intimate relationship together *with* the whole of God, thus relationship not embedded in the past or merely anticipating the future but relationship vulnerably functioning in the present. In Eucharistic worship, when his church functions in vulnerable relationship to build intimate communion together, his church family experiences the height of relational involvement with the whole of God.

Together with the presence and reciprocal relational work of the Spirit (the Son's relational replacement), Jesus' transformed followers are functionally reconciled together to be the new creation whole of God's family in likeness of the Trinity, ongoingly in the trinitarian relational process of family love. At this unique table fellowship *with* the whole of God, his church can celebrate God's whole only as church family together, not as relational and emotional orphans functioning as orphanage. Without this relational

celebration of God's whole, our Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, pneumatology and eschatological hope become merely static doctrine essentially disembodied with nothing relationally functional to practice and experience both with God and with each other together.

The whole in theology and practice has no alternative, thus is irreducible and nonnegotiable. God's story and the incarnation of the whole of the Word have been set in human history. While history is always subjected to revisionists, salvation history is unalterable. Jesus' whole person vulnerably embodied and intimately disclosed the whole of God and God's whole as the experiential truth only for relationship together. Once embodied, the whole cannot be disembodied and still have the whole. This is the primary christological problem facing church and academy, which the whole of Jesus makes unavoidable for us to respond with nothing less and no substitutes in order to be whole.

Except for the mystery of the excruciating pain on the cross when the Son was separated from the Father to "fragment" the whole of God, Jesus embodied *the life* of the whole of God; yet, even in that inexplicable state on the cross he embodied *the Truth* to vulnerably complete *the way* to relationship together to be God's whole. This definitive moment in human history is the sole alternative involving "reduction" of the whole of God, which was necessary for the further embodiment of God's whole as family together, and is ongoingly needed to exclude any disembodiment of God's whole in our theology and practice as church family. Wholeness in theology and practice involves the choices to embody the whole of God's family. Each choice for wholeness in our theology and practice is a celebration of God's whole on God's terms, of which we need more in church and academy to enjoy the breadth of being whole and to experience the depth of living whole.

In celebration of the incarnation of the whole of God and God's whole, my wife and I practice a tradition of concluding Advent by making a birthday gift for Jesus' person. This last Advent, 2007, we presented him with our gift of this song: "The Whole of God Embodied." For wholeness in theology and practice, we share this song with you (words and music on the following pages) in celebration of God's whole. May you make with us the choices necessary for wholeness in our theology and practice both in churches and the academy in order to further celebrate together God's whole on God's terms. Indeed, nothing less and no substitutes.

This is the whole of Jesus in sanctified life and practice, who calls his followers to be whole with him and sends us to be whole in the human relational condition in fulfillment of his formative family prayer.

("The Whole of God Embodied" on the next page)

The Whole of God Embodied

T. Dave Matsuo
Kary A. Kambara

(words in parentheses optional)

Transcendent God, holy God
vuln'rably present
is who you are (who you are)

O, Righteous God, faithful God
Int'mately involved (with us)
is what you are (O, what you are)

Revealed by grace, with your love
here for relationship (with us)
is how your are (yes, how you are)

O-- Praise be to God, embodied God
only for relationship (with us)
the whole of God (whole of God)

Thanks be to God, embodied God
relationship together
with the whole of God (embodied God)

Reflectively

Hmm-- who you are, yes--
relationship together
with the whole of God
Hmm-- what you are, yes--
relationship together
with the whole of God
Hmm-- how you are, yes--
relationship together
with the whole of God

O-- Praise be to God, embodied God
vulnerably present
the whole of God, whole of God

Thanks be to God, embodied God
intimately involved
the whole of God

(Repeat song)

(Descending slowly)

The whole of God
the whole— of— God

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(The music is on the next page)

The Whole of God Embodied

T. Dave Matsuo
Kary A. Kambara

Freely ♩ = 96

1 G C Am C G/B 3 F

Trans-cend-ent God, ho - ly God, vuln-'rab - ly pres-ent

4 G C G C

is who you are (who you are).

7 G C Am C

O right - eous God, faith - ful God, -

10 G/B F G C

inf' - mate-ly in - volved _____ (with us) _____ is what you are O,

Detailed description: This is a musical score for a song. It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Freely' with a quarter note equal to 96 beats per minute. The first system (measures 1-3) has chords G, C, Am, C, G/B, and F. The lyrics are 'Trans-cend-ent God, ho - ly God, vuln-'rab - ly pres-ent'. The second system (measures 4-6) has chords G, C, G, and C. The lyrics are 'is who you are (who you are)'. The third system (measures 7-9) has chords G, C, Am, and C. The lyrics are 'O right - eous God, faith - ful God, -'. The fourth system (measures 10-12) has chords G/B, F, G, and C. The lyrics are 'inf' - mate-ly in - volved _____ (with us) _____ is what you are O,'.

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The Whole of God Embodied

2
13

G C G C

what you are). Re-vealed by grace

16

A^m C G/B F G

with your love, here for re - la - tion - ship (with us)

19

C G C

is how you are (yes, how you are). O! _____

22

F G C

Praise be to - God em - bod - ied God

25

G/B F G C

on - ly for re - la - tion - ship (with us) the whole of God

The Whole of God Embodied

3

28 G C F

(whole of God) Thanks be to God

31 G C G/B F

em-bod-ied God, re la-tion-ship to- geth-er

34 G Dm C Dm

with the whole of God (em-bod-ied

37 C Reflective C F G F

God). Hmm - who you -

41 G G/B F

are, (yes) re- la-tion-ship to- geth-er with the

The Whole of God Embodied

4

44 Dm C C F G F G

whole of God Hmm - - - what you are, - - -

48 G/B F Dm C

(Yes) Re - la - tion - ship to - geth - er with the whole of God

51 C F G F G

Hmm how you - - - are, (Yes) Re -

55 G/B F G C

la - tion - ship to - geth - er with the whole of God O!

58 F G C

Praise be to - God em - bod - ied God - - -

61 G/B 3 F G C G

- - vul-n'rab-ly pres - ent the whole of God, whole of

64 C F G C

God Thanks be to - God em-bod-ied God -

68 G/B F G C

int' - mate - ly in - volved the whole of God.

The Whole of God Embodied

6

D.C. al Fine

71 C F

$\bullet = 88$ Slower

G F

$\bullet = 72$
Dm G

The whole of God, the whole

75 C

of God

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