

# Hermeneutic of Worship Language

Understanding *Communion* with the Whole of God

Kary A. Kambara

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www.4X12.org  
karykambara@4X12.org



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## Chapter 1 Introduction: Whose Language?

“I praise you Father...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”

Luke 10:21, NIV<sup>1</sup>

For nearly two thousand years Christians have gathered to worship God, in which time much worship language has flowed. What is this worship language? Language is the medium—taking on a wide variety of forms—of communication for relational connection, though this connection is often not the relational outcome. We all experience breakdowns in our communication, indicating that language regularly does not adequately serve its relational function. Married couples, for example, often need counseling to help them communicate in order to save the relationship from breakdown. This should alert us to the very real possibility that our worship language in relationship with God also does not serve meaningful communication—that is, to make relational connection in significance to God. In all that our language presents to the triune God as worship, *who* and *what* does God hear from us? In our worship expressions, what constitutes acceptable worship language to God? Even more basic, does God accept any worship?

Scripture tells us, no, God does not accept just any worship, that not everything we present to him pleases him. More than a possibility, it is likely that our language actually impedes relational connection. Jesus pointedly addressed this issue about worship language when he rebuked some Pharisees and scribes saying, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain, their teachings are but rules taught by men” (Mk 7:6-7; Mt 15:8-9; Isa 29:13, NIV). First he rejects worship language lacking relational involvement of their hearts (the heart signifying the whole person functioning from inner out), that is, words composed in worship language while uttered (“honor me with lips”) at a relational distance (“hearts far from me”). He then exposes their worship language as “in vain” (*matēn*, without purpose, useless) because it is unable to make relational connection with God and thus doesn’t fulfill the primary communicative purpose of language—though such worship language did fulfill a secondary purpose for its users that easily becomes the primary basis for worship practice.

What we hear from Jesus illuminates our understanding of the process needed for relational connection with God. Useless worship language is not a mere cessation of speech but composed a substitute language originating from “teachings/rules taught by men” (or “human tradition”); that is, the source of this substitute language is human

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<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated, all Scripture is taken from the NRSV; all italics in a quoted text are my variations or additions.

shaping from human contextualization that is designed to essentially simulate worship rather than communicate relational response. Even with any good intentions, this human tradition has critical relational consequences. Because this language is uttered from a relational distance (even unintentionally), it conflicts with God's distinguishing *relational language* that composes God's relational imperatives ("commandments," (Mk 7:8-9; see Jn 4:23-24), which are only for his primary purpose of making relational connection with the whole and holy God. Here, then, are two languages in conflict with each other, and their difference must be accounted for because they are incompatible in spite of the similarity of their words.

The inescapable question we are faced with is whose language we use in worship. Our worship language is either God's *relational language*—the language from God's very heart that 'sings' only for intimate relational connection together (intimacy defined as hearts open and making the deepest connection together)—or language that keeps us at a relational distance, confined in limits we impose on ourselves and God. The latter is a substitute language for God's relational language. Throughout this study we call this substitute language *referential language*, that is composed by a narrowed-down interpretive process (hermeneutic) using quantitative and generalized terms to convey information rather than having the qualitative and relational-specific meaning to communicate to God. We speak referential language fluently and expertly, as we will see—especially in this information age dominated by social media—and this creates a hermeneutical impasse in our worship language.

## Uncommon Relational Context

In the Gospel narratives of Jesus' many interactions with persons, the issue of 'whose language' persons uttered in Jesus' presence emerged repeatedly. As Jesus openly and vulnerably extended his whole person to others solely for relational connection (composing his distinguished 'relational context'), they were faced with the choice to engage him reciprocally with their own person vulnerably, or to keep relational distance and remain relationally apart.

When Jesus visited Martha and Mary in the well-known narrative from Luke's Gospel (Lk 10:38-42), Mary chose to engage with Jesus by making quite a counter-cultural move. Yet, she did not simply defy a cultural norm by leaving a woman's place in the kitchen with Martha in order to sit at the teacher's feet to study. Rather, her bold move was to step out of the constraints of being defined by her context that would keep her at a relational distance from Jesus, and stepped into Jesus' relational context to be directly relationally involved with Jesus with her whole person. Martha's response was indirect and her involvement more generalized, whereas Mary was relationship specific. Jesus was obviously pleased, and affirmed Mary for having chosen the "better part" where she now belonged permanently (v.42; cf. Jn 8:35-36). Her action reciprocally responded to Jesus' initiative of coming into their house for such relational connection. Later we discuss Mary's beautiful response of worship that needs to become paradigmatic for all worshipers, because she was a rare one who received Jesus' relational language and 'sang' back in his relational language in worship to make intimate relational connection with him (again, intimacy defined as open and vulnerable

hearts making the deepest connection together). Mary's compatible, reciprocal response and vulnerable involvement with Jesus make her a definitive witness for us to learn from for our own growth in God's relational language for worship.

Jesus' relational context in this narrative illuminates the significance of the new covenant enacted by God's relational grace and later to be sealed with Jesus' blood (Mt 26:27; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20). The new covenant isn't just any context but the distinguished relational context in which we can come face to face with the transcendent and holy (uncommon) God; it is therefore a holy (uncommon) relational context that necessitates submitting to God's terms defined by his relational response of grace (beyond a gift to possess). God's relational grace is the only basis (nonnegotiable and irreducible) on which we 'sing' in God's relational language to make relational connection with the whole and holy God. Mary's move from human contextualization of her person (for which the kitchen is an apt metaphor for women) to Jesus' relational context therein clearly composes the melody of this requisite response to God's relational terms for the new covenant relationship together. Therefore, functioning apart from this nonnegotiable relational basis of grace—which referential language reduces to a generalized word without its full relational significance—we will only remain defined and determined by our human context and its limits notably constrained by referential language. Consider the limits that Martha allowed herself to function in, staying out of tune at a constrained (perhaps comfortable) relational distance from Jesus (Lk 10:40; cf. Jn 8:35-36). It is therefore vital for us to account for the new covenant and its composing relational grace in order for our worship language to be transposed into God's relational language for the outcome of making relational connection with the whole and holy God. This constitutes grace as the nonnegotiable basis of the new covenant and the ongoing base for our response of worship in this relationship together.

Worshipping God in his relational language as Mary did is in contrast to and conflict with so much of who and what we present to the whole and holy God as worship today. Given the reciprocal nature of covenant relationship together—which thus includes indispensable relational responsibilities for both God and us—God rightly expects more from us (as we certainly expect much from God!) when we come together to worship. Yet, this *more* in worship that God seeks cannot be found in conventional indicators of *more* focused on outer-in aspects that we often look to (intentionally or unintentionally) in order to determine what is significant—notably in a comparative process of what we do or have (e.g. structure of worship service, volume of the music, numbers of people in attendance, offerings collected). Nor is the *more* that God seeks found in the primacy of our ministries, for example, as Martha served Jesus, or our response of service to the poor, marginalized, and oppressed persons, though that response has an important place in church practice. Jesus conclusively clarified the primary priority of discipleship in worship as vulnerably engaged by Mary (Jn 12:1-8, to be discussed in chap. 3).

The *more* that God seeks in his worshipers is the primacy of the qualitative depth of our whole person from inner out—what Jesus refers to as “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23-24)—in relational response that is compatible with *who*, *what* and *how* the whole and holy God is. Any primary focus on the quantitative *more* and on the secondary response of service are expressions shaped by the human contextualization of worship, the secondary nature of which God does not accept for the purpose of relational connection.

Ever since God entered into covenant relationship with humans, God has given priority to relationships in the ‘covenant of love’ (Dt 7:7-9), which by the nature of covenants are reciprocal; covenant with God is not just any relationship but with persons and a people functioning ‘whole’ from inner out with who, what and how God is (as in “be whole,” *tamiym*, Gen 17:1).

The *more* that God seeks is also with whole persons comprising a people, which therefore cannot be limited to each individual’s life and worship. God continues to call persons into ongoing *communion* together with God in the new covenant, the distinguished relationship sealed in Jesus’ blood at his last table fellowship (Lk 22:20). This ongoing *communion* together antecedes, underlies and composes Communion (i.e. the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper), the integral practice of which Paul made conclusive for the church to be whole (1 Cor 11:17-29). This new covenant relationship with God is corporate relationship together as God’s very own people on only the relational terms of the whole and holy God. It was at Jesus’ last and pivotal table fellowship that Jesus declared this fulfillment in “the blood of the new covenant,” thus becoming the functional bridge of the new covenant to the ecclesiology of whole persons in whole relationships together as the new creation family constituted in the whole of God (the Trinity). This is the irreducible relational context and nonnegotiable relational process for our worship to have significance to God, and in which our worship language must be translated into God’s language in order to communicate for the relational connection to be made.

There is always a tension and conflict between God’s relational context and our human context due to their respective natures. Certainly Jesus does not call us to escape our human context, for example, as seen among ascetics. However, while on this earth we will always be lured by and susceptible to the powerful influence of reductionism that shapes and constructs human contextualization, particularly how we define our person, define God and interpret God’s words. In other words, human contextualization, inseparable from reductionism and its counter-relational work, is a formidable force that ongoingly contests our life and practice as God’s people. When not accounted for, our worship language reflects the extent of our human shaping from human contextualization of our person and these relationships, diminishing whole persons and minimalizing whole relationships that are rightfully God’s. The lure is nearly irresistible yet so subtle that we can no longer continue to assume that the triune God accepts our worship nor assume to be the worshipers the Father seeks.

At his pivotal table fellowship, Jesus prayed in relational language for us to be distinguished from the prevailing context (“the world,” *kosmos*), just as Jesus distinguished himself (“sanctify myself, so they may be sanctified,” Jn 17:19). He is *the key* for his followers. Following him on his relational terms transforms us from inner out to establish definitively *who* we are and *whose* we are in transformed relationships together (Jn 17:14-19; Rom 6:3-4). The outcome is to distinguish his new creation family (from inner out) from human contextualization that merely constructs the appearance of it (from outer in), and thus also distinguishes our worship and worship language from our human context and its native language in referential terms, even while remaining *in* this context yet not *of* it.

In the new covenant, the transcendent and holy God continues to enact by the Spirit his thematic relational action to ongoingly redeem us from the human relational condition “to be apart” from God’s relational whole, and transform us to be whole in his



own family constituted in the Trinity.<sup>2</sup> This new covenant relationship, like the old covenant, is defined solely by who and what the whole and holy God is and determined on the basis of how the Father, Son and Spirit so intimately interrelate as to be One (cf. Jn 17:21-23). Our whole person (signified by the qualitative function of the heart) must be redeemed and made whole from inner out in the qualitative image of God. Corporately, whole persons join together in transformed relationships as his new creation family in relational likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity. These relationships together are the dynamic of ecclesiology, the ecclesiology of the whole,<sup>3</sup> distinguished in God's relational language—'singing' the new song—of God's whole relational context (not defined by human shaping) and God's relational process (not determined by human contextualization). The dynamic of life of God's relational context and process is defined as follows:

'Singing' is the integral relational dynamic of life that clearly distinguishes God's family in the tune of the new song composed in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God.

This dynamic of life, 'singing' the new song of the new creation family, is brought into sharpest focus when God's family comes together specifically to worship God *as* his family to make evident 'the ecclesiology of worship' in the context of the new covenant:

Worship is the integrating focus and integral convergence of our (individual and corporate) relational response to and vulnerable involvement with the whole of God.

This study examines worship language with the perspective and lens of this new creation family (ecclesiology of the whole), who we are and how we function together, which is the full significance of what God has saved us *to*, beyond only what he has saved us *from*—the latter by itself being a truncated salvation. In his thematic relational action throughout human history, God has redeemed persons, reconciled us, cleaned us up and adopted us into his own family constituted in the whole of God (the Trinity). We are now full members of God's family in God's relational whole. Whether and how we experience this—either as static doctrinal information or experiential reality—depends in large part on language, whose language we use. Do we use the language from human contextualization that constrains and reshapes the Word of God, essentially in our own image, or God's own language that whole-ly discloses the Word? The former creates a hermeneutical impasse in worship language that prevents our ecclesiology from being whole in relationship together.

Scripture differentiates between two languages that are used in worship: relational language and referential language, both of which are present in any human tongue. Relational language is God's language identified by Jesus as "my language" (*lalian tēn*

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<sup>2</sup> For full theological discussion of God's thematic relational action and his relational whole, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person, the Trinity, the Church: the Call to Be Whole and the Lure of Reductionism* (Wholeness Study, 2006). Online: <http://4X12.org>.

<sup>3</sup> Paul's ecclesiology of the whole in continuity with Jesus is examined in depth in T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process* (Paul Study, 2010). Online: <http://www.4X12.org>.

*emēn*, Jn 8:43). “My language” openly disclosed the intimate family relationships within the Godhead in deep relational tones from the Father (e.g. Mk 1:11; Mt 3:17; 17:5; Jn 12:28b) and the Son (e.g. Mt 6:9-13; Jn 11:41; 12:28; 17:1-26). These deep tones disclose the whole of God’s intimate relational being and vulnerable involvement together for our benefit (e.g. Jn 12:30) because “my language” also defines the primacy of Jesus’ relational work to make us whole together in relationship to compose his new creation family. In this new song, Jesus embodies the whole of God’s communicative acts directly to us—not indirectly in generalized terms to convey information—thus fulfilling God’s definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26) with his very own face openly and vulnerably available to us now for face-to-face involvement together ‘without the veil’ (2 Cor 3:16-18; 4:6). God’s relational language is inseparable from his Face, functioning only for Face-to-face involvement with us. Undeniably, then, by God’s relational nature, God does not engage in a unilateral action, thus also does not speak unilaterally for unilateral relationship. We have a reciprocal relational responsibility for which we are accountable, individually and corporately.

Referential language is language that diminishes or ignores the qualitative-relational dynamics by giving primacy to quantitative aspects of communication such as information or outer aspects—e.g. *about* persons, what persons do or have; this includes giving primacy to persons’ situations and circumstances. In worship, then, referential language remains within the limits of what God does (e.g. in our life, in the world and constraining God to it) or has (attributes), and events of the church year. In other words, referential language competes and is in conflict with God’s relational language of relational involvement, desires and purposes for his covenant family. In this sense, referential language confines and shapes what we believe, functioning like a template, constraining us from straying ‘outside the lines’ of discourse. This is critical for our worship, evidenced in the unquestioned tendency of some to adhere strictly to traditions of liturgy focused on an outer-in approach. This is why Jesus highlighted the conflict between “my language” and Satan’s language who is “the father of lies” (Jn 8:43-44). If we speak the latter’s language, we cannot “hear the *relational* words of God” (8:47).

As we examine our worship language we are inevitably faced with our relational responsibility as God’s daughters and sons, our individual and corporate responsibility in the relational outcome of God’s initiative of relational grace toward us that is inseparable from his Face. We are faced with necessary redemptive change from inner out (*metamorphoō*, not outer-in change of *metaschematizō*, e.g. Rom 12:2). By holding us accountable, God affirms us and helps us to grow further and deeper together in relationship, which God desires and pursues us for in his own ongoing relational action in the gospel of wholeness. And because wholeness (*šālôm*) cannot be realized in disparate individuals—even a group of individuals—particular focus is given to our worship language and its integral importance to relationships together as God’s family, God’s relational whole. Relational language is only for the building up of God’s whole, thus worship language has an integrating function for the maturing into wholeness of the church in all our relational bonds together—in the relational outcome of the ecclesiology of worship. This uncommon relational context with its whole relational process is integral for the significance of worship of the whole and holy God.

I assume most church and worship leaders, worship thinkers and teachers in both church and academy understand and accept that most of our worship practices evolve by

human shaping, that is, from human contextualization. Yet it is critical to understand that human contextualization is not a neutral influence when it comes to language, for there is an inherent conflict that necessarily arises between worship language that is from human shaping, that is, referential language, and the relational language that the whole and holy God speaks, and seeks from ‘true worshipers’ (Jn 4:23-24). Having said that, in one sense contextualization of worship language can be beneficial, even necessary, but for the primary purpose of communication, the obvious example being corporate worship in one’s native tongue; this is not the issue of contextualization addressed in this study. The urgent issue addressed herein is that human contextualization has shifted our involvement in worship from the primacy God’s gives to relationship—in spite of many stated intentions by church and worship leaders, thinkers and teachers—to the primacy of secondary matters. The latter is normative in much worship today. This study highlights that unrecognized shift and the ignored conflict with God’s priority for worship. What, for example, makes us as worshipers any different from those whom God reprimands in Scripture for worship that they engage in on their own terms (e.g. Mt 15:8-9; Isa 29:13)? Referential language works counter-relationally, even when it refers to relationship (cf. 2 Cor 11:14-15). Our language determines either blessed outcomes or grim consequences, whether we build up the body of Christ or reduce it to some simulation of God’s whole, as Jesus exposed of the churches in his post-ascension discourse (Rev 2-3, to be discussed further in chap. 5).

## **Language for Relationship**

Language is the means of communication necessary in all relationships, yet not always sufficient for a relationship. Language is often problematic as it causes misunderstanding or hurt even when we wish to make connection. Sometimes the problem is that we make assumptions; for example, we assume that we’ve clearly said what we mean and that the other person hasn’t listened; or, we haven’t listened well, yet assume we that know what the other person means when we don’t. Oftentimes, it seems as if we speak different languages, creating a gap too wide to overcome. Moreover, paradoxically, language is the means to create and maintain relational distance, as when we hide behind talk that doesn’t communicate our deeper selves to the other person. We like the *idea* of talking to make connection with a friend, for example, but in truth the quantity of talking creates an illusion of closeness—either intentionally or unintentionally; social media has compounded the illusion of connection. The effect of distance in relationships is to reduce persons and the relationship—that is true for the converse also—which God created (original and new) to be whole. Relationships strain in shallowness or break off in dissatisfaction.

These dynamics extend to our relationship with God, and how we function at church. The language used at church (‘churchspeak’) often creates illusions and tends to simulate meaningful practice but which, in effect, has little relational significance. In worship, our language can be a means to hide and maintain relational distance while talking—even unknowingly and unintentionally, even with sincere intentions otherwise. Part of this ongoing condition is due to assumptions about language in worship (both God’s and ours). Often we hear God’s words, don’t understand them, but pretend or

assume we really do. If it often seems that God and we speak differently languages, it is because in a real sense we do. This lack or absence of connection creates a hermeneutical impasse that must be addressed accordingly.

Worshipping God is only about our relationship together, namely reciprocal relationship on God's relational terms. God's terms means that if our worship language is to have any significance at all to the whole and holy God it must be compatible with God's relational language. Yet whether we learn God's relational language will depend on what language lens we use—that is, what we focus on and what we ignore. This will form the basis for the interpretation we use (our hermeneutic) for worship language. Generally, though not universally, hermeneutics involves interpretation that leads to understanding.<sup>4</sup> In *Hermeneutic of Worship Language*, we are concerned with understanding both God and worship, and interpreting the context and process which leads to this integral understanding that indeed connects our worship significantly to God. We will examine what this understanding is, how we need to define it integrally in our practice, and how our understanding can be deepened.

Our hermeneutic of worship language will determine who and what God receives in worship, and, conjointly, will determine the depth of our maturity in relationship with God as his family—the significance of the ecclesiology of worship. This direct connection is made by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, addressing persons who were stuck on the basics of faith, like infants still feeding on milk, and unable to develop beyond their hermeneutical impasse (Heb 5:11-13). In contrast, the writer says, those maturing and moving on to solid food use their organ or faculty of sense and perception, their “hermeneutical means”<sup>5</sup> (*aisthētērion*, 5:14) to “distinguish” (*diakrisis*) God's language and all his communicative actions and desires, as well as what opposes them (“good and evil”).

In an ironic though congruent twist to the matter of maturity, in the verse that opens this introduction, Jesus highlights “little children” to give definition to this hermeneutical means that the Hebrews writer ascribes to “the mature.” In a scene recorded in Luke's Gospel (Lk 10:17-21), just moments after his disciples excitedly returned from an early mission, Jesus' joy overflowed as he skipped and leapt ebulliently (*agalliaō*) in the Spirit, praising the Father. He praised the Father for having “hidden these things from the wise and intelligent” while revealing them “to little children [*nēpios*].” Little children represent the open and vulnerable hearts in relational response of trust from inner out in order to know someone. The relational involvement of these little children is the qualitative difference that stands in contrast to the measured, cautious and relationally distant stance of those who depend on their reason and rationalistic knowledge (information) about God. That quality represented in little children is wholeness of their person, not reduced by relational distance or being defined by what they can do. Furthermore, *nēpios* literally means “wordless,” a baby who is not yet talking. For those who function qualitatively and relationally like little children, having words—much less many words or the right words—and other features of spoken language at one's disposal is not requisite for relationship that delights God. In fact, such

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of hermeneutical and interpretive thought, see Stanley Porter and Jason Robinson, eds., *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, “*Did God Really Say That?*”: *Theology in the Age of Reductionism* (Theology Study, 2013). Online: <http://4X12.org>, 182.

words (as in churchspeak) often are substitutes for our whole person, hence relational barriers. The “hermeneutic of a ‘child’” points us to a deeper understanding of God’s language, which is only for the purpose of making relational connection on God’s relational terms. The hermeneutic of a ‘child’ challenges our assumptions about worship language that delights God’s heart; and this hermeneutic specifically exposes the hermeneutical impasse created by the referential language signified in the wise and learned (to be discussed further in chap. 4).

A hermeneutic of worship language presupposes a hermeneutic of worship, which I have written about in a previous study.<sup>6</sup> The hermeneutic of worship needs not only to have a qualitative and relational focus, it also must distinguish between worship with relational barriers (the significance of remaining ‘in front of the curtain’, and ‘with the veil’), and worship without relational barriers (see Mk 15:38, 2 Cor 3:12-18, Heb 10:19-22)—discussed further in chapter four. Worship language in the OT Psalms certainly helps us with the qualitative and relational focus. The most significant key (both hermeneutical and functional) for us, however, is Jesus’ whole person in the incarnation. As the hermeneutical key, Jesus unmistakably reveals to us that worship without barriers involves the whole of God’s whole person openly and vulnerably extended to us, thereby making himself available for the deepest relational connection—with *nothing less than and no substitutes* for his very self (discussed in chap. 3). As the functional key, Jesus embodies the response of worship that requires of us to be relationally compatible—that is, the reciprocal response of nothing less and no substitutes of our person with the open and vulnerable involvement of our hearts from inner out—to have relational significance to the Father, as he disclosed conclusively to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:21-24). Jesus is thus the relational key in whom our song of response needs to be composed. This is the experiential reality which Paul attests to (Acts 22:6-16; 26:12-18; 2 Cor 3:12-18; 4:6) for the church to embrace and function in to be whole in the relationships together composed by the ecclesiology of worship.

Therefore, while the hermeneutic of worship language may sound too academic to be helpful to us in practice, in reality it is only and all about the primacy of relationship together and having connection with the whole of God (the Trinity) and extending this primacy of communion to relationship together as sisters and brothers in the family of Christ, the body, his church—the communion constituted in the Trinity and emerging in likeness in his family as Jesus prayed (Jn 17:21-26). Such a hermeneutic is essential to the gospel we claim and proclaim, without which we don’t understand the gospel embodied in whole by Jesus (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10; Eph 1:22-23; 2:14-22). This primacy of relationship is the relational significance to be whole in God’s relational whole, persons made whole from inner out, and living whole in the relationships necessary to be whole. And it is within this relational context and process that any and all worship of the whole and holy God is composed in relational significance as the worshipers the Father seeks.

We cannot, however, take wholeness for granted because there is an ongoing challenge to God’s relational whole and our wholeness: the presence and influence of *reductionism*—discussed throughout this study. Reductionism’s influence is the most formidable opponent to relational wholeness by fragmenting the person in relational distance with its counter-relational work, and thus permeates all facets of life, including

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<sup>6</sup> *A Theology of Worship: ‘Singing’ a New Song to the Lord*. Online at <http://4X12.org>.

worship and notably worship language. With the subtle use of referential terms, reductionism's predominant influence in worship is to shift primacy of relationship to primacy of secondary aspects and activities in worship (e.g. music styles, genres of worship, forms, technology), reducing the worship context to a 'secondary sanctuary'. This involves the shift from worship language as relational language in Jesus' relational key, to referential language that in actual practice focuses primarily on the outer in and thereby keeps us off-key at a relational distance. As this study spotlights the influence of reductionism on our worship, it becomes unavoidable to face our individual and corporate participation and complicity in the reduction of God's relational primacy. Herein lies the necessary challenge to some very deep-seated assumptions about some very beloved ways of "doing" worship. This process necessitates delving more deeply than only language to the more basic issue of how the person is defined and how relationships are engaged—that is, our underlying theological anthropology that we all subscribe to, knowingly or unknowingly.

A hermeneutic of worship language would only recapitulate conventional academic study if it focuses on how to talk worshipfully about God in referential language and thus ignores relational language. This study therefore does not take the path of recovering propositional truths, justifying the need for creeds, updating ancient worship practices, or seeking how to be relevant in changing demographics. Such focus merely tends to solidify the hermeneutical impasse to relational connection with the whole and holy God. We are, rather, on an adventurous experiential path to relationally know and understand the heart of God, which requires the reciprocal involvement of our hearts. This is the vulnerable relational path to grow in God's relational language to be and live whole together as God's new creation family (in the ecclesiology of the whole) in order for our worship and language to have relational significance to God, to compose a 'new sanctuary' in place of the secondary sanctuary for our ecclesiology of worship.

## **The Relational Imperative Leading to Understanding**

Church and worship leaders, and those who teach about worship in the academy and church have a particular responsibility to take up these issues for the building up of God's family, the church (Eph 4:12-13). Growing as the new creation family involves redemptive change from inner out, not merely a reformation or innovation from outer in. In Scripture, God's relational language speaks to us unmistakably that in order for the new to emerge, the old has to die (Jn 12:23-25; Rom 6:2-14; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). For those leaders and teachers who don't see the need for change, who are comfortable with the status quo, the issues addressed in this study will, I hope and pray, challenge and encourage all such persons with the more that God seeks from us in reciprocal relationship.

To all who desire to serve Jesus as his followers, he makes definitive in his paradigm for discipleship these relational words: "Whoever serves me must follow me" (Jn 12:26). Referential language gets us to focus first on following some part (teaching or example) of Jesus, thereby fragmenting his person; then it shifts the primary focus to the word "serves" to pursue what it is we should do and say in service to him, including in corporate worship, due to the shaping influence of defining ourselves by what we do or

have (e.g. training, experience, knowledge, talent)—all of which emerges from a reduced theological anthropology fragmenting the person and relationships. Jesus, however, expresses the primacy he gives to relationship in the words “follow me.” This clearly is the relational imperative, giving “follow *my whole person*” primacy as the relationship together that constitutes discipleship, which is why he had to emphatically repeat this imperative to Peter (Jn 21:22). Being Jesus’ disciple is first and foremost relationship together, of intimate involvement in this primacy *with* him (as Mary enacted)—not engaged in the secondary *for* him (as evident in Martha)—so that his disciples would experience the depths of his person (cf. Jn 14:9, and Jesus’ prayer for all his followers, Jn 17:23-26). His relational language expresses how he sees us, that he does not define our person by what we do and have to give to him. In paraphrase, Jesus’ relational words for worship are thus: “Whoever serves me in worship must, by the nature of the worshipers the Father seeks, be relationally involved with me in compatible reciprocal response to how I am involved with you.” Now as then, Jesus’ whole person still seeks persons for compatible relational response of our whole person from inner out, nothing less and no substitutes—over anything we *do* for him, or *have* that we give him, however dedicated and faithful.

Following Jesus composes discipleship on his relational terms (not referential terms) in the relational progression to the Father in ongoing reciprocal involvement with the Spirit, the outcome of which is to be constituted together as God’s relational whole. God’s relational whole irreducibly integrates discipleship, all efforts in spirituality (growing in relationship with God), and worship in the relational significance of complete Christology, full soteriology and ecclesiology of the whole—that is, in the primacy of reconciled relationship together in wholeness without fragmentation and counter-relational work of reductionism. The ecclesiology of worship is the celebration of the whole of the new creation family of Jesus’ followers who have been adopted by the Father and made whole together in ongoing reciprocal relationship with the Spirit; and this integral family dynamic of communion together converges in Communion (celebration of the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper) as the focal point:

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.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, God’s relational language is never merely for information about the triune God, but only for the reciprocal covenant relationship together on God’s terms; accordingly, worship language communicating to this God can only be relational

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<sup>7</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>, 317-318.

language. Scripture is God’s relational language that reveals God as the God who directly extends his qualitative-relational being and nature through his vulnerable presence and involvement with human persons, most notably in the incarnation of Jesus. Yet humans have constructed and maintained relational barriers to this relationship in particular and relationships in general—ever since the primordial garden (i.e. covered themselves and hid, Gen 3:7-8)—thereby reducing language designed only for relationship to referential language that simulates relationship, that creates distance, that talks indirectly about the other (e.g. “Did God really say...? Gen 3:1, NIV). Scripture thus also communicates a sustained critique through the Old and New Testaments. God’s critiques focus on our theological anthropology, that is, ‘how we define our person’ and on this basis ‘how we function in relationships’. How we define our person either keeps us relationally distant from God, or opens our whole person from inner out for intimate relational connection with God—intimacy always defined as hearts open and vulnerably coming together, the ‘spirit and truth’ God seeks—made possible by God’s relational grace. This intimate relational connection is what constitutes worship behind the curtain, without the veil (cf. Ex 29-35; 2 Cor 3:12-19; Heb 10:19-22), that is, worship face to face with God, unmediated, in humbleness, and thus in our openness and vulnerability as whole persons in whole relationship together for which the triune God created us and subsequently redeems us to.

Is our corporate worship the worship of the whole and holy God? Are we the worshipers the Father seeks (Jn 4:23-24)? However you personally answer, let us assume for ourselves that the answer is *no* rather than *yes*. ‘No’ is a more open (and vulnerable) place to start, to grow deeper in our relationship with God corporately as his worshipping church—so that our worship be of significance to God and to ourselves as well (individually and corporately), and so that we and our worship be distinguished from human shaping in order that the holy God receive what is uncommon, for the whole of God’s church to be whole and to live whole in likeness, and to make whole the human context. All the above we cannot do as long as we are defined and determined by human contextualization.

Today there are important transitions taking place in the church worldwide. In the Global North, first and second generation neo-evangelical spokespersons in church and academy are giving way to a younger generation, yet who are only nominally more diverse. The Roman Catholic Church has just installed a pope from the Global South, who stands in both continuity and discontinuity with the traditions of this segment of God’s catholic church. The church in the Global South is exploding in growth. Changes such as these can continue to unfold to either go further and deeper with God, or to become increasingly embedded in human contextualization. Will we get beyond any hermeneutical impasse to make relational connection significant to the whole of God?

As we journey together through these pages, Jesus’ words “follow me” compellingly call us to go deeper with him in this relationship together. His relational process is the maturing into wholeness which will require transforming (from inner out, i.e. *metamorphoō*) our referential language into “my language,” God’s relational language, and also growing beyond our individual relationship with him to our corporate covenant relationship as God’s new creation family. He awaits our (both individual and corporate) compatible reciprocal relational response as whole persons together to ‘sing the new song’ in worship language of the covenant and ecclesiology of worship.



## Chapter 2      Sounds of Consonance and Dissonance

LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary?  
Who may live on your holy mountain?  
Those whose walk is blameless and who do what is righteous,  
Who speak the truth from their hearts.

Psalm 15:1-2, TNIV

Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tents,  
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

Mark 9:5

Most Christians are aware that our heart is essential in worship to make relational connection with God. It is necessary, however, to go beyond a view of the heart that is limited to feelings/emotions (though these are important), in order to become the whole worshipers the Father seeks (Jn 4:23-24). Our worship language must communicate to God persons whose hearts are open and vulnerable with *what* is within (e.g. love, desires, fear, anger, weakness, inadequacies, including sins) because only such a person distinguishes *who* is significant and honest and therefore presented whole-ly from inner out. This is the qualitative function of the heart of the whole person who presents nothing less and no substitutes, that is, instead of the secondary matters of what one does or has. The qualitative function of the heart integrates the person from inner out for the person to be whole to worship “in spirit and truth.” The beautiful truth (not in propositional form) about the heart’s qualitative function is that this is how we are created in the qualitative image of God!

The OT deepens our understanding about the heart, as the following discussion illuminates for us:

In Hebrew terminology, the center of the person is the heart (*leb*); ...the “inner person” (*nepes*) God “breathed” of himself into the human person (cf. Ecc 3:11b) is signified by the heart (*leb*)...“the wellspring” (starting point, *tosa ‘ot*) of the ongoing function of the human person (Prov 4:23)...[that which] gives definition to the person (Prov 27:19); and, when not reduced or fragmented (“at peace”), as giving life to “the body” (*basar*, referring to the outer aspect of the person, Prov 14:30), which describes the integrating function for the whole person (inner and outer). This suggests [that] the function of the heart signifying the “inner person”—which is then inclusive of the outer—involves both: (1) the qualitative integration of the whole person, and (2) the functional basis for relationship with the whole of God, specifically for experiencing the intimate relationship constituted in the Trinity. Both are realized, of course, only when the heart is not reduced and is necessarily transformed. The intellect may be able to provide quantitative unity (for example, by identifying the association of parts) for the human person. However, while this may be necessary and useful at times, it is never sufficient by itself to define the whole

person nor to experience the relationships necessary to be whole, especially with God.<sup>1</sup>

With this fuller understanding, the heart and wholeness are inseparable and essential to worship in order to present the significance of our person. Hearts that are open and vulnerable to each other in the primacy of relationship are necessary to come together for the experience of intimate relational connection in relationships that are whole—which is integral to the “well-being” that composes the biblical sense of “peace” (*šālôm*).

Accordingly, and this is critical for our practice, God does not have our whole person for relationship until it involves our heart. God gives primacy to our heart over all secondary outer-in aspects of our person (i.e. what we do and have), because it is only at the heart level that God and we can make significant relational connection together.

Apart from the heart all other efforts for connection in relationships are indirect or generalized, which presupposes relational distance. Interrelated, consider our worship language, how indirect are our songs (in third person) and how generalized we speak *about* God (with sweeping or idealized terms), which only assume to be directed *to* God in the significance of relational connection. This assumption has no truthful basis apart from the heart. In contrast, the beautiful truth involved in the direct and relational-specific function of the heart is the experiential truth that this is how we are created for intimate relationships together in the very likeness of how the whole of God (the Trinity) engages in relationship (as Jesus with the Father in the garden, Lk 22:42-44, and on the cross, 27:46, cf. Heb 5:7).

Moreover, our understanding about the heart and wholeness needs to deepen even further, especially its significance for worship of the whole and holy God as his family. One of Jesus’ earliest disciples helps us here. The one disciple in the Gospels who clearly illuminates the open and vulnerable heart needed for intimate relationship with Jesus is Mary of Bethany. Mary, as noted in the previous chapter, refused to be constrained by cultural expectation so that she could be with Jesus in his relational context. She left behind the constraints on her person from the “old” and stepped into the “new” to be whole in relational connection with Jesus in the relational imperative of discipleship (and got in trouble with her sister Martha for it, Lk 10:38-42). Her heart was further distinguished with Jesus when Lazarus died (noted below). In yet another key scene, Mary extended her person to Jesus in a beautiful response of worship (Jn 12:1-8), thereby involving her whole person in the primacy of relationship necessary for Jesus’ followers to function in the new creation family; her response illuminated the relational significance of the gospel and led the way for the ecclesiology of worship. The setting was table fellowship with Jesus.

Not long before his crucifixion, Jesus and the disciples were having dinner with Martha, Mary and Lazarus (a family whom Jesus loved, Jn 11:5), when Mary came and poured very expensive perfume on Jesus’ feet and wiped them with her hair (cf. a similar action from an ex-prostitute, Lk 7:37-38; Matthew and Mark’s Gospels say “a woman came...and poured the ointment on his head,” Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9). Other disciples who were present chastised Mary, calling her action wasteful because the perfume should have been sold and the money used to help poor people. In this moment their primary focus was on serving and ministry, not on the person of Jesus. Nevertheless, Mary had

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<sup>1</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person, the Trinity, the Church*, 7.

her heart set on loving her Lord in this act of worship, in which her whole person was openly and vulnerably involved with Jesus. Earlier when Mary and Martha's brother Lazarus had died and Jesus came to their village, Mary was told that Jesus was calling for her, and she quickly went to Jesus, knelt at his feet and poured her heart out to him, weeping, whereby Jesus' heart was "deeply moved" (Jn 11:28-35). She didn't stay at a comfortable distance relationally, in contrast with Martha's more restrained interaction with Jesus at a noticeably different level of affect for both Martha and Jesus (vv.20-27). Mary is mentioned only a few times in the Gospels, but each instance shows Mary's freedom to be vulnerable and direct with Jesus that none of the other disciples demonstrated (cf. Mk 6:52; 8:14-17; Jn 4:27,31-33). She could be confident with Jesus because she experienced his acceptance of and involvement with her whole person. Yet her confidence wasn't akin, for example, to Peter's relative openness (from outer in) because Mary's response emerged as relational trust in Jesus' whole person, while Peter's misguided behavior came from how he defined both himself and Jesus by the outer-in criteria of what they did and had, such as culturally-defined roles of rabbi and student (cf. Jn 13:6-8).

Mary illuminates the kind of disciple and thus worshiper that the Father seeks. She was a "true worshiper" (Jn 4:23) whose person functioned whole from inner out in "in spirit and truth." Hers was the compatible and reciprocal response to Jesus and how Jesus is relationally involved with persons: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you" (Jn 15:9). Jesus' relational involvement with persons embodies love (*agapē*), that is, God's family love. God's family love is never primarily about what to do—not even with sacrifice, such that the cross seen only as a mere sacrifice isn't the most significant aspect to Jesus' work in the incarnation—but about being deeply involved relationally with the other person for whole relationship together (cf. Jesus' involvement with others while on the cross). Jesus' relational work composed the integral basis for Mary's reciprocal relational response. Mary's relational connection with Jesus—like no other disciple's—is the outcome of God's relational involvement of family love to reconcile persons with him in the new creation family. This relational outcome is the good news that composes the 'whole' gospel of Christ (i.e. the gospel of peace, Eph 6:15). Her relational language epitomized 'sounds of consonance' in reciprocal response to Jesus' whole person.

And Jesus, highlighting the significance *to him* of Mary's act of worship, makes the most remarkable statement about Mary:

I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her (Mk 14:8-9, NIV).

Ever since Jesus said, "Wherever the gospel is preached," the gospel proclamation has spanned thousands of years and entered billions of ears, yet Mary's name is rarely, if ever, attached to Jesus' gospel. We must therefore ask ourselves this urgent question: What in fact and indeed is the gospel that gets preached? If the gospel we claim and proclaim doesn't tell of Mary's response—as compared to, say, Peter, James and John's missional activities (even as important as these activities were), we have ignored Jesus' own words. To have ignored these particular words (in relational language) from Jesus' mouth can only be the result of selective "hearing" from our biased perceptual-interpretive framework and lens. I assert, however, that the omission of Mary's relational significance

to Jesus is less about androcentrism as some biblical feminists would claim (though gender is undoubtedly involved) than it is about the threat Mary's person presents to those (both male and female) who are defined and determined by reductionism instead of by God's relational grace and *agapē*. Furthermore, to have ignored Jesus' words about Mary not only exposes the bias of the church's interpretive lens but also the shift from God's relational language to referential language.

This hermeneutical impasse is consequential for an ongoing reduced personhood in relationships without significant connection. To continue to ignore Mary's relational significance for the gospel is to continue in a reshaped gospel in referential language, whereby our ecclesiology becomes fragmentary, which then extends to reshaping our worship. Therefore, we can no longer presume that the gospel we preach in our worship services is not "a different gospel" that Paul fought against in the churches for ecclesiology to be whole (cf. Gal 1:6). In the cacophony of proclamations, we must by necessity be able to distinguish the voices of consonance from dissonance.

## Sounds of Consonance

Wholeness of our person and relationships is not optional for God's people. We must not, however, misunderstand from referential thinking what wholeness involves, for example, that the whole person is just a unity of mind, body and soul to counter dualism. While such thinking rightly points to a fragmented person, it tends not to lead to the wholeness embodied by Jesus in response to the human condition. Though the notion of holistic is increasing for Christian practice, this emphasis usually is disembodied from Jesus' whole person and thus de-relationalizes what is primary to God's life. Such a view often translates in Christian contexts to a missional focus on holistic ministry or social justice to respond to persons' physical needs and circumstances in addition to their spiritual needs; yet this response is not whole if the person is still defined from outer in at the expense of the primacy of relationship (cf. the above disciples focused on the poor in contrast to Mary). Biblical wholeness is the qualitative function of the person from inner out (signified by the primacy of the heart) necessary in order to be compatible for relationship with the whole and holy God, and congruent in relationships together as the new creation family in likeness of the triune God. Only this wholeness composes *šālôm* and, accordingly, the gospel of wholeness that fulfills the relational involvement of God's face to distinguish his family (Num 6:24-26; 2 Cor 4:6)..

Scripture identifies being whole as "blameless" (*tāmiym*, Ps 15:2; *anenklētos*, 1 Cor 1:8). Psalm 15:1-2 connects the necessity of "blameless" to worshipers. The poet David asks "O Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?" (v.1, NIV). The Hebrew word for "sanctuary" here is *'ōhel* (tent, home denoting God's dwelling), but sanctuary is rendered elsewhere as *miqdāš* (from the verb *qādaš*, to set apart from common usage in service to the uncommon [holy] God) referring to holy places where God's presence and glory were manifested (i.e. tabernacle and temple). To dwell/live in God's sanctuary and on his holy hill means to remain in the holy God's relational context. Who may remain in God's relational context and be relationally involved with the holy (uncommon) God?

David responds to his own question with honest humility yet confidently for

himself. David knows from his own experience that the answer to his questions is only “He whose walk is blameless [*tāmiym*], and who does what is righteous [*šedeq*], who speaks the truth from his heart” (v.2). *Tāmiym* means “complete” or “whole” (other notable persons who were *tāmiym* in covenant relationship with God were Noah and Abraham; see Gen 6:9 and 17:1-2).<sup>2</sup> The *tāmiym* person speaks “truth from the heart”—that is, honestly as a person from inner out, for whom the open and vulnerable heart is indispensable to compose relational language for intimate relational connection. Only persons who are *tāmiym* and ‘speak truth from the heart’ can be deeply known and deeply know each other in intimate relational connection. These are the persons God seeks in covenant relationship, who sing in God’s relational language to be compatible—that is, with sounds of consonance—with the whole and holy God.

In addition to *tāmiym*, David also says this person “does what is righteous [*šedeq*].” *Šedeq* is tied to righteousness (*šēdāqâh*, Isa 28:17), which throughout Scripture refers to God’s relational commitment to the covenant terms, and signifies that we can count on God in this relationship to be fully who, what and how God says he is and thus keep his word to us. Reciprocally, the person who is righteous (*šādaq*, e.g. Ps 119:137) is the one whom righteous God can count on for compatible response in relationship on the covenant’s relational terms. These are God’s distinguished relational dynamics which compose the whole of God’s uncommon (holy) relational process. Herein we can begin to get a deeper sense of and call to relational well-being and wholeness as persons who function in *tāmiym* and *šēdāqâh*. Both *tāmiym* and *šēdāqâh* assume the primacy of the qualitative and of relationship together in integral function in order to be distinguished as such. This is how corporate worship language must be distinguished from any conventional modes (i.e. from the common) of communication in order to be relationally involved with the holy God just as the whole of God is relationally involved with us—the relational significance of “Be holy for I am holy” in relational language, not referential language (cf. Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Pet 1:15-16).

We will grow as this uncommon God’s uncommon people in *tāmiym* and *šēdāqâh* only as we grow more deeply to relationally know God for *who* God is, *what* God is and *how* he is, namely by following Jesus’ whole person openly and vulnerably disclosed in relational progression together with him. God’s being (who), nature (what) and presence (how) have been illuminated in other related studies, which readers are encouraged to pursue for their own growth.<sup>3</sup> The following summary from *Sanctified Christology* is helpful for this study:

- 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’

<sup>2</sup> *Tāmiym* is central to a deeper understanding of theological anthropology; see T. Dave Matsuo’s discussion in *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in his Theology*, ch.1, section “Related Issues in Hermeneutical Impasse, Flow and Outcomes” and ch.2, section “The Journey Begins.”

<sup>3</sup> See especially T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

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).<sup>4</sup>

Integral to our growing in relationship with Jesus (Jesus' priority for discipleship, inseparably also the "goal" of spirituality) are *three major issues* for our relational involvement (i.e. our practice) to be whole. These have been embodied vulnerably in Jesus' earthly life, and should ongoingly challenge our assumptions about theological anthropology, and thus our language as we present ourselves to God in worship. They are as follows:

- (1) The significance of the person presented
- (2) The integrity and quality of one's communication
- (3) The depth of relational involvement with others<sup>5</sup>

**First issue:** God in full disclosure came into our human context embodied in the person of the Son. Focusing on function and not doctrine, Jesus presented nothing less than and no substitutes for his whole person, who is inseparable from the Father and Spirit. What we witness in Jesus' person is the whole of God embodied in vulnerable self-disclosure. And even though the whole of God embodied in the Son is not the entirety of transcendent God, *who* and *what* we experience is nothing less than and certainly no substitute for God. The significance of the person presented in Jesus is who, what and how God is—nothing less and no substitutes. Could the Father have sent someone other than the Son? Instead of sending the Son into the world, the Father might have continued sending his angels or some other intermediary to be a guide for us in this life, or hand someone a book of ready-made New Testament Scriptures, but he didn't. During Moses' life, the OT indicates that at one point God would have sent an angel in place of his own presence had Moses not argued for God's own presence (see Ex 33:1-3,12-17). For Moses, a substitute was not good enough, was not acceptable to Moses, and God received Moses' plea and responded with nothing less. In the historical arc of God's thematic action to restore humanity and the rest of creation to wholeness, God made strategic and tactical shifts by sending the Son himself into the human context to meet us Face to face (2 Cor 4:6)—nothing less than the whole of God embodied in Christ, and no substitutes

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<sup>4</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 26-27.

<sup>5</sup> Jesus' embodiment of the three major issues for all practice is developed fully in T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, ch.1 "The Person Presented," 17-35.

for his vulnerable presence and intimate involvement.<sup>6</sup> Jesus' embodiment in vulnerable self-disclosure of the whole transcendent and holy God (the Trinity) to the world was improbable to most and intrusive to still more. Yet even now, even the most ardent of believers (both in church and the academy) fragment 'the whole of God embodied.' Our perception and reception of Emmanuel must include his life between the manger and the cross. If we continue to keep Jesus in the manger and then swoosh him up onto the cross, we have already fragmented the whole of God presented throughout the incarnation and reduced him to only his work on the cross, maintaining and proclaiming an incomplete view of Christ (in an incomplete Christology). This reductionism has had long-range interrelated consequences—epistemological, theological and relational consequences which render us to a hermeneutical impasse. Understanding the whole of Jesus is the key to whole understanding of the heart of God, and to growing in our own person as we are created to be.<sup>7</sup> The relational process to this depth of understanding and relationally knowing Jesus is the significance of discipleship and spirituality, inseparably.

**Second issue:** All the words Jesus uttered were congruent with the person he vulnerably presented, for the integrity and quality of all his communication. Although we often find that much of what he said is downright baffling, our failure to understand him reveals more about us and the inadequacy of our quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework to interpret Jesus' language. God doesn't speak in a secret language that only "elite" Christians (e.g. mystics, scholars) can understand, nor does he speak only in theophanies (see Num 12:6-8). The problem for us is that we can never adequately understand Jesus' language by using a referential language lens at a relational distance because his language is only qualitative and relational.

Communication theory helps us recognize some features about ourselves and, indeed, about God, such as the following: (1) one cannot *not* communicate; (2) "Any communication implies a commitment and thereby defines the relationship;"<sup>8</sup> and (3) "Every communication has a content aspect and a relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former."<sup>9</sup> This third feature, the relational content of any communication, is conveyed as *relational messages* as follows:

- (1) what one is saying about him- or herself
- (2) how the speaker feels about the other person being addressed
- (3) how the speaker feels about their shared relationship.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I encourage serious readers to see the full discussion about God's thematic relational actions reaching their fulfillment in the strategic, tactical, and functional shifts in Jesus' whole person in the incarnation, in *Sanctified Christology*, 78-97.

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller discussion on how Jesus is our "key," please see *The Person, the Trinity, the Church*, Introduction, section "A Window to the Whole." The full quote is "Christ is the hermeneutical key that opens the ontological door to the whole of God, and also the functional key that opens the relational door to the ontology of the whole of God's family constituted in the Trinity, the Trinity qua family."

<sup>8</sup> Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin, and Don D. Jackson. *Pragmatics Of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (NY: W.W.Norton & Company, Inc, 1967), 51.

<sup>9</sup> Watzlawick et al, 54.

<sup>10</sup> This rendering of principles from communication theory of Watzlawick et al ("This is how I see myself...this is how I see you...this is how I see you seeing me"; p. 52) is developed by T. Dave Matsuo in

These are relational messages from the speaker to the hearer, which characterize language's function to make relational connection. In God's communicative acts to us throughout Scripture, God ongoingly conveys relational messages to us: (1) what he says about himself (e.g. Ex 34:6-7), (2) how he feels about us (e.g. Dt 7:7-8,12-13; Jn 3:16), (3) and what he says about our relationship together (Jn 17). Thus, to treat God's Word as a topic of study (notably in the academy) is to de-relationalize God by separating him from his relational messages to us; de-relationalizing God's self-disclosures keeps us at a relational distance (e.g. 'in front of the text' paralleling 'in front of the curtain'). In the academy this is the predominant approach to biblical studies, theology, and spirituality. Many seminarians are aware of and dissatisfied with the incongruence of academic exercises with God's Word. Similarly, in order for our own worship language to become relational language, then, critically, what becomes primary is neither acquiring nor proclaiming referential words, but first relationally understanding and receiving God's relational messages to us—which likely will require a new hermeneutic.

Jesus as the embodied Word of God vulnerably communicated the whole of God (the Trinity) in self-disclosure to us, not as information to know about God, but only for the primacy of intimate relational connection. The integrity of who and the quality of what Jesus communicated, and the Spirit extends, is nothing less and no substitutes—openly and whole-ly present from inner out and vulnerably involved for relationship together. This is how Jesus embodied the first and second issues for practice, the significance of his person presented (e.g. to the Father, to the Samaritan woman, to his disciples, to the crowds), whose language they could count on for who, what and how God is. We can therefore count on all of his communication to be relationally specific to us and *whole-ly* reliable, worthy of our relational trust. Imperative for our growth to wholeness is to be transformed in our perceptual-interpretive framework (Rom 8:5-6, 12:2) from our old lens that sees and hears referential words *about* God to the new that receives relational messages *from* God's very own heart *to* ours.

**Third issue:** Jesus' presence and involvement with persons was open and vulnerable for heart-to-heart relational connection in order to make them whole in face-to-face relationship together. His vulnerability was evident throughout his earthly life as he experienced the range of responses from humans, from open reception (e.g. Jn 1:12-13), to relational distance (e.g. the disciples, Jn 14:9a), to rejection (Jn 1:11, 6:66). Moreover, he was always exposed to human sin (notably as reductionism), and deeply affected by it (e.g. Lk 19:41-47). This is how Jesus vulnerably embodied God's relational grace and family love (*agapē*) to human persons. As it emerged and unfolded, Jesus' table fellowship becomes for us the definitive expression of the depth of his involvement with persons, which is discussed more fully in the next chapter.

These three issues for our own practice gain clarity in Jesus' person and are necessary for us to understand. Critical for our worship language to have significance to God, it must be consonant with Jesus' person, communication and relational involvement: nothing less and no substitutes for our whole person presented from inner out, in open

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*The Relational Progression: A Relational Theology of Discipleship* (Discipleship Study, 2004). Online: <http://4X12.org>. Chap 1, section: "Understanding the *Word*."



and direct communication to God to be vulnerably involved in reciprocal relationship together to the depth level of intimacy. Our language to God requires change in order to be this person and to compose the reciprocal response of our relational trust and commitment to God. Referential language does not engage our whole person in this level of relationship; it is not designed for this purpose and outcome. Moreover, reciprocal relationship is incongruent with any notion of unilateral relationship, and precludes our living as passive objects, for example, who expect God to do all the relational work (or the converse). A passive posture is dissonant with covenant relationship with God both because God cannot be other than relational and because God doesn't engage in relationship together unilaterally.

Furthermore, and equally important, we need to pay attention to and take responsibility for the relational messages we communicate to God in worship: what we're saying about ourselves, about how we see God, and feel about our relationship. That is, everything that takes place in corporate (and individual) worship says something relationally from us directly to God (intentionally or unknowingly); and these three issues for practice help form a qualitative relational lens for us to grow in our awareness of what is taking place relationally, and thereby make any needed hermeneutical correction. Only with this qualitative lens can we transpose all the dynamics in corporate worship into a key for the ecclesiology of worship such that our 'singing' has relational significance to God. In other words:

'Singing' is the integral relational dynamic of life that clearly distinguishes God's family in the tune of the new song composed in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, the song of which worship is the chorus. And, worship is the integrating focus and the integral relational convergence of our (both individual and corporate) reciprocal relational response and vulnerable involvement in relationship together with God—the ongoing primacy of which is the sound of consonance significant to God's ear.

I like portraying as 'singing' this qualitative-relational focus and function in wholeness because it is distinguished from discursive referential language and function taking place from a relational distance—which is worship in front of the curtain. God's language is only this 'singing'!

Wholeness is essential for God's family (God's relational whole)—connecting John 14:27 to Ephesians 2:14-18 for Colossians 3:15-16—to grow as the worshipers who “worship the Father in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23). In biblical wholeness, all aspects of life as God's people are inseparable—worship, spirituality, discipleship, and theological understandings (e.g. Christology, soteriology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, eschatology). Conjointly, in order to deeply understand and grow in the integrated *whole*, it is equally necessary to grasp that which diminishes this whole, which is *reductionism*, the major barrier to growing in our whole person and persons together in wholeness in the primacy of relationship with God on his relational terms. The following sections examine the process of reductionism and its counter-relational work against wholeness. For worship, reductionism replaces God's relational language to 'sing the new song' with referential worship language from outer in that churches participate in and, even unknowingly, promote, for example, with general terms like “relational” and “holistic” and with

indirect words in new songs and styles.

It is sad, though not surprising, when Christians experience relational distance from God's heart (and from each other) in worship. This is the experience of not feeling connected with God other than in fleeting palpable moments during a worship service, from Sunday to Sunday, if even that much. Whenever we sense that something is missing, this is a relational consequence that we need to start paying attention to; and the cause of which we need to understand. Distance in relationships (especially with God) is the key indicator of distance we have from our own hearts. Relational distance reduces all persons (ourselves and how we view God) and our relationships to less than whole, because the heart and its qualitative function become detached (fragmented) from the whole person, who thereby becomes de-relationalized. This reduction of the whole person (reduced ontology and function) keeps us relationally distant from God because our heart is not available for relational connection, therefore in dissonant function countering God's relational desires and purpose for us. One of the purposes of this study is to expose reductionism plainly, so that we can fight against it in order to grow in *tāmiym* and *ṣēdāqâh* as those who may worship God in his presence, like the poet David, in intimate relational connection involving our open and vulnerable heart, like Mary.

## Sound in the Ear of the Hearer

Given the above discussion about wholeness distinguished in relationships, we can now discuss how the whole gets reduced to something less than whole, that is, becomes fragmented. This discussion must start with something we all have and use: our *perceptual-interpretive framework* and its lens—that which determines what we pay attention to and likewise ignore. Our perceptual-interpretive framework is shaped by our human contexts (family, sociocultural) telling us the extent or limits of what to pay attention to and what to ignore. This forms the lens we use to perceive (notably by hearing and seeing) and which forms our biases and mindset to interpret everything around us. Ever since the primordial garden, the predominant perceptual-interpretive framework and lens focuses on and 'defines' the human person by outer-in quantitative aspects of what persons have or do. 'What I do' includes my job, education, and roles I perform such as in worship (worship leader, singer, or instrumentalist); and 'what I have' entails my possessions and attributes (e.g. abilities, resources, and even spiritual gifts). Such a definition works both ways, for what I do or don't do, what I have or don't have, to measure our identity in a comparative process with others.

The Greek word *bios* refers to these quantitative outer aspects of life—in contrast with qualitative depth of life, *zōē*, (e.g. Jn 10:10)—information about us that we document in biographies and display in résumés. With this focus on the outer person, that which gets ignored or hidden is the heart, the qualitative function of one's person from inner out. Defining persons by outer aspects without the inner person (signified by the heart) fragments the whole person, reducing the ontology (being and nature) of the whole person to those fragments in the process of *reductionism*. Reductionism functions like a template (e.g. Facebook) which narrows down persons to only certain aspects or categories. We have all experienced this reduction of our whole person created in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God because reductionism (as

sin) pervades all of human life, ever since the primordial garden. Secondary criteria from outer in have defined human person and determined human function, relegating the primacy of the whole person to a lesser place. In contrast, God illuminates a different hermeneutic in a definitive scene when he stopped the prophet Samuel from anointing the wrong man as Israel's new king (overlooking David), "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7, NIV). Clearly focused on *zoe* over *bios*, God seeks the person from inner out for covenant relationship together—and the primacy of the heart cannot be negotiated with the God of heart (cf. Lk 16:15; Rev 2:19,23b).

Fragmenting and reducing the person to secondary criteria from outer in also extends to shaping our view of God. God is reduced (not in reality but how we perceive God to be) because what gets taught and learned about God emerges from the mindset trained on secondary aspects and categories of what God does (e.g. saves, blesses, punishes) and has (e.g. attributes of God from the lens of Greek philosophy), thereby missing the quality and depth of the whole of God which was fully and vulnerably disclosed in the embodiment of Jesus' whole person (Col 1:19; 2:9). Even Jesus was subject to this challenge to his whole person in relationship with the whole of God when tempted—unsuccessfully—by Satan in the desert (Mt 4:1-22; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13).<sup>11</sup> It is an important lesson for our own person in relationship with God to see the dynamics of Jesus' temptations as challenge from reductionism to redefine his person and relationship with God to reductionist terms from a framework and lens that prevail today in our own human contexts, even in Christian contexts.

In the OT, God uses commonplace terms for the perceptual-interpretive framework and lens: eyes-seeing, ears-hearing, hearts-understanding (e.g. Isa 6:9-10). Jesus also uses such words to address the disciples' interpretive frameworks (e.g. Mk 4:9,24-25; 8:17-18; Lk 8:18). Paul refers to mindset and lens as *phroneō* and perceptual-interpretive framework as *phronēma*, distinguishing the *phroneō* and *phronēma* that are shaped from human construction from those shaped by the Spirit's relational involvement with those who are 'in Christ' (Rom 8:5-6; cf. *aisthētērion*, organ or faculty of perception, Heb 5:14, discussed previously). John's Gospel alludes to these in terms of darkness and light (Jn 1:5,9; 8:12), blindness and being made able to see (9:1-41). Like the expression 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder', how we hear God's relational language and perceive Jesus' full embodiment of the whole of God is subject to our perceptual-interpretive framework, the 'sound in the ear of the hearer'.

The most critical issue is that in our reductionism, we shape God to be more like us. This shaping is composed with a decreased sensitivity to the qualitative and a diminished awareness of the relational, thereby, on the one hand, reflecting our human condition and, on the other hand, reducing who, what and how God is. This shaping also reinterprets *tāmiym* (to be whole) and *šēdāqâh* (righteousness) without their assumptions of the primacy of the qualitative and relational, and replaces them with assumptions of reduced ontology and function. Whenever we diminish the primacy of relationship in likeness of God, for which the qualitative function of our hearts is irreplaceable, we fragment persons and reduce personhood to outer-in criteria of what we do and have. Primacy given to outer-in aspects of ourselves relegates the heart to secondary

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<sup>11</sup> For a full discussion of the temptations of Jesus, please see T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, ch.1, section "Reductionism Made Explicit," 19-23.

importance. In corporate worship, the regular failure to give this primacy to relationship together results in practice that ignores the heart's qualitative significance for relational connection with God's heart; paradoxically, but not surprisingly, such worship promotes and maintains relational distance with God and each other (even inadvertently). We need to understand the interrelated dynamic that failing to give primacy to relationship always means we give primacy to outer-in matters that are only secondary to God, which is essentially to reduce God's relational priority communicated in his 'singing' down to referential language. The consequence is reduced worship from reduced persons to a reduced God (and perhaps an un-known God), all who speak in the referential language from our shaping, not God's self-disclosed language composed for relational connection together. A reduced God emerges directly from how we define ourselves by secondary criteria from outer in, and on that basis do relationships—unfolding in a one-to-one correlation with how we see and treat God. That is, from assumptions of our reduced theological anthropology, we shape God in our own image—the image of which the ancient poet clearly distinguished in worship from the qualitative and relational God (Psalm 135:15-18):

The idols of the nations are silver and gold,  
the work of human hands.  
They have mouths, but they do not speak;  
they have eyes, but they do not see;  
They have ears, but they do not hear,  
and there is no breath in their mouths.  
Those who make them  
and all who trust them  
shall become like them.

This referential worship always relies on substitutes from secondary outer-in aspects about persons (God and human), and prevents the new wine (covenant) relational connection from emerging and flowing, as Mary expressed in her worship.

When we have thus shifted away from the primacy that God gives to relationship (for which the Spirit is here to deepen and complete), we are left on our own to determine what is significant to God. This process has become one of self-determination in relationship by our terms, and what we historically have come up with is to focus on the outer-in structure, forms, or styles of worship—for example, relying on church tradition, that Jesus challenges in the source of its construction (Mk 7:7-8)—to have significance to God. Liturgical *ordos* function as templates to follow, thus to ensure reading the entire Bible in a set amount of time, and ensure the inclusion of certain liturgical elements. Less time-honored but no less entrenched in much worship practice is the contemporary church's reliance on the worship band, singers, and choir to help "mediate" connection with God. Or, for those of us who want to experience more than what church tradition (past and contemporary) has provided, we try to be innovative (cf. the emerging church). If, however, we seek innovation with a primary focus on 'what to do', we have just reduced the function of creativity from creative action that serves God's relational whole to creativity only for affective experience or 'effect'—even if that effect is qualitative (e.g. using candles in a darkened chapel, baking bread in the sanctuary for its much-loved

aroma). When tradition and innovation are separated from the primacy God gives to relationship as the new creation family, we are engaged in something less and some substitute shaped by the secondary. Yet, to our ears, we do not pick up the sounds of dissonance that God hears.

Whether a dependence on church tradition (past or contemporary) or experimenting with innovation, any primary focus on secondary aspects will yield an increasingly fragmentary church defined by increasing variation that we assign meaning to. By the nature of their hermeneutic, not intentionally by their design, these shapes of worship preclude response significant to God. Such worship and its language do not make relational connection with the whole and holy God on his terms. Our worship has thus largely become reduced to uttering insignificance in ontological simulation of what should be the uncommon relational response that distinguishes the celebration of life made new and whole as God's new creation family, not as a gathering of our own creation.

In worship or any other relationship, in the absence of deeper relational connection, what takes its place is a kind of "noisy silence." Most of us don't usually say *nothing*—we in fact always communicate something, as discussed earlier—but we talk from our outer person in the form of referential language, talk composed of the secondary, and indirect talk—all amplified with the noisy silence on the Internet. Our talk is preoccupied with what we and others do or have (or don't do and don't have), often in a comparative process. If the depth of our talking remains at this level, we do not make significant relational connection, and the effect is like silence keeping persons relationally distant and thus at an impasse or closed. In contrast to noisy silence is the open silence needed to listen to the other person—for example, the purposeful and relationally-attentive silence to listen to God speak, and open and vulnerable silence necessary to relationally receive what God has said to us in relational language. In this silence with the Spirit, relational connection takes place between God and us. The sound of this silence is in the ear of the hearer, that is, the qualitative heard at the depth level of involvement in relationship together. And this open silence includes by necessity the hearer listening to one's own heart.

Worship leaders often display discomfort with this open silence, and seem to prefer the sounds of noisy silence. This discomfort is evident when in corporate worship someone leads the congregation in a time of silent reflection or prayer—which can be opportune times for relational involvement with God, including sharing with God our discomfort about being face-to-face with him in those moments. Yet, there is nearly always a background instrumental going on. I suggest that this filling-in is for the purpose (though not consciously so) of shifting away from the discomfort of being face-to-face with God openly and vulnerably with who and what one truly is from inner out—an intentional distraction toward outer in. This is a way that music can create a hermeneutic impasse in worship (music in its relational function is discussed later in the study).

Noisy silence determines what we pay attention to and ignore, and thus keeps us in control within our comfort zones. We up the volume of the noise by enhancing our talk: talking at great length, with a loud voice or even eloquence, with embellished stories, giving the illusion of depth of our involvement with the other person. Yet, the mere appearance of making connection does not fool the heart, for the heart knows (whether

our mind is aware or not) when deeper connection is or isn't being made. In these scenarios, the act of talking becomes an end in itself, an *ontological simulation* of relationship and an *epistemological illusion* of connection. All of this typifies and even reinforces relational distance, keeping persons in the human relational condition 'to be apart' from both God and each other.<sup>12</sup> This experience of ontological simulation is further entrenched in the use of technology, which merely enhances the quantitative aspects of communication in more and faster transmission of information about ourselves while lacking the inner-out face-to-face involvement of our whole person to make meaningful connection together with others. This process gives the illusion of allowing ourselves to be known and supposedly knowing others—an epistemological illusion that more and more persons invest in and fail to learn. Yet, this should not be surprising since, for example, social media merely reflects the reduced ontology and function of the human relational condition. The ontological simulation and epistemological illusion pervading relationships are not mere academic notions; they directly affect us all in the totality of our lives, most significantly with God in worship.

Such was the dissonant worship practice that provoked Jesus to harshly rebuke some Pharisees and scribes (Mk 7:6-7; Mt 15:7-9), with words echoing God's critique of the ancient Israelites' outer-in worship (Isa 29:13). What was unacceptable about their language was that what they presented to God as worship was a substitute from their own shaping by offering "human precepts as doctrines." Their worship language lacked their whole persons, that is, the qualitative function of the heart in relationship together with God: "honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me." These Pharisees and scribes' remained distant from God, and in place of the vulnerable inner-out involvement of their whole person, they offered God *something less* than and *some substitute* for what God seeks from his people. These were substitutes from secondary matter, their traditions ("rules taught by men," Isa 29:13 NIV; cf. "a human commandment learned by rote" NRSV). What they assumed to be significant worship language, God rejected as "in vain" (*matēn*, adv. signifying false, useless, invalid)—that is, lacking significance to him. Even though the Pharisees and scribes were highly knowledgeable about and devoted in their practices of piety (cf. Paul's autobiographical statement, Phil 3:4-6), their involvement lacked consonance with God's involvement. The implication in their worship practice is that they assumed they knew what God wanted—they assumed he accepted what they did from outer in (e.g. washing hands before eating, Mt 15:1-2; Mk 7:1-5) and what they had (correct doctrine, rules, information about God). Their worship language reflected a reduced view of God, reflecting their own reduced persons and worship reduced to primacy of the secondary, thereby uttering insignificance to God.

These worshipers constructed and shaped their worship on substitutes from the secondary, outer in aspects composed by and indirectly highlighting what they did and had. The critical underlying relational issue was engaging in relationship with the whole and holy God not according to God's terms, but their self-determined terms constituting "the tradition of the elders." Jesus makes clear this issue of self-determination as he confronts the Pharisees, asking, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Mt 15:3). Their pious traditions were, in Jesus' words, "human tradition...*your* tradition" (Mk 7:8-9). These words stand out and raise the urgent

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<sup>12</sup> For an in-depth and important discussion of the human condition, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Person, the Trinity, the Church*, further developed in *Jesus into Paul*.

question to ask ourselves: what can God hear from many of our worship traditions and utterances, utterances which include many of our worship hymns and songs? Traditions are neither good nor bad in themselves; they are merely secondary means to support our relationship with God as his people. It is when these secondary means become our primary language in worship that they become substitutes for the response of our whole person that God seeks, substitutes for the relational language necessary to be the integral response to God that is both reciprocal and compatible with the whole of who, what and how God is. Whenever the secondary becomes primary, this composes the context of a 'secondary sanctuary', the function of which is relational distance caused by indirectness. The worship in 'secondary sanctuary' by its nature is shaped by our reduced terms for relationship rather than the reciprocal relationship with whole worshippers that God seeks.

All of this reflects, reinforces or sustains the counter-relational work of reductionism. Until we recognize and understand this influence of reductionism on God's relational whole, we have insufficient understanding of the only means to redeem it in our lives in general and in our worship in particular—the whole of God's relational response of grace, which is discussed in the next chapter. At the same time, to understand reductionism, we need also to integrally understand (put the pieces together, *syniemi*, for whole understanding, *synesis*, Mk 8:17; Col 2:2) that reductionism's work is always counter-relational—always diminishing the whole person to the outer in, and thus disrupting or completely blocking relational connection. Reductionism does this by replacing God's relational language with referential language and noisy silence. The sounds of dissonance in the secondary are the paradoxical sounds of noisy silence in relationship that drown out sounds of consonance in the primacy of the qualitative and relational. This hermeneutical impasse continues to be a critical condition needing to be addressed accordingly in order to be made whole.

## **Sounds of Dissonance**

Wholeness is never experienced as an individual in a social vacuum but only integrally as persons made whole in the qualitative image of the whole and holy God and in relationships together with other whole persons in relational likeness of the triune God. These relationships together in the new creation are irreducible by the kinds of fragmenting distinctions that human contexts construct, and can grow in maturity only on God's relational grace as their basis and ongoing base. Reductionism, which is always in conflict with wholeness, functions to disrupt those relationships by subtly getting us to shift from this indispensable basis and ongoing base of God's relational grace to our substitute terms from human shaping (i.e. self-determined from outer in). The consequence is always to reduce persons and relationships of God's whole to conform to the constraints of human templates. The consequences on relationships take various forms familiar to all of us, and these dissonant expressions need to be exposed as sin of reductionism from which we need to be redeemed, healed and made whole.

Again, the major consequence of reductionism on the whole person is to fragment our person thereby creating distance from our hearts. When our heart is hidden or ignored, we cannot make relational connection with our whole person from inner out; instead, we present to others in relationship some fragment of ourself from outer in, namely

something we do or have. On this basis of defining our person from outer in, we also define others in the same way and engage in relationships with others on that reduced basis. We relate to other persons through what we and they do and have, which is always measured in a comparative process identified by distinctions of more or less, better or worse. We bring this involvement with others, along with related distinctions, to church life and practice, including worship. What emerges then in planning and leading worship is a narrowed-down focus on the distinctions of what we do (e.g. perform in roles, years of service to God) and have (e.g. musical talent, trained voice, innovative ideas, and, increasingly, academic degree in worship leadership). This is how patterns of tradition are formed and sounds of dissonance become the norm, even formalized.

Fragmenting and reducing persons by defining ourselves from outer in results in this inescapable process of making stratifying distinctions among ourselves. In our human context in general, but sadly within God's family, we make distinctions also based on outer-in human differences, such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, and age—distinction-making not unique to our period of church history but always contrary to God (Acts 15:8-9). Those who are different from us are considered to be either 'less' or 'better', depending on how we measure up in the comparative process. Wherever we make outer-in distinctions, there will be distance in relationships, constructed either hierarchically, or horizontally; any such distinction-making renders relationships to competitive relations, if not conflict relations. Those relations emerge both between and within churches as well as the academy. Moreover, these stratified relationships directly counter the new creation family relationships in which all persons are *equalized* from inner out together (the process of equalization is discussed in the next chapter; cf. Gal 3:26-28). Among the most glaring divisions in God's church in the US today are relational divisions between clergy and laity (exacerbated by the professionalization of clergy, which includes worship leadership), excluding women from leading churches, and the existence and preservation of churches based on race and ethnicity beyond the first immigrant generation. For us to construct and maintain homogeneous church contexts or partitions within a church on the basis of *any* outer-in criteria is to reduce ourselves and others to a fragmentary condition—all done in a comparative process of better or less (even inadvertently) that renders void any basis of God's grace.

The comparative process and its competitiveness are common and recognizable indicators of the presence of reductionism in the church. I have heard lead pastors deplore the comparative process in themselves, and go on to admit they keep track of numbers of persons attending worship service. In the comparative process, the quantitative, secondary, outer-in criteria we use to define ourselves are what we look at in others, by which to determine whether or not we measure up. No matter how well I do, there will always be someone doing better than I or not as well, who has a greater gift or a lesser one. This process both reduces other persons to fragments of their whole person, and makes them 'the competition' (evoking envy) or even 'the enemy' (evoking disparagement or indirect disdain). The effect this has on our relationship with those persons is obvious: we certainly would not allow ourselves to be open and vulnerable, showing our weaknesses and lacks—that is, we close off our heart and keep relational distance, while appearing irenic.

Persons in positions of worship leadership are susceptible to comparing themselves to other leaders, and to look for indicators of success from secondary



quantitative results, such as applause and other positive feedback. The results, if positive for *me*, make me feel good about what I did in order to define myself as more; of course, if the results are negative, I can only be defined as less. Either way, whatever happens revolves around this critical comparative and competitive process that defines *me*. Reductionism thus conjointly is counter-relational as well as keeps the underlying focus primarily on oneself in this self-determination (even self-justification) that depends on what one does and has in this fragmentary defining process, an enslaving process that we cannot free ourselves from on our own, even if we wanted to.

As to be expected, reductionism in the church has unavoidable consequences on the new creation family relationships. Without the open and vulnerable hearts, relationships can only be engaged at a relational distance. Not only do we not make ourselves vulnerable to others, including God, but we cannot relationally receive those who are vulnerably extending their hearts to us, notably from God. Moreover, persons who function openly and vulnerably for relationship pose a “threat” to those who define themselves from outer in. Two unmistakable examples focus our attention once again on Mary, Martha’s sister. Revisiting Jesus’ fellowship at Martha and Mary’s home, Martha objected to Mary’s actions and even tried to get Jesus to have Mary return to be with her in ‘the kitchen’—literally and also as metaphor for human contextualization for women. The text does not specifically say that Martha felt threatened, but she certainly felt negatively toward Mary, and tried not only to stop Mary’s focus on relationship, but also to get Mary to be like Martha—that is, remaining in the controlled comfort in the secondary of serving Jesus while at a relational distance. Mary also received negative treatment from others during her loving action toward Jesus at another table fellowship (Jn 12:4-5); those persons tried to shift Mary’s person from the primacy of relationship with Jesus to the secondary of ministry. The function of wholeness is always a threat to reductionist practice. Consequently, these two scenarios make evident how reductionism tries to interfere in the primacy of relationship with God. Had Mary been concerned with what others thought of her in a comparative process, she would have compromised her whole person by allowing her person to be defined by fragmentary secondary terms. If she had done so, the only sounds that would have emerged from Mary would have been dissonant to Jesus’ ears.

A common view holds that the threat Jesus posed to the Pharisees and temple leaders had to do with his threat to their authority and power, yet this is only part of it. More importantly he exposed their reductionism underlying the practices (from outer in) by which their persons were defined in a comparative process (Mt 6:1,5,16; 23:5-7) and behind which their whole person was hidden (cf. 23:25-28). We also often hear that the issue Jesus had with the Pharisees was their legalism—living by “the letter of the law” as opposed to “the spirit of the law.” While this interpretation warrants some attention, it has not understood the underlying sin of reductionism and what and who are being reduced.<sup>13</sup> God opposes what certain Pharisees (not all) epitomized: fragmentation of the person (divine and human) resulting in reductionism of the whole (whole persons in whole relationships), and on that basis trying to engage in relationship with God. Jesus specifically warned his followers against reductionist Pharisees: “Beware of the yeast of

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<sup>13</sup> The sin of reductionism against God’s whole is more fully discussed in various studies by T. Dave Matsuo. I highly recommend the most recent one, which is addressed specifically to the academy, *Did God Really Say That? Theology in the Age of Reductionism*.

the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy” (role-playing function from outer in, Lk 12:1), because of its position against inner-out function composed by the wholeness of God’s people, as explained further here by T. Dave Matsuo:

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 yeast/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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

Paul identifies this *hypokrisis* as “masquerade,” the presenting of a role or unauthentic identity to other persons in relationships. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthian church, wrote of this issue existing in the context of church: “Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:14-15). Masquerade (*metaschematizō*; the NRSV translates *metaschematizō* as “disguise”) means to change one’s outward form

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<sup>14</sup> Walther Gunther, “Lie, Hypocrisy” in Colin Brown, ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 467-470.

<sup>15</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 106-107.

which is merely change from outer-in. In contrast to *metaschematizō* is *metamorphōō*, the inner out transformation of redemptive change (cf. Rom 12:2) which requires the transformation of one's heart, how one defines oneself, and subsequently engages relationships in the new creation family. This dynamic of presenting *self* becomes a critical issue about reductionism in worship because outwardly we cannot necessarily tell the difference between reduced worship offered to God by reduced persons, and whole worship from the whole worshipers God seeks for whole relationship. This difficulty reflects the genius of reductionism to give ontological simulation the illusion of significance to our practices even when they are dissonant to God. The key indicator of living in reductionism is found in the interrelated presence of (1) insensitivity to the qualitative in life from the inner out, and (2) a corresponding relational unawareness of connection, even as the heart and relationship are spoken about in worship gatherings.

Jesus' disciples aren't immune to *hypokrisis* and masquerade. Peter's practice illustrates his masquerade of outer-in living, as well as the hurtful consequences on relationships in the church. Not long after Jesus had ascended, Jesus spoke to Peter directly in a vision, telling him that God also extends salvation to the Gentiles—an initial dissonant sound in Peter's ear (Acts 10). Led by the Spirit, Peter then went to the home of Cornelius, a Gentile, and preached to the Gentiles who had gathered there that the Good News was indeed extended also to them, and baptized those who received Christ. On subsequent occasions, Peter proclaimed this whole gospel message, his new theology (Acts 11:1-17; 15:6-11). Yet, Peter later contradicted the gospel of wholeness at the church in Antioch by making outer-in distinctions between Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles, and thus separating himself from the latter (Gal 2:11-14). He persuaded other Jewish Christians to do the same, so that “even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy,” thereby fragmenting the church (v.13). In family love, Paul confronted Peter about his *hypokrisis*, for “not acting in line with the truth of the gospel” (2:14, NIV). Peter's distinction-making in God's family exposed his lack of wholeness from inner out, and, instead, being defined and determined by outer-in influences in his human context (i.e. “certain people...the circumcision faction,” v.12). The relational fragmentation in the church at Antioch parallels what often exists in today's churches resulting from our own distinction-making shaped by a lack of sensitivity of the qualitative in us and of relational awareness between us.

The gap between Peter's theology and his practice is symptomatic of an experiential gap with God.<sup>16</sup> Peter's relationship with Jesus had ups and downs due to how Peter defined his person by what he did, and on this fragmentary basis tried to do relationship with Jesus on his reductionist terms; this reflected his reduced theological anthropology that needed further redemptive change from inner out (*metamorphōō*).<sup>17</sup> Even having received a direct revelation from God, Peter's newly corrected theology remained an outer-in acquisition (i.e. *metaschematizō*), not redemptive change (dying to the 'old' so that the 'new' can emerge, i.e. *metamorphōō*) that reflected his relational

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<sup>16</sup> For a full discourse on Peter's relationship with Jesus, see *Following Jesus, Knowing Christ* (Spirituality Study, 2003), ch.5, section “Being Relational: The Pursuit of Peter,” and ch.2, subsection “God's Nature as Intimately Relational.” See also *The Person, the Trinity, the Church: The Call to Be Whole and the Lure of Reductionism* g ch.2, section “Convergence with the Trinity.” Both studies are online at <http://4X12.org>.

<sup>17</sup> Theologically, how Peter attempted to have relationship with Jesus was problematic and reflected his “hybrid theology,” which is discussed in full in T. Dave Matsuo, *Did God Really Say That? Theology in the Age of Reductionism*.

experience with God, particularly in the involvement of God's relational grace. Preaching this new theology, however, gave the appearance that Peter lived it, yet the sounds of dissonance speak of an ontological simulation. Moreover, the disjuncture between Peter's theology and his person in practice effectively embodied (thus communicated to others) a "different gospel" (cf. Gal 1:6-7); a gospel that has been shaped (past and present) by human contextualization, and continues to be constructed and deconstructed in dissonant terms composed by pervasive influence in the unavoidable age of reductionism. This urgently challenges church and worship leaders, seminarians, and teachers in church and the academy to "listen to my Son" in a new way, because "the interpretive framework and lens we use will be the gospel we get" (Mk 4:24).

The *hypokrisis* in Peter's life clearly demonstrates for us the qualitative difference between outer-in change (*metaschematizō*) and inner-out redemptive change (*metamorphoō*). Jesus and Paul both warned against *metaschematizō*, and for the necessity of *metamorphoō* necessary to be whole in the relational outcome of the truth of the whole gospel, just as Jesus declared unmistakably that Mary embodies the significance of the gospel for all of us. This redemptive change requires both dying to the old (reductionist ontology and function from outer in) so that the new can emerge, made possible by Jesus' relational work on the cross *and* the experiential reality of ongoing intimate connection with the whole of God, particularly with the Spirit. This is the relational outcome to be whole in the family relationships together necessary to constitute God's whole, which cannot be limited to the individual. It is crucial to understand that this integral relational outcome is the experiential reality of what we are saved *to* and composes the only context for worship that has significance to God (discussed further in the remaining chapters).

Peter's dissonant words noted at the beginning of this chapter exemplify what happens when a worshiper's heart is hidden or ignored, words that lack significance to God. Peter's intention of worship illustrates the substitutes we give God in the absence of our primary function for intimate relationships together (the latter which Mary's worship epitomizes). At the transfiguration of Jesus (Mk. 9:2-11; Mt. 17:1-13), Jesus was transformed (*metamorphoō*, to fundamentally change) revealing the whole of who he was right before Peter, James and John's very eyes. And the disciples were afraid. The significance of this moment is illuminated here:

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?<sup>18</sup>

Face to face with Jesus’ whole person (his divinity now stunningly disclosed), Peter did not know what to say (Mk 9:6), or did not know what he was saying (Lk 9:33). Most consequential to his response in worship was that Peter was not free to first receive Jesus now openly and vulnerably revealed. In his fear, Peter (also speaking for the other two disciples) resorted to offering to erect altars/tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Peter’s worship language did not convey what was really going on (he was afraid), and more importantly, his language did not communicate his relational involvement with Jesus and the others. His heart was unfree to be directly involved in worship with Jesus’ person, and therefore his worship could only be *something* offered indirectly (apart from face to Face)—building altars (tents) for Jesus and his companions. His worship offering clanged in the dissonance of ‘secondary sanctuary’—something less than and with a substitute for his whole person. We might want to credit Peter with having good intentions, but there is a crucial matter for us to understand here: Peter’s worship language had no relational significance because he remained relationally distant from Jesus. Relationally, Peter worshiped with the veil over his heart, not with openness and vulnerability with Jesus face to face, heart to heart, but with an incompatible and self-determined response that was dissonant to Jesus’ presence and involvement with Peter.

None of the three Gospel accounts record either Jesus or the Father responding in any way to Peter’s suggestion of building altars; the implication is that in this instance Peter’s worship language had no significance to God. Instead, however, the Father addressed the disciples with an imperative that resounds to us today: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” (Mk 9:7; cf. Mt 17:5; Lk 9:35, NIV). Then Jesus “came and touched him and the others, saying “Get up and do not be afraid” (Mt 17:7), patiently and in love continuing to pursue their hearts. God ongoingly engages with us in the same way, in order that our response to and involvement with God become reciprocal and compatible to God’s vulnerable presence and involvement with us.

Peter’s idea of worship from his relational distance was analogous to giving a performance before Jesus, with relational consequences that are important for us to understand. The task of building tents was to engage in a worship performance which Jesus could only have watched. The relational implication for Peter, James and John was to perform ‘in front of the curtain’ rather than entering the most intimate place ‘behind the curtain’ with Jesus for face to Face involvement. In the same way, when the worship we present to God leaves God merely watching us do something, then our worship is also reduced to a performance in dissonance before God while we remain ‘in front of the

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<sup>18</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 62.

curtain'. Such practice rejects Jesus' relational work on the cross to tear open this curtain in order that we can enter into the intimate presence of the whole and holy God (Heb 10:19-20) for face-to-Face involvement (without the veil, cf. 2 Cor 3:16-18) with our whole persons, nothing less and no substitutes, in compatible relational response to who, what and how God is with us. Such practice is the relational consequence of not understanding and receiving God's vulnerable involvement embodied by Jesus that composed a new "place" and song for worship to be engaged by the open expression of our hearts (Jn 4:21-24). By composing this new relational context and process, Jesus vulnerably disclosed the reciprocal relational response necessary to be "true worshipers." By its nature (*dei*, v.24), worship demands this irreducible and nonnegotiable relational response because "such as these" are the only worshipers the Father seeks. This is why the Father made it a relational imperative to "listen to my Son."

When we worshipers remain 'in front of the curtain', we cannot sing God's new song as the new creation family, but only utter sounds of dissonance to God's heart. Furthermore, worship 'in front of the curtain' also renders the rest of the congregation to a relationally-detached audience, while those leading worship merely draw focus to themselves, even with the sincere intention to focus on God. Besides being unable to make relational connection with God, drawing attention to those persons leading worship (singers, musicians, choir, orchestra, dancers) creates *relational ambiguity* about who is to receive the focus, attention, and even praise (notably by applause).

Grace eventually prevailed for Peter to experience the inner-out redemptive change with the reciprocal relational work of the Spirit, evident in his first epistle (e.g. 1 Pet 1:1-4,13-15). Peter finally recognized his own struggle with reductionism, and warns against this influence from human contextualization (vv.13-14). Yet, Peter's metaphor for reductionism (a roaring lion)—that is, the process of reductionism perpetuated by "your adversary the devil" (5:8)—is far more overt than what we experience today of reductionism. The reality for us today is that fragmentary persons and diminished relationships in church simply mirror fragmentary persons and diminished relationships prevailing in our context, and, on this basis, seem perfectly normal to us. Therefore, when we come together for corporate worship, we too often and too readily reinforce relational disconnection and distance. I suggest that nowhere is this dissonance of disconnected relationships in church more evident than in our practice of Communion, how Communion is understood theologically and practiced in both high church liturgy and low church worship. Our sounds of dissonance in Communion are of great concern because Communion is the definitive integrating relational dynamic in the ecclesiology of worship; and our language of Communion requires this composition, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

In church today, reductionism is seemingly undetectable and therefore easy to ignore—this is the insidious genius of reductionism that works in several ways (cf. 2 Cor 11:13-15): the presence of reductionism is subtle because it substitutes for significant relational connection with ontological simulations (focus on the secondary and indirect involvement) that convinces us of their significance; reductionism is alluring because it works off our susceptibility to self-determination by which we determine the terms of our relationship with God to define our self; and the counter-relational consequences of reduced persons and relationships seem normal to us, given their prevalence and accepted presence in our human contexts. No matter how dedicated to Christ we are, no matter

how long we have served God, no matter how active in church we are or how much we might even have sacrificed—including in service of worship to God—reductionism works in our blind spot, and Satan likes to keep it that way by getting us to focus again and again on secondary outer-in criteria of what we do or have in a comparative process from self-determination that makes us feel better about our *self*. This dissonance is not being heard today, though it never escapes God’s ear.

## Changing Our Sound

It is urgent for worship and church leaders (and those in the academy) to recognize and address reductionism and its counter-relational work that fragments persons (divine and human) and shifts our focus from the primacy of relationships to the secondary practices of outer-in worship. However, we also must be aware that transformation (from inner out, *metamorphoō*) to experience the ‘new’ to sing in sounds of consonance with God’s relational language necessitates dying to the ‘old’ from our human contextualization in order to engage the integral process of redemptive change (the old dying and the new rising). And dying to (being redeemed from) the old must include letting go whatever benefits we receive in the ‘old’—for example, affirmation from others about what we do and have to form our identity, or as the basis for self-determination—which then may even mean losing a job contingent on the old. Since reductionism and wholeness are simply incompatible, the process of redemptive change is neither accommodating nor unexacting; but its unlimited outcome is new and whole (cf. Rom 6:4; Eph 4:22-24).

What we will gain by dying to the old so that the new can emerge has no significance in referential terms, yet becomes fully distinguished in relational terms (cf. Paul’s language in Phil 3:7-9). What we gain is the outcome of the only alternative to reductionism—that is, the wholeness of God’s relational response of grace in relationship together (fulfilling Num 6:25-26). “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor 12:9) are the relational words from God’s heart to ours that call us to redemptive change from inner out to be whole and uncommon, *tāmiym* and *ṣēdaqah*. Grace is the only basis for relationship on God’s terms and the ongoing base to live in God’s relational context (the new covenant) and in the trinitarian relational process of family love (*agapē*) to compose the new creation family (ecclesiology of the whole).

Grace, new covenant and ecclesiology of God’s relational whole converge in Jesus’ table fellowship. These relational dynamics that Jesus embodied at these table fellowships are essential for us to understand in order to experience the following as family together: relational grace as the basis, new covenant as the relational ‘structure’, and ecclesiology of the whole as the family dynamic in which worship is the integral focus and integrating congruence of our (individual and corporate) reciprocal relational response and vulnerable involvement in relationship together with the whole and holy God for the ecclesiology of worship. This is the communion of God’s family that must by its nature compose our worship language.

Let the sounds of consonance emerge from us to God’s ear—which the following chapters will further unfold.





## Chapter 3

## The Language of Communion

Don't you know me yet,  
even after I have been among you such a long time?

John 14:9, NIV

The way into *direct relational connection* has not yet been disclosed  
*to them* as long as the *old worship framework* is still standing.

Hebrews 9:8

During Jesus' earthly ministry, certain persons responded to the relational language of Jesus' call to them to "follow me" to become his disciples. Yet, it is important to distinguish discipleship with Jesus from the common rabbi/teacher-student relationship prevailing at that time, based on roles defined from outer in. Being Jesus' disciple involved the primacy of relationship together only on Jesus' terms, which Jesus clearly indicated in his paradigm for those who wish to serve him (Jn 12:26). In this primacy of relationship, his followers engaged (not without struggle) in the qualitative "whole immersion" experience in Jesus' relational language in order to know Jesus intimately (i.e. eventually) as they underwent inner-out change in relationship together; this experience went beyond a total immersion (e.g. total immersion for learning a foreign language) for outer-in acquisition of only referential information about Jesus. This relationship with Jesus composed the relational progression that deepens from being disciples to friends, and into the relational belonging in the Father's very own family (Jn 15:14-15; Mt 12:48-50)—the relational progression necessary for reconciled relationship with the whole and holy God as the new creation family together. As evident from the early disciples, the relational progression does not take place unilaterally or automatically, but rather vulnerably involves reciprocal relational work composing our response that is consonant with God's relational call to us in only relational language.

As persons responded to Jesus' call to follow him in relationship together, they invariably found themselves sharing meals at table fellowship with him and others. These table fellowships were distinguished experiences for Jesus' followers in the primacy of relationship, not only as individuals but also corporately with Jesus in what often countered the sociocultural-religious norms. The Gospel narratives of these table fellowships don't contain much dialogue for us to listen in on, yet God's relational language embodied by Jesus' whole person can be heard in distinct, clear tones. As we listen in, with the language lens of God's relational language, there comes increasingly into audible range God's relational messages ongoingly and unmistakably communicating the desire of God's heart for intimate communion with us—inseparably as individuals and corporately together in the new covenant as his new creation family. Jesus' table fellowships don't merely provide us with narrative details about Jesus' life; more significantly, they illuminate for us the integral relational dynamics of communion together, whereby our language of Communion must by its nature be composed to be compatible and congruent with Jesus in ongoing communion together.

In this chapter, we listen to Jesus' relational language (spoken and expressed without words) with persons at his table fellowships composing the following relational dynamics to establish persons in wholeness from inner out: God's *relational grace*, which is extended to persons in the *new covenant relationship*, the relational process of which establishes persons together as the *new creation family* for the *ecclesiology of the whole* and, thereby, as a relational outcome only, our *ecclesiology of worship*. The relational significance of table fellowship with Jesus therefore goes far beyond the limited interpretations merely of acceptance and inclusion, for example, of marginalized persons into church membership. While we listen to Jesus' relational language, keep in mind how Jesus embodied the three issues for practice that are vital for us to grow in his language: (1) the integrity of the person he presented, nothing less and no substitutes; (2) the quality and integrity of his communication, notably his relational messages; and (3) the depth of involvement with which he engaged in relationships with persons.

As we listen to Jesus in these contexts, and at his last and pivotal table fellowship just prior to the cross, he will bring to fulfillment (though not yet completion) the significance of his table fellowships. This is a critical convergence integral to interpreting the significance of our involvement in the primacy of relationship for communion together, both with God and each other. We need to understand his last supper through the lens of the new creation family that he initiated during those earlier intimate gatherings over shared meals, in order to partake of his life compatibly so that we will participate congruently in life together in relational likeness of the whole of God.

## The Emergence of Communion Together

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke narrate a number of instances when Jesus shared meals with disciples, tax collectors, sinners, a leper (Mt 9:9-13, par. Mk 2:14-17, Lk 5:27-32; Mt 26:6-13, par. Mk 14:3-9), and Pharisees (Lk 7:36-50, 11:37; 14:1-24). John's Gospel concentrates on Jesus' table fellowship with his closer disciples (Jn 12:1-8; Jn 13-17), focusing more deeply on Jesus' vulnerable involvement in self-disclosure in those interactions, particularly at their last supper together (Jn 13), which extended into his conclusive relational language integral for composing his family (Jn 14-17). Before examining what persons experienced at these table fellowships, some background of the sociocultural context during Jesus' time helps to give fuller context to the significance of the integrated relational dynamics that converge at Jesus' table fellowships.

In the prevailing sociocultural context of the Mediterranean region, the table fellowship of sharing meals was a common expression of acceptance, friendship, intimacy, and belonging.<sup>1</sup> Given that the region was home to numerous deities, shared meals were part of sacred rituals signifying the relationship between humans and their deities. The Israelites also observed a temple/tabernacle cultic practice of sharing a meal with God—the practice of peace offerings (*šelem*, also called the “fellowship offering,” Lev 7:11-15, 32-33). For this shared offering, the worshiper brought an animal to be

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<sup>1</sup> See full discussion of table fellowship in the Mediterranean world in 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.

sacrificed, a portion of which was given to God, and the rest to be eaten by the priests and worshiper(s). Very detailed regulations were followed pertaining to ceremonial purity of the sacrifices, the priests and worshipers for this shared meal (indeed for all the various sacrifices and offerings), which apparently were enjoyable celebrations expressing thankfulness to God. In effect, with these offerings the Israelites “shared a sacred meal with God as a sign of their acceptance by him through the sacrificial act,”<sup>2</sup> and was celebrated only occasionally.

Yet, by Jesus’ time, the Pharisees had reshaped Judaism’s cultic practice by turning every meal into a sacred one, and their strict outer-in emphasis on purity had relational consequences, as noted by Christian liturgy professor Paul Bradshaw:

They were very careful about not only *what* they ate (so as to observe the dietary laws prescribed in the Old Testament) but also *with whom* they shared a meal, since table-fellowship with those regarded as impure would compromise their own ritual purity. It was for this reason that Jesus’ behaviour scandalized many of his contemporaries, since, although apparently claiming to be a pious Jew, he ate with the outcasts of society—tax collectors and sinners.<sup>3</sup>

Levi (Matthew) was one of these tax-collectors who were reviled and rejected as traitors in the Jewish community for serving the Roman government. Tax collectors were also known to cheat citizens for their own gain. We can imagine that Levi was strongly and deeply affected by both his involvement in this job and the hatred from his own people; he knew he didn’t measure up in the comparative process of the prevailing religio-cultural context, and thus very likely felt he was less and ashamed about his person. The relational language that flowed from Jesus to Levi is vital for all of us to embrace for our own (individual and collective) identity formation as Jesus’ followers.

### **Equalized by Relational Grace**

When Jesus called Levi to “follow me” (Lk 5:27-28, par Mt 9:9, Mk 2:13-14), Levi responded without apparent hesitation, got up from his collection booth, “left everything” (v.27) and followed Jesus. Levi then hosted a great banquet for Jesus and his disciples, which was also attended by many of Levi’s fellow tax collectors as well as other sinners. What happened in Levi that he seemingly left his job to follow Jesus on impulse?

Jesus’ call to Levi was no arbitrary act, no relationally-detached imperative to a person considered as ‘less’ by all prevailing standards. Jesus saw Levi’s whole person, and called him to a new level of involvement into his very own relational context (unique to the whole of God). “Follow me” beautifully communicated Jesus’ relational language to Levi that expressed along with these words the following relational messages (noted in the previous chapter): (1) what Jesus says about himself—you can count on me to be whole-ly involved with you for the deepest relational connection together; (2) how Jesus feels about Levi—I see your whole person from inner out, you are important to me and I

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Bradshaw, *Early Christian Worship: A basic introduction to ideas and practice* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 38.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Bradshaw, 39.

want *you* (not what you can do for me); (3) how Jesus feels about relationship with Levi—I want to share in intimate relationship together, for you to participate in my life! From the moment Jesus approached Levi, Jesus engaged him with his whole person—nothing less and no substitutes—because nothing less and no substitutes is the only way the whole and holy God is present and involved, which is the integral basis for interpreting Jesus’ relational language with the above messages.

And Levi conjointly received Jesus’ person, obviously deeply touched in the qualitative depth of his heart (the “eternity” substance that God has planted in all of our hearts, Ecc 3:11), and reciprocally responded with his whole person. It is critical to recognize that for relational connection to be made, there has to be reception of the other’s relational communication. And since God never engages in relationship unilaterally, Levi had to have made the deliberate choice to receive Jesus and respond back to Jesus. This response required involvement on Levi’s part to open his own heart to Jesus in order to vulnerably receive Jesus’ whole person extended to him for relational connection—that is, the level of intimate involvement requiring hearts vulnerably opening to one another. To do this, Levi had to risk disregarding the constraints from his human context, both his job that defined him as ‘less’, and also the religio-cultural barrier that as a tax collector (a sinner) he could not eat together with a rabbi. Like Mary’s unconstrained and determined responses to Jesus (mentioned earlier), Levi made the choice to respond to Jesus’ call to him to leave the old behind, and to step into the new of Jesus’ relational context to be relationally involved together with Jesus. When we get beyond referentializing Jesus’ words and the situation, Jesus was composing the primacy of new relationship together in wholeness. Levi’s further response illuminates this emerging communion by hosting Jesus at a banquet, a celebration which Jesus’ compared to a wedding feast (Lk 5:34).

Illuminated definitively in Jesus’ relational involvement with Levi is the dynamic of God’s relational grace—that is, Jesus’ relational involvement with persons that reaches deeper than our reductionist outer-in criteria (defining our person by what we do and have) into our hearts, signifying our whole person. God’s relational grace herein redefines the person from inner out, thereby to be restored to wholeness, in the qualitative image of God. At table fellowship with Jesus, Levi certainly deeply experienced Jesus’ whole person openly and vulnerably extended to him for relationship together. Only on the basis of this relational grace, Jesus intruded on Levi’s life to pursue Levi’s whole person for intimate relationship together. In this way Jesus communicated in his relational language to Levi that he was forgiven and redefined from inner out, for relationship together. For Levi, who was relegated by his human context to be less in a comparative process, to experience Jesus’ person extended specifically to him in God’s family love transformed him beyond human explanation, for he became one of Jesus’ main disciples from then on. This is the relational outcome of how God’s relational grace functions in order to make us whole, yet whole only in intimate relationship together on God’s whole terms.

The relational dynamic unfolding with Jesus is integral for both our understanding and practice of communion composed by Jesus for his new creation family, the church. Jesus’ intrusive relational involvement freed persons like Levi from their ‘old’ way of defining themselves by secondary criteria from outer in, particularly by what they did and had (reductionism), and thus believed about themselves in fragmented identity. God’s

relational grace does not see and define persons according to human-shaped distinctions based on outer-in criteria, nor engage in relationship according to those criteria, but, importantly, renders impotent all human-shaped distinctions in the comparative process determining persons as ‘better’ or ‘less’. And by redeeming us from the influence of both those human-shaped (i.e. false) criteria to define persons and the comparative process, the relational barriers and distance caused by those distinctions are also removed (cf. Eph 2:14-16). The relational outcome is the *equalization* of persons from inner out before God and with each other (cf. Gal 3:26-28; Col 3:10-11). God’s relational words to Paul—“My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor 12:9) speaks loudly and clearly of relational grace as the only basis and ongoing base for persons to be whole and relationships made whole together in the process of equalization. Levi’s experience of Jesus’ table fellowship signifies the equalizing of all persons in relationship before God as well as in relationships together so that no one could be considered better or less than anyone else. Moreover, relational grace’s demand for honesty and openness of hearts, no hiding of all that one truly is, opens the way for the relational connection of intimacy—the only connection the Father seeks in worship (Jn 4:23-24).

What Levi experienced in relationship together with Jesus at table fellowship illuminates relational grace as the only alternative to the sin of reductionism and its counter-relational influence (i.e. the human condition of relational distance or separation). God’s relational grace transforms human persons and relationships to be both equalized and intimate; the transformed nature of equalized and intimate relationships is the outcome only of God’s relational grace. Therefore, wherever the church maintains unequal and/or distant relationships (even when our words speak otherwise), then something other than God’s relational grace is defining and determining us and our so-called communion together. The only alternative to God’s relational grace is from our own shaping, which could emerge from our tradition, culture, or efforts in self-determination.

Beyond Levi’s experience at table fellowship with Jesus, all we otherwise know about Levi is that he became one of Jesus’ main disciples. Yet his significance in that first recorded table fellowship illuminates how Jesus’ relational grace equalized not only Levi and that specific group of persons, but signifies that all of us who follow Jesus need to be equalized by his relational grace in order for the intimate relational connection of communion together to emerge. To be clear, it wasn’t table fellowship itself that constitutes the experience of relational grace, but only the relational involvement of Jesus’ whole person for this relational connection. Table fellowship, however, is a wonderful metaphor for the equalized and intimate relationships together that compose relational communion as the new creation family constituting God’s relational whole. And it is as this family in communion with the whole of God that composes the Communion the church needs to recover beyond mere referential language to get to the depths of Jesus’ relational language. Nonnegotiablely, only relational grace can be our basis for relationship with God and our ongoing base for equalized and intimate relationships together as family, to compose the language of communion and Communion (discussed shortly) that has relational significance to God—and that has relational significance for us, not merely religious significance.

The grace of God constitutes God’s relational action solely initiated by God for the specific purpose of relationship together, not in unilateral terms but in reciprocal

relational terms composing relationship together in wholeness—the relational outcome of God’s relational action of grace. The relational dynamic of God’s relational grace, however, tends not to be sufficiently understood, which gives us a clue as to why relational distance (intentional or unintentional) persists in God’s church based on the human-shaped distinctions noted in the previous chapter (e.g. clergy-laity, race, ethnicity, class, gender, age). The reverse is also true: the presence of any relational distance points to our insufficient understanding of God’s relational grace, even though in our theology we are saved by grace (the contradiction of Eph 2:8 and 2:14). Grace has been reduced to less than its relational significance by our interpretive framework linked with referential language. We dissonantly define grace in either highly spiritualized generalities, for example, grace is the gift of God himself (e.g. Barth and Rahner<sup>4</sup>), which is true only on the basis of the ongoing relational outcome composed by God’s vulnerable presence and intimate involvement in direct relationship with us. Along with de-relationalizing grace, we also reduce relational grace down to quantitative terms as some spiritual gift working unilaterally (enacted by the Spirit). Or grace becomes merely about what God does for us, such as giving us desired outcomes in situations, or as endurance for a hard and long ordeal, as in “there but for the grace of God....”

Conventional theological explanations about grace taught in church and academy come largely from the influence of the Reformation: God’s saving grace is God’s unconditional love by which we have been justified before God through Jesus’ sacrifice; grace is also the prevenient force that mysteriously makes our hearts ready to receive God; and grace enables the believer to persevere obediently in the Christian life. This Reformed lens fails to perceive Jesus’ relational dynamics that embody (e.g. for Levi at table fellowship) who and what God is, and thus which fragments God (however unknowingly) from how God does relationship. The unintended result is that God ends up enacting relationship unilaterally (cf. determinism), with a primary focus on what God does for *me*; and our response is therefore what we do for God: to acknowledge God, give thanks and glory to him, and even be joyful, all enacted, of course, by grace in matter-of-fact referential terms. Yet, if we haven’t received Jesus’ relational language vulnerably, and his relational grace has not redefined our person from inner out to be whole, then our response cannot be compatible and reciprocal; and these expressions cannot be made other than referentially from outer in, at a relational distance—composing only sounds of dissonance in God’s ear. In your experience, for example, how joyful from inner out is the church?

In this reduced view of God’s relational grace, human relational responsibility is diminished in order to preserve God’s sovereignty, his place of authority; the alternative is not to suggest Arminianism. Certainly God is sovereign and authoritative. However, we are wrong to thus minimize his call to “follow me” in the primacy of *reciprocal* relationship in discipleship and render it to a less-than-relational response primarily about serving. The critical point we need to understand about God’s sovereignty and authority is that our response is compatible only on his terms, the relational terms of the whole and holy God. Mary and Levi’s relational responses conclusively illuminate for us the nonnegotiable reciprocal response to compose the communion of worship that has relational significance to the whole and holy God of relational grace. Any other basis is

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kearsley, “Grace,” in Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J.I. Packer, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 280-81.

from our shaping in self-determination (even in the theological task) that always signifies what we do or have, and thus, without question, ends up focused on me, while even acknowledging God's grace.

The following two excerpts from a study of the integration of Jesus and Paul help deepen our understanding of God's relational grace and its irreplaceable function for us to relationally know God as it counters reductionism:

Grace emerges in God's relational dynamic with nothing less and no substitutes for the face of God in thematic relational response to the human condition from the beginning, though most notably in the incarnation (cf. 2 Cor 6:1-2). The face of God not only sent light to shine on us but came *in person* as the Light (Jn 1:4; 3:19; 12:46); and the Face was vulnerably present and relationally involved, distinguished "full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). Grace and truth are not mere static attributes of Jesus' innermost substance, nor are they mere resources he can give as a gift, the gift of grace. The OT often renders the terms "grace and truth" in combination as "steadfast love and faithfulness" (cf. Ps 25:10; 40:10; Prov 16:6), which always involves covenant relationship. In these terms defined from relational language and not referential language, grace is interchangeable with steadfast love and always defined in the dynamic of relationship. Therefore, grace is not a mere gift to claim as our possession but the definitive relational response initiated by God to distinguish the whole ontology and function of the face of God, who is vulnerably present and relationally involved just for whole relationship together. Grace is inseparable from relationship in God's relational dynamic and on this basis is integral both for the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition and for the relational outcome of whole relationship together (cf. Isa 42:5-6).

The functional reality of God's relational response called grace is distinguished solely by the whole of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement with persons in the human condition for the integral purpose not merely to redeem (deliver, save) them *from* their condition (i.e. for a truncated soteriology) but only for the relationships together necessary to be whole, God's whole family on God's relational terms (the full soteriology, Jn 1:10-13). Only when grace is restored to its proper relational language can grace be distinguished and clearly emerge as distinguished love in relationship. And, while in a very limited sense this can be considered unconditional love totally initiated by God, unconditional love is still perceived in comparative terms in the same category of all love which also includes conditional love. Unconditional love is certainly special in this sense, but that is inadequate to distinguish love and thus grace.<sup>5</sup>

It is impossible for us to be in relationship with the transcendent and holy God, who is ontologically distinct from humanity. Yet, God accounts for this difference between us by the initiative of his relational grace. God thereby has made himself wholly vulnerable and directly accessible to us, embodied first in Jesus and now continuing in the Spirit for Face-to-face intimate relationship together. Relational grace makes it

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<sup>5</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel* (Integration Study, 2012). Online at <http://www.4X12.org>, 43.

possible for us to be in God's presence without the need for a veil, just as relational grace makes it possible for God to be in our presence with the curtain no longer between us. Functioning in relational grace, Jesus openly and vulnerably involved himself with us for relational connection (Jn 1:14). His whole person (enacted in his body and blood) constituted, and continues to compose, the communion of transformed relationships (both equalized and intimate) that conclusively distinguishes his new creation, the church.

Intrinsic in relational grace are God's relational messages, as noted in Levi's experience: the unspoken relational language of how he feels about us, about our relationship, and that we can count on him to be whole-ly present and involved in our relationship together. Yet, God's grace did not merely tear open the curtain for God to come out to us; grace also necessitates our whole person in compatible reciprocal response, to leave behind the old in order to enter behind the curtain and have the veil removed for relationship together with the holy God face to Face (Heb 10:19-22). Unlike the implications of the Reformed view, we have ongoing relational responsibility in the matter of grace that makes a certain demand on us, for which God holds us accountable: "The truth, which we don't always grasp theologically, is: grace *demands* honesty of my heart and doesn't allow me to be anything other than my real, true *self* (weak, fallible, sinful) with God—and eventually with others."<sup>6</sup> Without this demand of grace, our response is reducible and our involvement is negotiable to terms other than God's, with the relational consequence of having a relationship without relational connection.

Grace's demands have always been God's relational terms for covenant relationship (old and new) with him—nothing less and no substitutes for our whole person—and is the only compatible response to the vulnerability of God present and involved with us now through the Spirit. It is the qualitatively distinguished response specific to and required by the nature of God's embodied relational action toward us that tore open the curtain for the covenant relationship of love with the whole and holy God. Yet, the reality is that "this vulnerable way into direct relational connection has still not been opened to them as long as the old remains in operation" (Heb 9:8).

### **Communion with New Wine**

I don't know if my imagination is going too far, but I picture the transformation that Levi underwent, and imagine Levi's excitement. In response to Jesus' call to him, Levi appeared totally new, "left everything and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for Jesus in his house" (Lk 5:28-29). There is some parallel between Levi's and Mary's relational responses to Jesus (Mary's was discussed previously). Like Mary, Levi's response to Jesus was the choice, affirmation, and celebration in wholeness—rejecting the constraints of being defined and determined on the basis of outer-in criteria (the 'old'), and stepping into Jesus' relational context and process for relational connection together to be redefined from inner out, notably with the qualitative involvement of his heart (the 'new'). Both Mary and Levi demonstrated the rejection of the old that is necessary in order for the new to emerge, the death and the rising that we share in with Jesus' death and resurrection (Rom 6:5-8).

Indeed, the interaction that took place during Levi's celebration for Jesus illuminates the contrast and even conflict between the old and new. Some persons (John's

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<sup>6</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Following Jesus, Knowing Christ*, Chap 2, subsection "The Demand of Grace," 37-38.



disciples or other persons) asked Jesus why his disciples didn't fast, as did John's disciples and the Pharisees; Jesus' disciples ate and drank, implying the primacy of new relationship together enjoyed in the context of table fellowship (Lk 5:33-38; Mk 2:18-22; Mt 9:14-17). Jesus answered in three metaphors about the incompatibility between giving primacy to outer-in constraints (e.g. the templates of tradition) on persons and relationship together (the 'old') and giving primacy to whole persons and relationships (the 'new'): fasting and mourning with the bridegroom at a wedding banquet, putting a new cloth patch on an old coat, and putting new fermenting wine into brittle old wineskins. Jesus then illuminates the emerging new order that new wine must be put into new wineskins—that is, whole persons celebrate life together in the primacy of relationship just as Jesus ongoingly engaged in with his disciples, tax collectors and sinners. Yet he added at the end (in Luke's version) that some persons prefer the 'old'. This last comment speaks to the status quo of the 'old', and is critical for us to recognize today, particularly considering our worship traditions (past and contemporary), and thus whose language we use—referential language from our shaping or God's relational language. The old maintains relational distance in its communion, even when its language speaks with innovative reference. By its nature, however, the new cannot be limited to or constrained by relational distance and that which prevents the flow of communion together.

Both Mary and Levi expressed the new wine as they were deeply changed from inner out, having rejected the old constraints on their person from their human context in order to respond to the whole of Jesus' vulnerable presence and involvement. In wholeness of their person from inner out (as in *tāmiym*), both Mary and Levi responded with nothing less and no substitutes from the secondary, but only in the primacy of relationship with Jesus (in *šēdāqāh*). Their lives illuminate the new wine put into new wineskins, and the true worshipers the Father seeks for intimate relationship together.

Another unlikely person who illuminates the new wine emerging and flowing is the former prostitute who washed Jesus' feet while he was reclining at table fellowship in a Pharisee's house (in contrast to the above table fellowships, Lk 7:36-50). She is a moving example of a person very much fragmented, a relational orphan rejected by her context based on her occupation. Yet, Jesus didn't define her from outer in, as Simon the Pharisee obviously did. Instead, Jesus saw her whole person from inner out—signified by the qualitative function of her heart. He thus openly received her in what was no doubt the only way she knew how to give of herself—drenching Jesus' feet with her tears, kissing them, wiping them with her hair, and rubbing perfume on them. In Jesus' involvement with her, she experienced relational grace and reconciliation signifying her forgiveness. Having been thus forgiven much, she responded back to Jesus with her heart freely open and vulnerably given to him with the intimate involvement of love. Like Mary and Levi, this woman had to reject any constraints from her human context (how she was defined, and thus what would have kept her at a relational distance), to step into Jesus' relational context to worship him so vulnerably. Jesus and she shared intimate relational connection because she reciprocally responded to him compatibly with how he was present to and involved with her. The relational outcome highlights for us the depths of communion together that Jesus composes to be experienced in our innermost.

Jesus' final words to her, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace" (v.50), are Jesus' further relational words integrating faith and salvation with the wholeness (peace)

of communion together. Biblical faith is our compatible and reciprocal response to Jesus' whole person with relational trust in vulnerableness like the relational trust of a child, with nothing less of our person and no substitutes from outer in. With such childlike trust is how this woman drew near to Jesus: she relationally trusted Jesus, for example, that he wouldn't push her away as she washed his feet. She must have expected negative reaction from some of the other people present, yet that anticipation didn't prevent her from giving herself to Jesus.

Being "saved" (*sōzō*) means to be redeemed and healed and made whole in God's relational context and process, going beyond our limited view about salvation, which often stops short at only what we are saved from (sin), in a *truncated soteriology*. For our salvation to be complete, we need to fully understand what we are saved *to*—relationship together in the family of the triune God, which means by its nature to be whole and in the transformed relationships (both equalized and intimate) necessary to be whole as God's new creation family, in *full soteriology*. On the basis of this relational reality, we can now experience belonging as daughters and sons to the family of God, the church, integrally functioning in God's relational context by God's relational process of family love. This distinguished experience of belonging is the significance of adoption, not the idea or an illusion, but the experiential reality of what we are saved to. "Go in peace," is about wholeness (*šālôm*), as this vulnerable woman experienced being made whole in relationship with God, pointing back to God's definitive blessing to establish his people in wholeness (Num 6:26). The woman was no longer defined from outer in, nor did she let anything from the outer in constrain her, but as a whole person she loved Jesus freely from her heart inner out. Such communion together would likely raise some questions in our gatherings (at it did for Simon), and easily make us feel uncomfortable—even as we affirm Christ's salvation and celebrate Communion.

Mary, Levi and the former prostitute illuminate for us what composes the new wine of relational language in worship that is consonant to God's ear. Their responses in celebration and worship were direct, vulnerable, intimate and unambiguous about whom they loved, not the indirect and/or generalized responses of referential language. Moreover, their compatible reciprocal responses reflected being made whole in 'whole immersion' together with Jesus from which emerges and flows the new wine. Jesus received them with affirmation of their whole persons, a clear indication of how their worship stands in contrast to Peter's worship (discussed in the chap. 2), which was indirect and ambiguous because in place of his inner person (his heart) he offered the substitute from the secondary. Peter's worship, we recall, was ambiguous as to who it really served, and which accordingly received no response from either Jesus or the Father. Peter's difficulty stemmed from his resistance to God's relational grace, which became clearly evident when Jesus was about to wash Peter's feet. The relational implications of Peter's communication to Jesus are imperative for us to understand for our communion together with Jesus, and are discussed in the last section of this chapter.

It is also critical for our own 'communion with new wine' to understand how Jesus' vulnerable involvement with persons was enacted for the relational progression to adoption for the incomparable experience of belonging as God's daughters and sons. Adoption into God's new creation family needs to be received and embraced as the functional outcome of God's relational grace and family love, for the relational significance integral to Communion that can no longer be dismissed or simply ignored as

a mere theological concept. To illuminate this relational dynamic, Jesus' involvement at table fellowship with another tax collector, Zacchaeus, is such a story of God's family love that adopts persons as his very own. And understanding Zacchaeus' story extends its meaning to us as well. Will we vulnerably receive Jesus' relational words to us through Zacchaeus' story, to establish us also in the formative communion together with new wine, the nature of which composes us integrally for Communion to be the true worshippers that the Father seeks?

### **Communion's Family Language**

The good news of the gospel is unmistakably embodied by Jesus' intimate involvement of family love extended to a man named Zacchaeus. Integrated with Levi's story of having been equalized by God's relational grace, Jesus' relational involvement with Zacchaeus illuminates God's further relational dynamic to "adopt" persons as his very own sons and daughters, into his new creation family—implied in "because he too is a son of Abraham" (Lk 19:9). The relational outcome of adoption is the emergence of the new creation family together, the significance of which composes our language of communion, and which needs to transform our language of Communion to be congruent with this distinguished relational outcome.

Zacchaeus, like Levi, was reviled by his people for working for the hated Romans; also, Zacchaeus was most likely engaged in even worse behavior than Levi, being a rich chief tax collector (Lk 19:1-10). Like Levi, Zacchaeus was marginalized or rejected in his community. The narrative in Luke's Gospel further notes that Zacchaeus was also short in stature, which no doubt compounded the negative perception and treatment of Zacchaeus as less in the outer-in comparative process of reductionism. Zacchaeus' story is well-known, notably for climbing a tree in order to see Jesus who was going through town. Jesus, in clear relational language, called him by name and communicated directly to him, "for I *must* stay at your house today," thus inviting himself to Zacchaeus' home (v.5). Zacchaeus' relational response, likely mixed with anxiety, received Jesus with joy into his home, which surely then involved table fellowship. By using the imperative "must" (*dei*, meaning necessary by the nature of something, not merely from obligation or duty, *opheilō*), Jesus communicates his relational purpose to "stay" (*menō*, to remain, to dwell) with Zacchaeus. What defines the nature of Jesus' purpose is the relational response of grace to establish his new creation family through adoption—which involved God's relational process of family love that required Jesus' redemptive work signified in Communion—the distinguished relational outcome not just for Zacchaeus but for all of us to hear, receive and respond to.

Jesus' involvement with Zacchaeus sings the relational language of the triune God's family love. Jesus embodied family love as he extended his whole person vulnerably to a man who was defined and determined by his human context as less—from his occupation (which included defrauding others) and his physical stature, and who lived with this stigma and rejection by his religio-cultural context at Jericho. The relational outcome of Jesus' family love for Zacchaeus at table fellowship emerged even more distinctly than in Levi's story. And as with Levi's story, it is critical to recognize the conjoint relational process necessary for relational connection: Jesus vulnerably extended his person to Zacchaeus, and Zacchaeus made the choices in compatible

reciprocal response necessary by God's relational terms to complete the relational connection, thereby composing the language of communion together clearly in family language.

In spite of the grumbling by persons who saw that Jesus was staying with such a sinner (v.7), Zacchaeus did not hide who and what he was and had done, but “stood there” before Jesus and openly took responsibility for himself. Zacchaeus vulnerably made himself accountable to Jesus, and in the process of being transformed, he evidenced his repentance by giving half his riches to the poor and paying back fourfold to anyone he had defrauded. Zacchaeus' response to Jesus was with his whole person, redefined from inner out by the relational grace and family love that Zacchaeus received in Jesus' whole person—nothing less and no substitutes. The relational significance to Jesus of Zacchaeus' response is evident in Jesus' affirmation: “Today salvation has come to this house because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and save the lost” (vv.9-10). To “save” (*sōzō*, to redeem, heal and make whole) is Jesus' relational action to conjointly redeem persons *from* the sin of reductionism (fragmentary persons in the human relational condition ‘to be apart’), and redeem them *to* wholeness from inner out for relational *belonging* to the whole of God's family. Jesus indicated this relational belonging to God's family by his words calling Zacchaeus “a son of Abraham.” Jesus doesn't mention Abraham merely as Zacchaeus' historical ancestor, but to link Zacchaeus' whole person redefined from inner out with the wholeness (*tāmiym*) and righteousness (*šēdāqâh*) that compose God's covenant relational terms, and which Abraham's whole person functioned in (cf. Rom 4:11b). By implication, then, being a son of Abraham meant being a son of God on the whole and holy God's covenant relational terms of grace. The critical issue for us to understand is who and what composes persons' identity as ones who belong in the whole and holy God's family—that is, only whole persons functioning compatibly and reciprocally in relationship with the whole and holy God on God's relational terms; no biological or historical heritage, or any other outer-in criteria can constitute us as God's daughters and sons.

Jesus' relational language deeply affirmed Zacchaeus for responding to Jesus' transforming involvement—that is, on this basis of relational grace reciprocally responding in the wholeness and righteousness of a son (or daughter) of God. We need to pay attention to the relational dynamics here; we need to “listen to my Son,” as the Father makes imperative for us today. The Father seeks persons to be his daughters and sons in intimate family relationship, but we cannot experience and thus relationally know our Father if we do not listen to the Son's relational language, if we try to engage him at relational distance by presenting anything less or any substitute for our whole person from inner out.

Jesus' further relational words—“For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost” (vv.9-10)—disclosed his irreducible relational purpose for coming into the human context, not as teachings or announcements about God in referential language, but only for the relational reconciliation of persons into his own family (cf. Jn 3:16-17; 17:3). All of God's self-disclosures in our human context go to this relational purpose, and will continue toward this purpose to its eschatological conclusion. Accordingly, in the arc of God's thematic relational action in all of human history, God made *strategic, tactical,* and *functional* shifts—shifts that illuminate the full significance of ‘God with us’, communicating directly to us in self-disclosures with God's very self to respond to our

human relational condition ‘to be apart’.<sup>7</sup>

The God’s *strategic shift* was enacted in the incarnation of the Son to replace the physical sacred place (e.g. mountain, tabernacle, temple in Jerusalem) that, until the incarnation, mediated connection with God (see Jn 4:20-26). With this strategic shift, Jesus disclosed to the Samaritan woman, “the hour is...now here” when worshipers could engage directly with God’s vulnerable presence to be whole-ly known—nothing less and no substitutes—to anyone who would vulnerably receive and respond to him in compatible reciprocal relationship “in spirit and truth” (cf. Jn 1:12). The relational connection between God and worshipers was no longer limited to an outer-in physical place or, by implication, mediated by priests making physical sacrifices; now, in Jesus’ vulnerable presence, God and worshipers could share intimately together, Face to face behind the curtain, and without the veil (i.e. any relational barrier, Heb 10:19-22; 2 Cor 3:16-18). Yet, this intimate relational connection and outcome are contingent on the old worship framework no longer remaining in operation (Heb 9:8).

Jesus’ intimate table fellowships marked God’s *tactical shift*, in which Jesus embodied relational grace to redefine persons like Levi and Zacchaeus from inner out to be whole, which also had to include the transformation of their perceptual-interpretive frameworks. No longer constrained in their persons and relationship by being defined and determined from outer in, Levi and Zacchaeus were equalized in their innermost in intimate relationship with Jesus. Their experiences illuminate for us the relational progression of discipleship—from disciple to friend to relational belonging in God’s family.

Yet in his interaction with Zacchaeus, Jesus’ relational language discloses the deepening in relational progression from friends to relational belonging in God’s very own family, which by necessity now includes the reciprocal function and responsibility of son and daughter. Yes, table fellowship among friends is meaningful, but it is also only temporary, for all the participants go their separate ways afterward. New wine table fellowship with Jesus, however, signifies relational belonging permanently as sons and daughters as members of God’s family (cf. Jn 8:35; Eph 2:19). In functional terms, Zacchaeus specifically illuminates someone who experienced relational progression to now belong in God’s family through God’s relational action of *adoption*. Jesus enacts the purpose in the triune God’s salvific plan to adopt Zacchaeus into his very own family (cf. Eph 1:5), with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities that naturally-born children have (cf. Jn 1:12-13). Jesus’ intimate relational involvement at table fellowship with Zacchaeus and others like him took them deeper in relationship together in this process of adoption, thus enacting the *functional shift* of the whole of God’s relational involvement with them.

Being adopted into God’s very own family signifies a relational reality that deeply surpasses a mere official social identity, or even a religious identity. Adoption needs to be fully understood as the experiential truth of Jesus’ intimate involvement with persons that relationally establishes them with the Father in the new creation family. This understanding leads to knowing the Father as our own, the reality now possible because, as Jesus said, “if you really knew me you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him” (Jn 14:7, NIV)—which essentially means that to

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<sup>7</sup> Insightful discussion of God’s thematic relational actions in his strategic, tactical and function shifts is available in T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul*, 158-68; see also *Sanctified Christology*, 78-97.

know Jesus in intimate relational connection is to know the Father, and to see Jesus is to see the Father unmistakably as “Abba, our Father” (cf. Rom 8:15-16). Jesus hereby composed the experiential reality for persons to now belong through adoption into the family of God in distinguished contrast to the prevailing human condition of relational orphans (cf. Jn 14:18). All the relational dynamics that Jesus embodied in God’s strategic, tactical and functional shifts are the relational communication (in God’s relational language only for communion together) from the whole of God’s heart in the trinitarian process and relational language of family love (the depth of *agapē* beyond sacrifice). God’s relational involvement in his thematic relational actions—for full soteriology that definitively declares what we are saved to—are summarized as follows:

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.<sup>8</sup>

Adoption, therefore, is no mere theological metaphor but the relational outcome and experience of redeemed and reconciled persons in the primacy of intimate communion together functioning as the new wine in new wineskins—namely, as God’s new creation family. Our adoption into God’s family is the relational experience in full soteriology, the relational dynamics of which are summarized by Paul (Eph 1:4-14). Paul’s letters also unmistakably emphasize that Jesus’ relational grace to establish us ‘in Christ’ together removes all the relational barriers erected by human contextualization that shapes persons and relationships (defining and determining us from outer in, in the comparative process, Eph 2:12-14; Gal 3:26-28; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:11). God herein responds to the human relational condition ‘to be apart’—which we need to understand as the relational consequence of our autonomous efforts in self-determination—for the redemptive reconciliation of persons to himself and to each other, for the intimate and equalized relationships necessary for persons to be made whole even now in likeness of the whole of God (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:21-23)—the ultimate outcome of which will be consummated fully at the “eschatological relational conclusion of God’s thematic action”.<sup>9</sup> Reconciled relationship together as God’s new creation family whole-ly (i.e. beautifully) fulfills God’s definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26) along with God’s relational words in Isaiah:

“So is my word, that goes out from my mouth [*peh*];  
It will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa 55:11, NIV).

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<sup>8</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 94

<sup>9</sup> See discussion of the eschatological conclusion, and eschatology as relationship in T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 301-305.

Jesus' whole person is this very word embodied who has accomplished this relational purpose.

The functional shift and relational implications of having been adopted by the Father into his very own family may seem beyond what can be experienced as church, given today's normative church practices in worship and, in particular, of Communion. Yet we would not feel wary or skeptical had we truly listened to the relational language of the Son, as the Father has made imperative for all of us (Mt 17:5). Had we been vulnerably listening to and receiving Jesus' relational words all these centuries since Jesus first embodied them—that is, listening with the relational vulnerability and hermeneutic of a child (Lk 10:21; Mat 18:3-4; cf. Jn 5:39-40)—Jesus' relational language at table fellowship (indeed throughout the incarnation) would have clearly resounded in our ear specifically as God's family language; and we would long for this intimate involvement together, not passively as objects in faith but in reciprocal response as daughters and sons. Most prominent are his frequent references to the Father—"my Father," "our Father," and "your Father" (e.g. Jn 5:17; Mt 6:9; Jn 20:17)—just as the Father calls Jesus "my Son" (e.g. Mt 3:17; Mk 9:7). This family language of communion composes us in the relational likeness of the Trinity and cannot be denied without denying the relational ontology of God (cf. Jn 17:20-26; 2 Cor 3:17-18; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). And because this triune God has adopted all of Jesus' followers, we are now composed together as family members belonging to each other, including belonging with Jesus as our brother (Mt 12:48-50, par Mk 3:34, Lk 8:21; Jn 20:17; cf. Rom 8:29; Heb 2:11). Jesus' relational language is indisputably God's family language that communicates all the relational messages from God's heart to us.

Like adoption, therefore, "family" is no mere theological metaphor. If we truly believe in God's self-revelation in the incarnation, and affirm the authority of the Word, then we are challenged, if not confronted, to vulnerably receive and respond to Jesus' family language. Our corporate worship gatherings certainly would not be characterized by the primacy of secondary outer-in matter and relational distance, as often as our gatherings are. Nor would our celebrations of Communion be administered in referential language, resulting in the all-too-common perfunctory, overly individualized and relationally distant, joyless affairs that we call Communion—signifying something less than our participation in Jesus' life and our common share in Christ, the *koinonia* distinguished vulnerably by his whole person.

In a further necessary relational movement in the whole of God's thematic relational action, Jesus further disclosed the 'whole of God' at his final and pivotal table fellowship—notably who the Spirit is and why the Spirit is here. As Jesus prepared his disciples for when he would return to the Father, he focused on their persons deeply, seeing them from inner out, and addressed what was still needed for them to be brought fully into God's family, not in theory, but in whole function together. Jesus' impending departure deeply troubled the disciples (Jn 14:1, 16:22). Even though the disciples had not fully understood Jesus or deeply connected with him (to be discussed in the following section), they had experienced at least some level of the intimate communion signified by Jesus' table fellowship. For them to anticipate Jesus' departure—including his predicted death—left them sad, anxious, and afraid to lose him (which Jesus assured them he knew), thus to once again find themselves in their previous condition of relational orphans before he had relationally intruded on their lives. Jesus then promised, "I will not leave you as

*relational orphans*” (Jn 14:18, NIV); he promised the Spirit to come to them in his place. The Spirit, Jesus said, is “another *encourager*” (*allos paraklētos*). *Allos* (“another”) means another of equal quality, of the same kind, and *paraklētos* is one who encourages, comforts, exhorts, and advocates. Jesus therein promised the Spirit as Jesus’ equal relational replacement, “to be with you forever” (v.16), to be present and intimately involved for reciprocal relationship together, just as Jesus himself had been with them (v.17 with v.6). The important relational implication for us to understand here is that the depth level of our involvement with Jesus (using a relational lens) directly translates into the depth level of our involvement with Spirit. Just as Jesus’ relational imperative requires our compatible and reciprocal response of our whole person with Jesus, so is the relational imperative for our involvement with the Spirit.

Jesus makes clear to the disciples this relational imperative for their compatible reciprocal response (14:15, 23a), the relational involvement necessary to experience the whole of God further and more deeply through the Spirit’s relational communion with them. The Spirit’s communion with them composes this relational reality: “we [Father, Son and Spirit] will come to you and make our home with you” (v.23b). Therefore, as Jesus returned to the Father, the Spirit, as Jesus’ relational replacement, would now be vulnerably present and intimately involved with them (and us), just as Jesus was during his earthly ministry—the significance of which is illuminated in Jesus’ table fellowship. In the economy of the Trinity, the Spirit now assumes the central function of the communion of God’s family, and his presence and involvement should not be constrained by an overly christocentric focus, even as the church family partakes of Communion (2 Cor 3:16-18).

The relational dynamics of Jesus’ table fellowships thus integrally compose the definitive experience of communion together for the adopted daughters and sons who belong permanently in the triune God’s very own family. This whole and solely relational understanding of the communion taking place at Jesus’ table fellowships provides the qualitative-relational lens needed to understand the full significance of Communion. Therefore, only *Jesus’ table fellowship is the hermeneutical key for interpreting the language of Communion*. God’s enactments for relational reconciliation in the trajectory of his thematic relational actions—relational grace, the new covenant, and the new creation family—all converge in Jesus’ new wine table fellowships (illuminated by Mary, Levi, the former prostitute, and Zacchaeus). Furthermore, the reality of the Spirit’s presence and involvement with us today must also correct the church’s current language of Communion that has ignored God’s ongoing presence and vulnerable involvement with us as his new creation family, so that Communion indeed engages this relational significance both with the whole of God and us together.

Most of the church’s language of Communion today focuses narrowly on Jesus’ Last Supper. More specifically, the typical language of Communion gives primacy to his ‘words of institution’ as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels and Paul’s Corinthian letter (Mat 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25). We typically align his words about his body and blood/cup of the new covenant primarily, if not solely, with his sacrifice on the cross. This alignment is not incorrect, but this by itself reflects an inadequate referential interpretive lens that ignores the primacy of relationships as family together that Jesus established integrally by all his table fellowships. In other words, our language of Communion needs transformation (translation by whole immersion) into the



language of communion together as God’s new creation family, not just theologically but in our practice as the church. Thus, while Jesus’ Last Supper with the disciples has until now been the primary constituent for our language of Communion, we cannot continue to let that limited practice remain the status quo, as comfortable as the status quo is (as many of us well know!). We cannot adequately understand nor respond with new wine to Jesus’ words of institution for the new covenant uttered at that final table fellowship apart from the whole significance of Jesus’ table fellowships—during which he embodied the new covenant in communion with new wine up until then. Therefore, *Jesus’ new wine table fellowship is the hermeneutical key for interpreting the theological and relational function of Communion for the church as God’s new creation family—the function of transformed relationships together, both equalized and intimate with the veil removed.*

On this basis, I suggest that we drop that phrase ‘words of institution’ altogether since they reflect a Communion in referential language —practiced either as Eucharistic tradition from the outer-in, or as an overly individualized and inward-looking time of self-examination. We need to restore Jesus’ words to their functional meaning composed by the triune God: ‘formative family language’. This transposing would help us make the vital connection with Jesus’ prayer at his final table fellowship recorded in John’s Gospel. His prayer has traditionally been called ‘the High Priestly Prayer’, but relationally and functionally what it communicates is more correctly heard as Jesus’ ‘formative family prayer’ (Jn 17). In this prayer, the whole of God’s relational response of grace converges to constitute all of Jesus’ followers as family together in relational likeness to the Trinity.<sup>10</sup>

This latter discussion about Jesus’ language brings us back to the issue of whose language we use for the Word: God’s relational language that communicates the whole person from inner out, or referential language from human contextualization that communicates a narrowed-down or fragmented person from outer in. The latter creates and maintains barriers (even unintentionally or unknowingly) to relationally knowing God, that is, creates a hermeneutical impasse. As mentioned earlier, this hermeneutical impasse is the relational consequence from reductionism, the most formidable opponent to wholeness in relationships. For our deeper communion with the whole of God, it is crucial to understand further how reductionism present in the disciples prevented them from knowing Jesus, reflecting how they defined their person (and thus defined Jesus) from outer in, in spite of having been with Jesus for three years and participating in those table fellowships.

## **“Don’t you know me yet?”**

Deeply knowing Jesus in intimate relationship was not an automatic outcome for Jesus followers because their engagement of Jesus often didn’t make relational connection with him. The Gospel narratives tell us of Jesus’ frustration with the disciples; specifically, the disciples often didn’t understand Jesus’ relational language (“Do you still not perceive or understand?” Mk 8:17), and they didn’t pursue him for that understanding (Mk 8:14-16; 9:32, cf. Jn 4:27). Their lack of understanding resulted from the relational

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<sup>10</sup> I urge readers to engage in the deeper discussion of Jesus’ formative family prayer discussed in T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*.

distance they kept (“are your hearts hardened?”). The disciples still functioned with their outer-in interpretive lens focused on referential language: their eyes failed to see, their ears failed to hear (v.18). The relational consequence is that they could not receive Jesus in his relational language, creating a hermeneutical impasse, and therefore they didn’t deeply know him. This hermeneutical impasse is highlighted in key interactions that took place at Jesus’ final and pivotal table fellowship (Jn 14:1-9). We have much to listen to and learn from these interactions for our own communion with Jesus to relationally know the whole of God, and thus to transform our language of Communion in worship together as his new creation family.

“Don’t you know me yet?” (14:9) are Jesus’ poignant words to his disciples at Jesus last table fellowship with them. Jesus was preparing the disciples for his impending return to the Father; and the disciples were anxious and afraid about his leaving them (Jn 14:1,27b). A moment earlier Jesus had shared with them that because they knew him they also already knew the Father (v.7). Yet, as if they weren’t listening to these last words, Philip interjected “show us the Father” (v.8). Indeed, as if not listening is how their interpretive lens worked, thus missing Jesus’ relational language, not just here, but all during Jesus’ time with them. Even with their dedication to follow him, they strained to relationally connect with Jesus at the depth level of communion together to intimately know Jesus’ whole person (not just his teaching and miracles), and, consequently, they didn’t yet relationally connect with the Father, much less know him. For this relational connection to unfold was directly contingent on their old practices no longer remaining—a nonnegotiable term for relationship with the whole and holy God (Heb 9:8).

Could it really happen that the disciples, who had been with Jesus for three intense years together, didn’t *know* Jesus? As Jesus’ main disciples, they undoubtedly had been present at all of Jesus’ table fellowships, at which they had directly experienced Jesus’ person, nothing less and no substitutes, and his vulnerable relational involvement with them. They heard Jesus’ relational language ongoingly in what should have been ‘whole immersion’, given the primacy of relationship that is Jesus’ relational imperative for his disciples. Moreover, the disciples also witnessed how Jesus engaged with many other persons in a wide variety of situations (cf. Jn 14:10-11)—persons who responded to Jesus in loving worship, persons who rejected and persecuted him—as well as many improbable miracles that he did in their presence.

Most significant of all, more than any of the above, the disciples witnessed firsthand Jesus’ intimate relationship with the Father. Jesus had openly revealed their relationship, as John’s Gospel summarized: “It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (*exēgeomai*, denotes leading someone out into full view, thus to make known, Jn 1:18). Jesus had not come into our context to disseminate information about the Father in referential language. It was only in Jesus’ whole person communicating in the relational language of his intimate communion with the Father that Jesus disclosed their relational oneness, their inseparable and irreducible oneness, in other words, the whole of God.

In so many ways Jesus disclosed this irreducible interrelatedness with the Father by his relational language: “the Father and I are one” (Jn 10:30); “the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jn 10:38); “that they may be one as we are one” 17:20-26). Jesus and the Father are so intimately one, he also disclosed, that “If you knew me you would know my Father also” (Jn 8:19); “Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who

sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me” (Jn 12:44-45); “If you know me, you will know my Father also...you do know him and have seen him” (Jn 14:7). Yet, for the most part, the disciples did not make the relational connection with Jesus to hear and receive all this relational language; in spite of these three intensive years together, which included being present at Jesus’ table fellowships, they did not deeply know Jesus as he expected them to. His words to the disciples (“don’t you know me yet?”) must have surprised them, for among all his followers these disciples certainly must have assumed that they really did know Jesus.

The disciples’ assumption that they knew Jesus had to have been based on the quantitative measures of length of time (*chronos* over qualitative *kairos*) they had spent together with Jesus, along with all that they had witnessed him do (e.g. heal persons, calm the sea; the *bios* of Jesus over his *zoe*). Any such assumption on their part was now being challenged by the penetrating question “don’t you know me yet?” Likewise, their underlying perceptual-interpretive framework was also being challenged. The issue of assuming we know Jesus is critical for us to examine for ourselves as well; it particularly is critical for church and worship leaders, who have the responsibility for the maturing of the church as God’s very own family, to witness to this depth level of knowing Jesus.

Accordingly, it is vital for us to understand that there are essentially two kinds of knowing, of knowledge—knowledge as information (referential knowledge) *about* someone, or knowledge from intimate relational connection with someone (relational knowledge)—which emerges from our perceptual-interpretive framework and lens we use ongoingly. This distinction is necessary in order to fully understand what Jesus meant when he said he is “the truth” during that same interaction at his pivotal table fellowship.

When Jesus openly disclosed to the disciples, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (v.6), he was speaking in relational language as always. Though these words are familiar to us, it is critical for us to discern more carefully how the disciples (and any of us) understand “truth.” Using a referential lens, Jesus as “truth” is reduced to propositional truth, essentially making him an object to know about or possess, merely as referential knowledge. Propositional truth as object may be important for a belief system; however, propositional truth is never sufficient for the purpose of making relational connection with God, and thus is unable to help us deeply know and understand the whole-ly relational God.

In contrast to, and even vitally in conflict with, propositional truth as object, Jesus is the ‘embodied Truth’ only as Subject in relationship together. That is, Jesus’ whole person embodied the whole of God’s vulnerable presence (the life) and intimate involvement (the way) only for the experiential truth of communion together, the blessed relational outcome of which is to relationally know God. This is Jesus’ meaning of “I am the truth.” Truth, then, is only about relationally knowing and understanding the whole of God, and therefore its integral function is only to relationally compose us together as the Father’s very own family, not merely the certainty of our belief system. God clearly and definitively declared the primacy he gives to this relational outcome in his words in Jeremiah:

Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in *what they can do*, do not let the wealthy boast in *what they have*; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me....” (Jer 9:24-25; cf. 1 Cor 1:26-31).

The only boast we can make that has any relational significance to God is that we know and understand God. Any other boast we make is from outer in (e.g. having wisdom, abilities, resources), which both has no relational significance to God, and, as Paul conclusively identified, fragments persons and relationships in the church (1 Cor 1:10-12, 21; 4:6-7; 8:1; 2 Cor 10:12)—all of which addresses, challenges and exposes our underlying theological anthropology.

The disciples were hereby “exposed” by “don’t you know me yet?” They had not ongoingly engaged with the embodied Truth as Subject on his relational terms. The consequence of their interpretive lens was their hermeneutical impasse, of not knowing Jesus deeply. This hermeneutical impasse speaks directly to the depth level of relationship that the disciples engaged with Jesus (one of the three major issues for our practice, discussed in chapter two). Jesus’ whole person is always vulnerably present and accessible for our compatible reciprocal response from inner out. Thus, for example, as we respond—with nothing less and no substitutes—then intimate relational connection is always made, just as Mary’s response of worship so beautifully illuminates, along with the former prostitute in *agapē* relational involvement. This necessary level of relational involvement with Jesus’ person in order to know him is what Jesus pointed to with these words: “Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get; and still more will be given to you” (Mk 4:24-25). That is, the interpretive framework and lens we use (either outer in, or inner out) is the determining factor for the depth of our involvement in relationship with Jesus (“the measure you give”), and the depth of relational connection made and relationally knowing each other (“the measure you get”). By using a relational lens, we will engage Jesus with our whole person from inner out for ongoing intimate connection with Jesus to know him with increasing depth of understanding (“For to those who have more, more will be given”). However, with a referential lens, we narrow down Jesus to truth as object and remain focused outer in, and thereby at a relational distance (“from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away”); this involvement with Jesus is distant or shallow, and is insignificant or worthless (cf. worship that is “in vain,” Mt 15:9), most notably for knowing and understanding God.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, again, communion together with Jesus is not a unilateral relationship but only reciprocal; and the depth level of our reciprocal involvement with him in order to make the intimate relational connection in the communion composed by Jesus is nonnegotiable by his relational terms of the new covenant. Our communion in relationship as we gather together to worship him, and thus Communion, need to be composed in the primacy of our compatible reciprocal response with the whole and holy God—nothing less, no substitutes!

During his discourse in a previous setting (Lk 13:22-27, NIV), Jesus had already pointed to the issue of a hermeneutical impasse. In this discourse, Jesus used a parable to illuminate that merely being present at table fellowship with him (“we ate and drank with you,” v.26) does not constitute making relational connection with him (“I don’t know you or where you come from” v.27). Jesus did not, and still does not, assume the level of our relational involvement with him. He knows, on the one hand, when we are flowing with

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<sup>11</sup> To read an important discussion of Mk 4:24-25 as it pertains to theology and theological education, see T. Dave Matsuo, “*Did God Really Say That?*” *Theology in an Age of Reductionism*.

the new wine in communion together (e.g. Mary), as well as, on the other hand, when we give him something less or some substitute from outer in for our whole person (e.g. Peter), often even during our Communion times.

This discussion brings us back to the question raised in the introduction: whose language do we use? If we choose God's relational language, then, like the disciples, we are unavoidably faced with our need to die to our old way of defining our person from outer in—a reduced theological anthropology from which we then try to engage in relationship with God—and be raised up new and whole from inner out. This is the redemptive change necessary in order to respond compatibly and reciprocally to the embodied Truth of Jesus as Subject for face-to-Face communion together at his table fellowship, without the veil signifying our relational distance. The direct relational connection constituted by Jesus is opened to those who relinquish the old (Heb 9:8).

The indispensable need for redemptive change is clearly evident in one more interaction that took place at Jesus' final and pivotal table fellowship. This key moment, usually overlooked, movingly reveals Jesus' vulnerable involvement of relational grace, further unfolding God's relational response to transform us for the deep relational connection that he and the Father ongoingly seek. The interaction illuminates for us to see clearly the relational dynamics of relational grace for communion in the new covenant and the relational basis for God's new creation family—relational dynamics which we may often try to avoid because it makes us too vulnerable. This interaction takes place between Jesus and Peter.

At the beginning of their final meal together before Jesus was to go to the cross, Jesus approached Peter to wash Peter's feet (Jn 13:1-8). Peter refused to let Jesus do so. Why? Peter, we recall, maintained relational distance at Jesus' transfiguration because he defined his person from outer in; and on that basis, he attempted to worship Jesus with a substitute from the secondary of what he could *do* indirectly for Jesus, not how he could be involved with Jesus in face-to-Face relationship. With his outer-in interpretive lens, Peter accordingly related to Jesus on the basis of their socially-defined roles: Jesus was Peter's master teacher, and thus 'better' than Peter in Peter's comparative process. In Peter's interpretive framework, it simply was not permissible for Jesus, the Rabbi, to lower himself to the position of a servant and wash his feet. It is critical for us not to perceive Jesus' actions with a limited interpretive lens that only sees Jesus modeling 'servant leadership', because what he engaged in goes far deeper than 'what to do', which the servant model gets us to focus on in a primary way. What Jesus is vulnerably and intimately embodying is God's relational grace that removes all relational barriers—represented here by the teacher-student roles—for the purpose of communion together in transformed relationships, the new wine table fellowship composing God's new creation family.

Jesus came Face to face with Peter for intimate connection together, and Peter said "*Never!*" Relationally, Peter's message to Jesus was a refusal to engage with Jesus on Jesus' terms for intimate relationship together, but rather to stay within his old constraints (in a reduced theological anthropology) and continue to engage with Jesus on his own terms. Peter was resisting letting Jesus redefine him from inner out, the relational response of grace which would free Peter from the constraints of his old outer-in interpretive framework. Yet Jesus continued to pursue Peter so that the new wine could emerge and flow in communion together: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with

[*meros meta*] me” (v.8). In other words, Jesus told Peter that he must let Jesus redefine his person from inner out by his relational grace (the sole significance of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet) for the primacy of intimate communion together. “Share with me” only involves the relational experience of communion together with Jesus. Various other words signify this relational ‘sharing with’ together— *koinōnia* refers to the fellowship and participation together that Jesus’ table fellowship embodies and calls persons to (cf. Acts 2:42); *koinoneō*, to be a partaker in, share together in (1 Pet 4:13); *koinos* refers to what is shared in common by several persons (Acts 2:44). Jesus kept pursuing Peter in the relational work necessary for Peter to become whole from inner out; this moving interaction makes unmistakably clear the relational function of grace and family love enacted by the whole of God.

Given Peter’s final reply to Jesus (“not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” 13:9), his relational posture still reflected his outer-in interpretive lens. Yet, Jesus continued to pursue Peter’s whole person, even after the resurrection (Jn 21:15-23), in the primacy of relationship together, wherein the relational message to Peter continued with the relational imperative to “Follow me!” (Jesus said it twice in this interaction, vv.19,22). This required redemptive change for the ‘old’ to be transformed to ‘the new’, the new wine, the new creation.

Jesus’ main disciples struggled to make relational connection with him, and they incorrectly assumed they *knew* him. Redemptive change for them was yet to come, and, joyfully, it indeed did. If we acknowledge that we too struggle to make deep relational connection with him, and that we really don’t know him as our hearts deeply desire, then Jesus is kneeling at our feet, ready to respond to us Face to face, to redeem and transform our hearts to make us whole from inner out. He desires intimate communion together, and communion’s relational outcome of knowing and understanding him, the Father, the whole of God.

## **Developing Communion Language**

The language of communion, on the one hand, is an uncommon tongue; that is, it cannot be uttered or translated by what commonly prevails in human contexts, therefore it never develops in our understanding as long as what is common determines our language. On the other hand, the language of communion is not a mysterious language, because it is directly accessible and openly comprehensible to any human person created in the relational language of the Creator (Gen 2:18), and to whoever receives the language of the Word whole-ly disclosed in his vulnerable presence and intimate involvement (Jn 1:1-4, 10-13). And on this relational basis alone, the language of communion emerges in our function and develops in our knowing and understanding the whole of God.

Grace, covenant and ecclesiology of the new creation family functionally converge only in Jesus as Subject embodying the whole of God—who, what and how God is present and involved in relationship. There is no more significant illumination of these integral relational dynamics than at Jesus’ new wine table fellowship. Jesus’ new wine table fellowship thereby critically functions as the bridge between the new covenant and new creation family in the ecclesiology of the whole, without which these aspects of the church’s theology and practice remain fragmented. Moreover, Jesus’ language at his

table fellowship is not only relational language but *family language* of the whole of God, embodied whole-ly by Jesus for our communion together. On this irreducible and nonnegotiable basis, God's family language needs to transform our language of Communion to compose our intimate relationship together to be relationally 'one' in relational likeness of the whole of God—not merely as a theological concept, but as the embodied Truth as Subject constituted with his body and blood and composed with his formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26).

Jesus continues to pursue us today, just as he pursued his first disciples. Therefore, "Pay attention to *what* you hear." The language of communion defines and determines its significance.





## Chapter 4

## Liturgy Behind the Curtain

Why is my language not clear to you?

John 8:43

Since we have confidence to *engage in direct relational connection*  
...by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain  
...let us *intimately connect with God* with *our whole heart*.

Hebrews 10:19-20,22

To relationally know Jesus, and thereby to understand the whole of God, is of primary importance to God (Jer 9:24-25); this is the integral relational outcome of communion together in reciprocal relational involvement with him (signified by his table fellowship). Relationally knowing God is also irreplaceable to compose our language of Communion—signifying the embodied sacrifice behind the curtain that relationally removes the veil—in order for our Communion celebrations to have relational significance to God and ourselves as well. Yet, intimately knowing Jesus is not an automatic outcome for Jesus’ followers (as discussed in the previous chap.) because of the difficulty many of us have making relational connection with Jesus, like the first disciples. This is the critical issue underlying Jesus’ question above. If we have difficulty relationally connecting with God, then we cannot deeply know God’s heart (i.e. deeper than referential information) and thus our worship cannot have relational significance to him—just as Jesus vulnerably disclosed to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:21-24). To the extent that this reflects our current level of knowing God, then in a relational sense both those who lead worship and those gathered are engaged in worship of “an *un-known* God” (like Paul encountered in Athens, Acts 17:23). And like the Athenians, we can only shape this unknown God according to our terms (notably from human contextualization), and by extension, *we* determine what constitutes pleasing and significant worship, and construct our liturgies accordingly.

‘Liturgy’ literally means “the work of the people” from Greek *leitourgia* (compound of *laos*, people, and *ergon*, work). This study uses ‘liturgy’ to denote that all the gathered worshipers participate actively and fully, not as passive observers. It is used synonymously with worship (noun). This chapter distinguishes what composes primary liturgy from secondary: that which communicates worship directly to God and therefore has significance to the whole and holy God, as well as for God’s whole and holy family.

All of Jesus’ interactions challenge us to what is necessary to make relational connection with God in order to know him, which then means his language is indispensable to understand. This is why the Father makes it imperative to listen to his Son; and the Son makes the relational imperative to pay attention to both *what* we hear (Jesus’ relational language), as well as *how* we listen (Mk 4:24-25 and Lk 8:18). What we hear is determined by our hermeneutic, the interpretive lens shaping what we pay attention to and ignore. How we listen is determined by our theological anthropology—e.g. outer in or inner out, relationally distant or involved—which also then determines whether we worship in front of the curtain at a relational distance, or behind the curtain in communion face to Face.

Jesus calls us, as we saw for Mary, Levi, and Zacchaeus, to leave behind the comfort of the ‘old’ ways of defining ourselves from outer in, and thus to let go of the very basis by which we try to engage him in relationship at a distance. More so, Jesus challenges us to leave the ‘old’ in order to relationally trust him in new relationship together, that is, relationally joining him behind the curtain for the integral relational outcome from his sacrifice (as in Heb 9:8-10; 10:19,25). Leaving the old of the status quo in order to experience the new in communion together is nonnegotiable for Jesus’ followers, even though this faces us with uncomfortable choices. Yet, just as he is vulnerably present and intimately involved with us with nothing less and no substitutes for his whole person—ongoingly and vulnerably for relational connection—he calls us to be reciprocally vulnerable with him; and in this reciprocal interaction, he redeems, heals, and transforms our person and relationships. We can only relationally trust him as our hearts are thereby made vulnerable to God for relational connection together in order to be made whole in communion together. These are relational dynamics that he calls us to engage with him as we follow him; discipleship becomes problematic when not engaged on this depth level of involvement (cf. Peter). A critical issue regarding these dynamics is for us to clearly understand that God only engages in reciprocal (not unilateral) relationship, and seeks only those who will respond by embracing the relational work necessary for relational connection together. For us today, in Jesus’ physical absence the Spirit (Jesus’ relational replacement) is vulnerably present and intimately involved with us for the ongoing reciprocal relational work together for the redemptive change necessary to join him behind the curtain and therein worship the whole of God face to Face with the veil removed (2 Cor 3:16-18).

## **Worship without the Veil**

To understand further what we previously discussed about Mary (chap. 2), her vulnerable involvement with Jesus—with her whole person from inner out—epitomizes the compatible reciprocal relational response to him and relational outcome to deeply know Jesus. The other disciples had complained that Mary was wasting expensive perfume by using it on him instead of selling it for the poor, exposing their primary focus on the secondary matter of ministry. Jesus replied by affirming Mary, words that we need to carefully pay attention to: “Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, *what she has done* will be told in remembrance of her” (Mt 26:13; Mk 14:9). “What she has done” was relationally significant to Jesus, but not because she worshiped Jesus extravagantly; Mary worshiped him with her whole person from inner out (i.e. whole-ly) in the primacy of relationship together. Of further significance for us to pay attention to, Jesus said that Mary had anticipated “the day of my burial” (Mk 14:8; Jn 12:7). Mary’s vulnerable involvement in this way reflected the depth of Mary’s involvement in relationship with Jesus, which included having deeply listened to Jesus’ disclosures about his impending death (e.g. Mk 9:31) and also not staying relationally distant and unaffected. She demonstrated knowing and understanding Jesus beyond what any of the other disciples demonstrated (cf. Jn 14:9). Beyond a pending event, by anointing Jesus’ body beforehand for burial (Mk 14:8b), she was vulnerably involved with Jesus together in his deepest moments (“she has done what she could,” Mk 14:8a). In other words, Mary was vulnerably participating in Jesus’ life, her whole person from inner out deeply involved with Jesus’ whole person even in anticipation of his death, in stark contrast to the relational distance that the other disciples kept (e.g. Mk 9:31-32; cf.

Mt 26:40,43). Basic to each of their responses to Jesus was either understanding or a lack of understanding Jesus' relational language. In her beautiful (i.e. whole-ly involved) response to Jesus, we see how Mary deeply knew and loved Jesus; and surely at this depth level her heart was breaking as she poured the perfume on Jesus.

Communion with the whole of God means to participate in his vulnerable life and thereby know him deeply, yet our participation in the whole and holy God's life can only be engaged with him, as he says, "where I am," (Jn 12:26, 14:3, 17:24). At this vital juncture of God's presence and involvement, 'where I am' is only 'behind the curtain' in the whole of God's uncommon (holy) relational context, to be completely engaged in the trinitarian relational process of family love. Therefore, if we are 'where I am', our worship will engage this distinguished communion together, in a sense worshipping *with* our sister Mary, thus 'in memory of her' because this integral relational outcome is the gospel (Mk 14:9). If we are not 'where I am', our worship will remain focused in a primary way on substitutes composed by secondary matter of what we do or have—reflecting liturgy in front of the curtain. If we don't relationally know Jesus in the communion of integral relationship together, we have yet to join him in his sacrifice behind the curtain (Heb 9:12, 10:19-22) that reconstitutes the sanctuary (no more secondary sanctuary) in order for the whole of God's presence and involvement to be with us directly in Face-to-face relationship together (Eph 2:18-22)—"where I am."

When Jesus died, he accomplished the relational work necessary to reconcile us with God, something that obviously we could not do. Jesus' death signified his entering behind the temple curtain to make the sacrifice necessary for God and us to be reconciled in new relationship together (Heb 9-10). Yet, as we have been discussing, the whole of God only engages in relationships only on his holy terms in his relational context and relational process. The uncommon (holy) God cannot and will not engage in relationship with us in front of the curtain on our terms, that is, by the common way of doing relationships based on secondary criteria (of what we do or have) from human contextualization. In other words, only the holy God can designate where and how his Face can be encountered. Historically, the place where God's presence was encountered was in the tabernacle and temple, behind the inner curtain in the Most Holy Place. Then, in God's improbable relational action of the Son's incarnation, God's presence was whole-ly embodied in Jesus' person (God with us). The whole and holy God's presence "is now here," as Jesus vulnerably disclosed to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:21-26). Jesus himself now embodied where God's presence could be encountered, so that even *before* his death that tore open the curtain (Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45), Jesus vulnerably embodied communion together in the most holy and intimate place, behind the curtain, signified by his table fellowship. Thus, 'where God is' is no longer about a physical place (even a sacred place, cf. Jn 4:21-24), and clearly not constrained to the Eucharistic elements. Jesus' words "where I am" (Jn 12:26, 14:3, 17:24) point only to intimate communion with him face to Face in the whole of God's intimate relational context and process (2 Cor 3:16-18; 4:4-6; Eph 2:14-22). With the relational barriers removed, we can come confidently yet only vulnerably into his vulnerable presence for ongoing communion together (Eph 3:12; Heb 10:19-20). This is Jesus' call to us to join him by our compatible reciprocal response in the relational progression of discipleship to participate in God's life together as his family.

As noted in chapter two, we rarely if ever hear of Mary's beautiful response of worship mentioned wherever the gospel is proclaimed, as Jesus said. When we finally do listen to Jesus (as the Father made imperative, Mt 17:3) and pay attention to Mary's significance to Jesus and the gospel, Mary's whole person becomes deeply edifying for

us as we think about our worship language. Yet, any discomfort we may have about Mary is important to acknowledge. Mary's vulnerableness exposes those of us who avoid being vulnerable; she challenges us to leave behind our 'old'—that is, the reductionism of defining ourselves from outer-in criteria of what we do and have, and on that basis try to engage in relationship with God—in order to be vulnerable with God for relational connection together. The depth of reconciliation necessitates being redeemed from our 'old'.

Openly bringing this discomfort to our Father and not letting that discomfort constrain us is a critically important vulnerable step in our compatible reciprocal response to the triune God's ongoing vulnerable presence and involvement with us. This is a significant step of faith—faith defined only as our compatible reciprocal response in relational trust (“in him and through faith in him,” Eph 3:12a, NIV), not something to possess as in common notions about faith. Just as Mary, Levi, the former prostitute, and Zacchaeus illuminate for us, faith as relational trust means to count on God not to criticize, ignore, or reject us as we make ourselves vulnerable to him, but to receive us in our response for relational connection with him. Our vulnerable reciprocal response of relational trust is the only relational involvement with God that is compatible with who, what, and how the whole of God is and engages in relationship; and this relational involvement is the basic composition for worship. This response accordingly involves the three major issues for all practice—(1) the integrity of the person we present to God, (2) the quality of our communication to God and (3) the depth level of involvement in relationship that engages us in the trinitarian relational process of family love. Our whole person vulnerably presented and expressed in relational trust is the compatible relational language needed to compose the worship language that the whole of God will accept and enjoy with the curtain no longer between us.

In God's primacy for relationship on his relational terms of grace, being vulnerable is unavoidable because the person we present for intimate relational connection can only be who and what we truly are, which includes our fears, inadequacies and, inescapably, our sin of reductionism. We cannot be anything but vulnerable before God in order to receive his relational grace deeply in our heart—that is, in contrast to Peter, to let Jesus 'wash our feet' in order to transform our hearts. Yet, like Peter, many of us avoid being vulnerable (unknowingly or knowingly). It is much easier—that is, more comfortable and safer—to present something less than our whole vulnerable person from inner out, and so we give God a substitute from secondary matter of what we do for him (e.g. perform in a role for worship) or what we have that we can give him (e.g. our talents or other resources for worship, service and ministry). However inadvertently and unintentionally we engage in these outer-in dynamics in worship, the consequence is the construction of a secondary sanctuary in which liturgy and we as worshipers remain in front of the curtain.

In relational terms, worshiping God in front of the curtain means that our discipleship of following Jesus resists being vulnerably involved with Jesus 'where I am', thus creating and maintaining the hermeneutical impasse to knowing and understanding God, as Jesus experienced with the disciples. When our discipleship doesn't lead us to follow Jesus to be with him where he is behind the curtain, then what we have and practice is an incomplete Christology of a fragmented Jesus, resulting in a truncated soteriology that merely saves us from sin (yet not from reductionism) that leaves us fragmentary without relational connection, still in front of the curtain. There is no communion together, and we cannot relationally know and understand God from this position, no matter how good our intentions. In this relational condition, our worship

language can only be constituted in referential terms. And even though referential worship language may sound good, even qualitative and eloquent, if such language is uttered in front of the curtain, it is merely an ontological simulation that has no relational significance to God (cf. Eze 33:30-32; 1 Cor 13:1), or to us.

To join Jesus and worship behind the curtain can only be on the basis of God's relational grace—grace as the relational basis (not a static doctrine of grace) to be reconciled in relationship with God and as the ongoing base for reciprocal intimate relationship together. Jesus' sacrifice behind the curtain has also removed the veil over our hearts—redeemed from the old and transformed to the new—so that this new wine can emerge and continue to flow for ongoing relational involvement with the whole of God face to Face. The depth and quality of this relational involvement together is the primary significance of participating in God's life, and needs to compose our worship. Giving primacy to relationship together thus integrates all the secondary aspects of worship, service, and ministry to be whole. This integrated perspective is the wholeness Jesus called us to in the Sermon on the Mount, paraphrased as follows: “pursue the primacy of communion together in God's relational context and process (the kingdom of God), with your whole person (defined by God's righteousness as nothing less and no substitutes), and all the secondary aspects of life will be integrated accordingly (Mt 6:33; cf. Jesus admonished the church at Ephesus for ignoring the primacy of relationship, Rev 2:4).

Moreover, the relational outcome of being transformed from inner out in transformed relationships together as God's new creation family without the veil is wholeness (peace) and relationally knowing God and participating in God's life (i.e. qualitative *zōē*, not quantitative *bios*). In fact, this relational outcome—knowing the whole of God—is Jesus' definition of “eternal life” (Jn 17:3). The relational language of Jesus' definition thus corrects the common and fragmented understanding of ‘eternal life’ that is limited (ironically) to quantitative time (chronos) as merely unending life after death. Jesus defined eternal life in his formative family prayer simply as “that they know you, *Father*, and *me*” (Jn 17:3). This is the hermeneutical key that Jesus made definitive for our practice in the present, not the future. Therefore, whenever we hear or think about eternal life, the primary qualitative-relational significance is knowing and understanding the whole of God by participating in God's *zōē*; and this understanding of eternal life is the relational outcome to be able to boast about (Jn 3:16-17; Jer 9:24-25). Our worship, especially in our Communion celebrations, needs to reflect this blessed relational outcome as God's family together with the veil removed, for knowing and understanding God is truly something to boast about!

Easter Sunday has come and gone; the curtain has been torn—at least in our theology but not necessarily in our function. A key issue that determines which side of the curtain we worship on is whether or not we make ourselves vulnerable to God. Vulnerableness reflects whether we function in whole or reduced theological anthropology—specifically, being vulnerable in the person we present, in our communication, and the depth of our relational involvement with God and others. The wholeness of Mary's person stands out among Jesus' first disciples as one having vulnerably joined Jesus behind the curtain and without the veil, to participate in his sacrifice and new life together. She functioned compatibly and reciprocally in relationship together in wholeness (as in *tāmiym* and *šālôm*) and with nothing less and no substitutes that composes righteousness (*sēdāqâh*)—that is, as the kind of worshiper David highlighted (Ps 15:1-2). Mary was this worshiper, the same as the ‘true worshiper’ who worshiped the Father ‘in spirit’ (i.e. whole-ly, from inner out as *tāmiym*), and ‘in

truth' (i.e. nothing less and no substitutes in *šēdāqâh*).

In contrast to Mary's vulnerableness, Peter chose to stay cautious and measured, thus reflecting his lack of a compatible reciprocal response to Jesus' person (cf. Peter's resistance to letting Jesus wash his feet). Peter essentially remained in front of the curtain, worshipping on his terms with his indirect offering focused on what to do (with his offer to erect tents), and therefore with the veil still covering his face/heart ("do you love me...follow me," Jn 21:15,22). The determining functional difference between Mary and Peter was that Mary vulnerably took steps of relational trust (i.e. faith) in the only way that is compatible with Jesus' vulnerable presence and intimate involvement extending family love to her. This vulnerableness is irreplaceable, so vital that it is requisite for Jesus' disciples in order to be 'where I am'.

There are further important implications of Mary's compatible reciprocal response to Jesus that help us understand what is necessary on our part to experience communion with Jesus, to relationally know him and thus participate in the life of the whole of God. We have examined how her whole person (*tāmiym* and *šālôm*) functioned in relationship with Jesus with nothing less and no substitutes that composes righteousness (who, what and how one is, *šēdāqâh*); and her righteousness reflects that she was the kind of worshiper David defined further as those who dwell in God's holy presence (Ps 15:1-2). Mary as worshiper thus functioned in righteousness, compatibly with Jesus whose righteousness determined her own righteousness—both fulfilling the relational terms of being who, what and how one *is* in the new covenant together. Therefore, because Mary functioned in righteousness, Jesus could relationally count on the person she presented, the integrity and quality of her communication, and the depth of her relational involvement with Jesus as she vulnerably participated in his life. In all of this, Mary hereby demonstrates a person whose "righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees" (Mt 5:20), Jesus' relational imperative and relational contingency to "enter the kingdom of heaven" (that is, the relational context and process of the whole of God). Mary unambiguously engaged with Jesus 'where I am' and experienced (as she entered) the kingdom of heaven in the present. In this distinguished function from the norm, she is one who, on account of righteousness (God's and hers), received negative if not hostile reaction from Martha and other disciples—perhaps not exactly "persecution," but certainly harsh complaint and criticism (Mt 26:8). Yet, as the eighth Beatitude makes definitive in relational language, she was "blessed" (*makarios*, deeply satisfied) because she experienced intimate communion with Jesus, and, thereby, the whole of God ("theirs is the kingdom of heaven," Mt 5:10).

Finally, Mary's worship certainly exposes the worship from reductionism, like that of the reductionist Pharisees, which God rejected (Mt 15:8-9; Mk 7:6-7; cf. Isa 29:13). God specifically rejected these Pharisees' (and, previously the Israelites') worship "with lips" but "hearts far from me," much like Peter's worship at Jesus' transfiguration. By contrast, the narratives of Mary's worshipful involvement with Jesus during table fellowship do not recount that Mary verbally said anything (cf. also the intimate involvement from the former prostitute). There is an important message here, that we are worshipers whose involvement has relational significance to God only as we function in the primacy of compatible reciprocal response to him with our whole person from inner out. This response may or may not include verbal language, but certainly is composed in the tune of God's relational language. We need to hear the composition of God's integral relational message for worship: any language we express that does not reflect our whole person's involvement with him in his relational language becomes a substitute, the content of which (e.g. words and acts of praise, in referential terms) also does not have

relational significance to God. Such worship remains at a relational distance, with the veil still in position while in front of the curtain.

Whatever aspect of communion with God, more than the other disciples Mary reciprocally embodied the level of intimate involvement necessary in discipleship and worship to be congruent with the gospel Jesus vulnerably embodied. This gospel of wholeness composed by Jesus only in relational language has no other relational outcome. Stated simply in Jesus' relational language:

Being vulnerable in relationship is the reciprocal relational means to intimacy together (hearts open to and making connection with each other), which involves us in the integral relational process without the veil necessary to know and understand the whole of God.

Anything less or any substitutes for our person and in our response do not understand Jesus' relational language. And we need to further understand what underlies this gap in our practice in order to address it accordingly to be whole.

## **Hermeneutic of a 'Child'**

In chapter two, we discussed how the process of reductionism prevents us from being vulnerable with our whole person because our person gets reduced to outer-in fragments (what we do and have), and on that basis we attempt to engage in relationship. Our 'old' interpretive framework (hermeneutic) pays attention to the quantitative outer-in criteria of what one does or has in a comparative process while ignoring the qualitative-relational aspects of the whole person's function in relationships. This focus ignores the primacy of the heart's qualitative function for relational connection and thereby keeps the heart unavailable for any depth of relational connection. This quantitative hermeneutic, often without our awareness, keeps us at a relational distance in only shallow involvement whereby we limit the process for knowing someone (i.e. the epistemic process) to merely acquiring referential knowledge about that person without the depth of relationally knowing them. The lack or absence of relational connection has been the norm in relationships—both past and present in our human condition—and any deeper connection has become not only an inconvenience but also a matter of avoidance. This norm is increasingly evident globally with the multitude of connections made through social media, and locally in the U.S. with the emotionally-vacant connections of a "hook-up culture" among the millennial generation (teens and young adults)—both designed for minimal engagement in shallow relationships.

In our relationship of following Jesus, we allow these dynamics, however unknowingly, to prevent our vulnerable involvement necessary to receive Jesus in his relational language, and to prevent our vulnerable response to be able to 'speak' his relational language in intimate relationship together. Therefore, Jesus has conclusively revealed that to vulnerably follow him on his relational terms unavoidably necessitates our reciprocal responsibility to become vulnerable in the process of redemptive change of our perceptual-interpretive framework (cf. Paul's same imperative, Rom 8:5-6, 12:2). Our 'old' interpretive framework (*phronēma*) and lens (*phroneō*) and its epistemic process must be redeemed and made 'new' in order to learn from inner out his relational language (i.e. vulnerable relational involvement in communion together, or 'whole immersion') necessary to relationally know him. This redemptive change is nonnegotiable, so that any effort composed by reductionism in ourselves (e.g. as self-determination) becomes

exposed in our distance (qualitatively, emotionally, relationally), and therein confronts our assumptions. This interpretation is not open to variation if it is to transform our involvement in worship, church, and even theological education. Our critical part in this process is first to be vulnerable with God, as Jesus conclusively illuminates in key interactions in which he invokes the relational involvement of a ‘child’.

In three interactions critical for us to consider carefully, Jesus focused his disciples (and others) on little children as a metaphor for persons who function with the hermeneutic and epistemic process needed to make relational connection with Jesus on his relational terms and thereby know and understand the whole of God. How so? The unpretentious vulnerable function of little children represents the compatible relational response and depth of involvement distinguishing the true worshipers the Father seeks (e.g. Mary). With this relational lens, therefore, Jesus makes it imperative for his followers to engage in relationship with the vulnerable involvement of a ‘child-person’. This engagement is nonnegotiable for all who follow Jesus to be with him ‘where I am’ in order to make the relational connection necessary to become daughters and sons who know and understand God, and accordingly worship in spirit and truth without the veil.

The **first key interaction** is recorded in Luke (Lk 10:17-23, briefly mentioned in the Introduction). After having completed their mission, Jesus’ seventy-two disciples “returned with joy” (*chara*, related to *charis*, grace). Excitedly, in this relational outcome of grace, they reported to Jesus what had taken place in his name. They expressed themselves freely, even vulnerably, to Jesus, quite in contrast to those times they were constrained to share with him (e.g. Mk 8:16, 9:32; Lk 9:45; Jn 4:27). In response, Jesus expressed his own joy by skipping and leaping ebulliently (*agalliaō*) in the Spirit, praising the Father with his whole person from inner out, both verbally and also by dancing about, freely and vulnerably as a child would (cf. Isa 11:6). He praised the Father, “because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants [or little children].”

In this key passage, Jesus juxtaposes the ‘wise and learned or intelligent’ (*sophos* and *synetos*) and ‘little child’ (*nēpios*), and in doing so distinguishes which persons receive and thus complete the relational connection initiated by God’s vulnerable self-disclosures. Characteristic of the ‘wise and learned’ is their quantitative interpretive framework that pays attention to outer aspects of Jesus, such as his teaching and actions, and consequently who acquire only referential knowledge about him. Their limited epistemic process focuses only on Jesus as object to learn about fragmentary or disembodied knowledge (e.g. propositional truth), but without vulnerable involvement of their own person to engage Jesus as Subject in relationship together. Most of us have functioned as the ‘wise and learned’ (knowingly or unknowingly), treating God’s self-disclosures with measured involvement that gives primacy to the outer-in function of reasoning (the intellect) without the heart’s qualitative function. This rationalizing approach to God’s self-disclosures characterizes the prevailing mode in biblical studies and theology in the academy, but also can apply to teaching in church, or in personal Bible study. Yet, Jesus is not in any way suggesting fideism (faith without reason). The relational consequence for the ‘wise and learned’ is that God’s vulnerable self-disclosures for relationship together remain “hidden” and relational connection cannot be experienced—signifying the congruence of functioning with the veil, in front of the curtain. This relational gap is insurmountable by the working of the human mind, whose hermeneutic is capable of shaping and constructing merely epistemic illusion and ontological simulation.



In contrast to the ‘wise and learned’ are persons who function with the interpretive lens and epistemic process of ‘little children’. The Greek word *nēpios* is formed from *nē* (not) and *epōs* (word), literally meaning “wordless,” referring to a child too young to talk—that is, more precisely, an infant. Babies this young do not yet talk in developed language, yet communicate and make relational connection with their whole person. This relational reality should not elude us in defining the significance of our person. They openly receive communication from others and communicate, albeit nonverbally. The significance that Jesus highlights of these child-persons is their use of a qualitative-relational interpretive framework and compatible epistemic process that gives primacy to relational connection with Jesus by vulnerably receiving his whole person (not to mere referential words in his teaching), and reciprocally responding in their own vulnerableness. Because of their open (not measured) reception and response, God’s self-disclosures are thus able to be “revealed” and relational connection made (cf. Heb 9:8; 10:19-22). This distinguished relational connection is what was “well-pleasing” to the Father, which Jesus knew because it was delightful to him as well. This vulnerableness for relational connection with the whole of God is irreplaceable, therefore, to compose our involvement in worship that is well-pleasing to God. These relational dynamics are vital for us to understand if our worship is to also distinguish the whole and holy God, and not an un-known God we have shaped.

The hermeneutic we use is critical to define the person Jesus whom we follow, and to determine the known from un-known God whom we worship. The following excerpts deepen our understanding of the distinction Jesus is making between the wise-learned person and the child-person:

[Jesus] was not suggesting that God’s revelation was selectively given to only certain persons, and thus not available to all. His only focus here is about knowing and understanding God’s self-disclosure, which is grasped not as observers (however astute) but understood only by involvement in the relational context and process by which God communicates.

The “young children” (*nepios*), about whom Jesus was so excited, is a metaphor for a person from inner out, not from outer in: an unassuming person just 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 as characteristic of most children). More specifically, this “child-person” functions by using the mind ingenuously in likeness of the whole of God, without unnecessarily complicating matters or overanalyzing things, yet not over-simplistic or foolish, thus compatible with the qualitative presence of God—a mind distinct from what prevails in the human context. Most important, therefore, this child-person’s mind does not function apart from the heart in order to entrust one’s whole person—nothing less and no substitutes—to be vulnerably present 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 prevailing terms, this metaphor includes the function of a perceptual-interpretive framework that is unrestricted by predispositions and biases. As our mind grows in development, we also put on different lenses that tend to become more and more restricting and essentially reductionist (e.g. imagination, creativity, spontaneity decrease)—as in the trained incapacities often from higher learning. This ironic development describes “the wise and intelligent or learned,”

who, as Jesus directly implied, depend on their rationality (*sophos* and *synetos*) without epistemic humility. Consequently, they fail to function as the whole person from inner out necessary by nature to engage the relational epistemic process to receive God's self-disclosures and know the whole of God in relationship together—resulting in the relational consequence to labor in fragmentation and not truly be whole.<sup>1</sup>

A child-person characterizes the 'soft', vulnerable heart that is open to others (in Scripture referred to as "circumcised hearts," e.g. Dt 10:16, 30:6; Rom 2:29) in contrast to "hardened hearts" (e.g. Ps 95:8; Zec 7:12; Mk 10:5; Heb 3:15; cf. Eze 36:26). This openness to others signifies being both sensitive to the qualitative and relationally aware, thereby composing the hearts sought by God that are available for relational connection together. Recent studies on babies highlight how deeply babies are relationally aware and sensitive to the qualitative in interactions, and help us understand more deeply why Jesus uses babies as the metaphor for our necessary involvement with him. For example, babies' vulnerability to others is confirmed by one such baby study:

Human babies, notably, cry more to the cries of other babies than to tape recordings of their *own* crying, suggesting that they are responding to their awareness of someone else's pain, not merely to a certain pitch of sound. Babies also seem to want to assuage the pain of others: once they have enough physical competence (starting at about 1 year old), they soothe others in distress by stroking and touching or by handing over a bottle or toy. There are individual differences, to be sure, in the intensity of response: some babies are great soothers; others don't care as much. But the basic impulse seems common to all.<sup>2</sup>

Also, consider these comments from psychology professor Paul Bloom, indicating how babies communicate their innate relational nature without words (*nēpios*):

Psychologists had known for a while that even the youngest of babies treat people different from inanimate objects. Babies like to look at faces; they mimic them, they smile at them. They expect engagement: if a moving object becomes still, they merely lose interest; if a person's face becomes still, however, they become distressed.<sup>3</sup>

Babies quite naturally stare at strangers. They are curious and haven't yet been

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<sup>1</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology & Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel*, 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bloom, "The Moral Life of Babies." Online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/09/magazine/09babies-t.html>. To view a video of the baby studies in action, go to <http://www.nytimes.com/video/2010/05/04/magazine/1247467772000/can-babies-tell-right-from-wrong.html>.

<sup>3</sup> A YouTube post narrated by Dr. Edward Tronick of University of Massachusetts Boston shows an interaction between a year-old baby girl and her mother interacting face to face. They are thoroughly engaged together. Then the mother makes her face "still" or blank. It's painful to watch as the baby tries unsuccessfully to re-engage her mother out of her still face, becomes distressed, and ends up crying (which was painful to watch). Online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZht0>.

Other studies about babies at Yale University have shown babies reacting favorably to helpful puppets while rejecting mean unhelpful puppets. <http://yaledailynews.com/crosscampus/2010/05/05/oh-baby-infants-are-moral-bloom-tells-nyt-mag>. These results are discussed by Yale psychologist Paul Bloom, "Bred in the Bone: The Moral Life of Babies," online <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/09/magazine/09babies-t.html>. Accessed Dec. 18, 2012.

socialized by the message “It’s not polite to stare.” When my husband and I are out, we sometimes see families with babies. At times, the babies will stare at us, and we smile at them, say “hi” and give a little wave. They then either grin happily and flap their arms or look away shyly only to look back again and again. However brief the interaction is, the relational connection has unmistakable significance to them, and we certainly delight in the connection too. Such interactions and the further understanding we gain from baby studies confirm Jesus’ deep knowledge of babies and child-persons underlying his imperative for connection, that they function with relational significance in the three major issues for all our practice that all of Jesus’ followers have to account for. To review, they are (1) the integrity and vulnerability of the person we present, (2) the quality and integrity of our communication from inner out, and (3) the depth of relationship engaged for relational connection. Babies communicate through their unspoken relational language of facial expressions, physical gestures, and sounds, with their lens focused on the qualitative over the quantitative. We certainly can learn from babies why becoming like a child-person is a relational imperative for Jesus’ followers to worship inner out in spirit and truth on his vulnerable relational terms.

None of these relational dynamics are new to us, because all of us were at one time babies born with the qualitative-relational interpretive framework and relational epistemic process. Yet, not surprisingly, most if not all of us change from that kind of vulnerability in relationships; we have ‘lost’ these relational functions through ‘trained incapacities’ from reductionism, as noted in the quote above. Adulthood in every culture (to my knowledge) has this consequence. The lack of vulnerability characterizes even our most significant relationships—with God and other loved ones—and prevails in most of our worship gatherings. The relational implication in worship is that without the vulnerableness that composes the hermeneutic of a child, we remain worshipping in front of the curtain and thus maintaining the veil—not relationally connecting with the Lord; and our worship consists of substitutes from the secondary of what we do and have, the significance of which is shaped only by human contextualization. This so-called worship certainly is neither relationally significant to God nor relationally satisfying to us. Yet, such worship in front of the curtain is the status quo prevailing in so much of our worship experience. It is not clear whether we keep the status quo because either we are merely resigned to the lack of relational connection, or we have given up and assume such communion is consigned to the ‘not yet’ of eschatology; perhaps we in fact prefer it this way. In any case, we are called to account for Jesus’ relational imperative for worship—“must worship in spirit and truth”—which means to be vulnerable in relationship with the whole of God with our whole person, nothing less (or more) and no substitutes.

The redemptive change we must undergo from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ must include leaving behind our quantitative interpretive frameworks and referential epistemic processes which we have cherished as ‘wise and learned’ persons; leaving the old is requisite in order to emerge with the new qualitative-relational interpretive framework and relational epistemic process essential to be able to hear, receive, and respond to and with Jesus’ relational language with our whole person from inner out. This is the integral redemptive change that Jesus challenged Nicodemus with (“you must be born from above” or “born anew,” Jn 3:3,7) in order to see or enter the kingdom of God (vv.3,5)—which we have already identified as the relational context and process of the whole of God.<sup>4</sup> Jesus makes this further relational imperative in a second interaction (to be

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<sup>4</sup> See a fuller discussion about Jesus’ key interaction with Nicodemus in T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 156-59, 188.

discussed shortly) to address the disciples on their common (i.e. not holy or uncommon) outer-in function from human contextualization and the relational barriers evident among them. How the disciples responded to Jesus' hermeneutical correction is not immediately apparent.

The hermeneutic and epistemic process we use in our relationship with God—either that of 'wise and learned' and or of the 'child-person'—composes either referential language and fragmentary knowledge about God, or relational language and whole knowledge of God. This difference distinguishing the two conflicting ways we function is the difference between immature and the mature followers of Jesus, a paradoxical difference that challenges our sociocultural notions of maturity (Heb 5:11-14). The writer of Hebrews admonishes persons for being "dull in understanding" (i.e. lazy or sluggish in understanding v.11), just as Jesus critiqued his disciples for failing to know and understand his self-closures (Mk 8:17-21; cf. Lk 9:45). These persons are immature ("infant" in the negative sense of being undeveloped, i.e. "you need milk," Heb 5:12), who are stuck on the fundamentals of God's disclosures ("elementary truths of God's word," NIV; cf. the common overly christocentric focus of much of our worship services, Heb 6:1), and not growing in understanding the necessity of righteousness (the whole of who, what, and how one is) as the essential relational function for covenant relationship with God (v.13). Whether we function as 'wise and learned' or 'dull in understanding', both reflect the lack of 'soft hearts' of vulnerableness to both receive and relationally respond to God's vulnerable self-closures embodied by Jesus' whole person, and thus are not able to follow him behind the curtain to be with the whole of God Face to face without the veil.

The writer contrasts these immature ones still feeding on milk with the mature who go on to solid food. What distinguishes the mature is that they use their organ of sense and perception, that is, their hermeneutical means (*aisthētērion*, v.14), to perceive, receive, and respond to God's self-disclosures. They are able to know and understand God because they have responded compatibly to the whole of God as "those who are being made holy [uncommon]" (Heb 10:14), joining Jesus behind the curtain (Heb 6:19, 10:19-22). The writer of Hebrews included this key discussion about *aisthētērion* (perceptual-interpretive framework and lens) to address persons' apparent lack of relational trust necessary to experience communion together with the whole of God without the use of a veil (i.e. any form of relational distance). Conjoined with Jesus' words about the hermeneutic of a 'child', the mature are, ironically, those who become a child-person, while the immature are like the 'wise and learned'—quite in contrast to and conflict with the measuring stick for so-called mature Christians from human contextualization! With this irony we should be encouraged, because the blessed outcome of any epistemic and relational humility exercised to become a child-person is to experience nothing less and no substitutes of the whole of God, thereby to know and understand God, and whereby be worshipers congruent with the Father's desires—to his great pleasure.

The **second key interaction** takes place between Jesus and the disciples, and begins with the disciples embroiled in the comparative process of 'better-less' indicated by social ranking ("Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Mt 18:1-4; cf. Mk 9:33-34; Lk 9:46). Their reductionism (i.e. their reduced theological anthropology) was on full display. In response to them, Jesus brought a little child into their midst and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never *participate in the kingdom of heaven*" (v.3). Jesus is making being 'where I am'

(signified by “the kingdom of heaven”<sup>5</sup>) contingent on “change and become like little children.” Jesus is not literally telling his disciples to behave like very young children; such a view would be to interpret Jesus’ language referentially from outer in and fail to understand Jesus (which was Nicodemus’ problem, Jn 3:4,9). Nor is Jesus idealizing children. In direct response to their reductionism, which constrained them from making relational connection with him and created competition with each other, Jesus focused them on how they needed to change in order to participate in his life behind the curtain for communion together without the veil.

To “humble *oneself*” (in reflexive voice, Mt 18:4) is Jesus’ relational imperative for his followers to be involved with him openly with their whole person from inner out. Essential to humbling oneself is the vulnerableness of a child-person—that is, without pretense, without “masks” to hide behind, without presenting anything less or any substitute for one’s whole person. Although Jesus did not specifically address the issue of masks in this interaction, it is important to understand how the use of “masks” counters vulnerableness of a child-person. The use of masks is to present an identity to God (and others) in relationship that is different from our whole person from inner out. Masks in Greek theater were used by actors to play a role, a character or identity other than their own; this is the significance of the masquerade of *hypokrisis* that both Jesus and Paul rebuked (Lk 12:1-3; 2 Cor 11:13-15). Peter was later confronted by Paul for just such hypocrisy (Gal 2:11-14), which reflected the need for Peter’s further transformation from inner out. The relational consequence of such a presentation is always functionally indicated in relational distance.

For Jesus’ disciples today, this common dynamic of *hypokrisis* continues to have direct consequences for the person we present to others in our relationships—notably with God and in the church family but also in the world. The primacy of relationship that God created us for will always be reduced to secondary importance when persons function with masks, even unknowingly and unintentionally. This reduced priority sets in motion a reordering of relationships together whose appearance has no real significance (cf. Heb 9:9-10). In other words, masks function in ontological simulation, namely in church only simulating the new creation family.

For the focus of this study—the interpretation, understanding and meaning of worship language—the use of masks (i.e. engage in masquerade, or *hypokrisis*) in worship is especially problematic. To use a mask is to perform a role from outer in of worship leader, musician, singer, or preacher, including a gathering of worshipers, all enacted to construct the drama of worship. Masks in worship give the appearance of worshiping God, of being devout, even spiritually mature—but are not vulnerably involved with God or each other with the vulnerableness of a child-person that Jesus clearly makes imperative. The outer-in performance of these roles draws attention and gives primacy to the outer presentation of what one does and has, for example, musical talent, eloquence, style in preaching, even demonstrative singing—performed even with the intention of worshiping God. The significance of one’s performance is always measured in a comparative process, whether in comparison to what others do and have, or by the comparative feedback we get from others who also focus on the performance. Such feedback is given in our churches increasingly as praise and applause directly following a performance, and this is extremely problematic in worship and feeds the underlying concern expressed by the disciples “Who is the greatest?” Consequently, praise and applause after any performance in worship creates relational ambiguity—that

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<sup>5</sup> See a fuller discussion of the kingdom of heaven in T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 175-79.

is, who is being praised? Some sensitive worship leaders figure out ways to deflect applause in God's direction, but rare are those who intentionally teach congregations to praise only God. This relational ambiguity exists in all Christian contexts wherever Jesus' disciples define themselves from outer in (signified by "who is greatest?"), but is particularly grievous in worship. Our worship language becomes unintelligible as communication that distinguishes reciprocal relational response to the Face of God. Thus, prevalence of relationally ambiguous worship reflects the reductionism in worship and church leadership, reflecting reductionism's counter-relational work. Jesus holds with special accountability those who are leaders and teachers in worship, church and the academy (Mt 18:5-6) because all such persons have the relational responsibility to help others grow in relationship on God's relational terms only—for the primacy God gives to relationally knowing and understanding *him*.

To function with masks, or with the veil, is the antithesis of righteousness, because God cannot relationally count on mask-veil users in worship to be whole-ly who, what and how they truly are from inner out; the person they present to God in worship functions less than whole, at a relational distance, as one yet to be mature (Heb 5:13). These are not worshipers who worship in spirit and truth without the veil, but persons with the veil (often presenting extremely attractive and convincing selves) still in place. To humble oneself to become a child-person ("become humble like this child," Mt 18:4) is to come with honesty of our heart to God about our sin (including the sin of reductionism), fully accepting we are utterly incapable to make relational connection with God on our own terms from self-determination. This vulnerable relational posture before the whole and holy God is what Jesus makes clear in the first Beatitude (cf. 'poor in spirit', Mt 5:3). To thus humble ourselves is an inescapable step in the redemptive process of dying to the 'old' way of defining our self, which includes our masquerade, and to be redefined 'new' from inner out by only God's relational grace to remove our veil, thereby to be made whole in face to Face relational connection (cf. Eph 4:24).<sup>6</sup>

Refocusing now on the interaction between Jesus and his disciples, with his words "welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Mt 18:5), Jesus redirects the disciples' involvement in God's relational context and process to include their involvement with each other—in response to their counter-relational concern in a comparative-competitive process. Jesus makes clear that just as they must function in vulnerableness for communion together with him in order to participate in the kingdom of heaven (signified by "in my name"), they must also deliberately function with this same depth of relational involvement with each other—that is, to "welcome" each other in congruent function as his followers ("welcomes me"). "Welcome" (*dechomai*) means to accept deliberately and readily—that is, without the distinctions from human contextualization, which they were not doing; Jesus thus indicated how they needed to further change to function in relational likeness with how the whole of God engages in relationships. We need also to apply Jesus' words to how we function in our worship gatherings so that our relationships are reordered in this primacy; our vulnerable involvement with God is inseparable from how we are engaged with each other if we are indeed functioning new as God's family (cf. Jn 13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn 4:7-12). In other words, worship is not primarily an individual experience but the whole function of the church as the new creation in likeness of the Trinity (cf. Col 3:9-17).

In the whole of this key discourse (Mt 18:1-9), Jesus is engaged in nothing short

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<sup>6</sup> For a helpful discussion on the Beatitudes for identity formation of Jesus' followers, I recommend T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel*, 221-240.

of the integral relational work of redemptive reconciliation. That is, we need to keep in mind that in this interaction, Jesus is taking the disciples through his deep relational work necessary to redemptively reconcile them to the whole of God to be new creation family together. Therefore, our understanding about reconciliation needs to go much further and deeper than common notions from human contexts, for example, that reconciliation is merely about removing the cause of conflict between two parties. With this limited view, reconciliation with God is merely about peaceful coexistence with God. Such a view of reconciliation is insufficient for intimate communion with the whole and holy God, whose being is qualitatively constituted by heart, whose distinguished nature is relational, and whose ongoing presence is vulnerably involved.

The work Jesus is engaged in is to clearly illuminate for his disciples the irreconcilable difference between their reduced theological anthropology (in ontology and function) from human contextualization and the whole theological anthropology in God's relational context and process, represented by a child-person. Reconciliation with God cannot be on our common terms, which allows us to remain in our reduced theological anthropology and, thereby, function relationally distant. Reconciled relationship with the whole and holy God can only be experienced in God's relational context (which Jesus' embodied at table fellowship; with the triune God behind the curtain; the kingdom of God/heaven), and nonnegotiable engaged in the trinitarian intimate relational process of family love. The relational outcome for us is to be made new (whole from inner out) as adopted daughters and sons in the new relationships together necessary to be whole—thus to compose God's whole, his new creation family, the church. Implicit in Jesus' discourse is the nonnegotiable basis of relational grace for reconciliation; and this reconciliation is redemptive because it necessitates leaving behind the old in order to emerge in the new as God's new creation family together. These are the integral relational family dynamics Jesus is working out in family love with his disciples, and for which the Spirit is vulnerably present and intimately involved (or, more likely, waiting to be involved) with us to make a relational reality and bring to completion.

Reduced theological anthropology in no way whatsoever can make relational connection with the whole and holy God. The disciples' reductionism and comparative process could never enable them to engage in his life 'where I am' ("participating in the kingdom of heaven," Mt 18:4; cf. Mt 5:3)—and this is true for us today. The disciples needed to change by becoming vulnerable like a child-person with Jesus in the relational context and process of the whole of God, and thereby engage the relational epistemic process to know and understand his relational language. If they did not change and they continued to function in reductionism, they could not participate in his life (signified by "enter the kingdom of heaven"); this relational consequence is evident in Jesus' painful exposure of these disciples (Jn 14:9). Moreover, for Jesus' disciples to continue in reductionism has the unavoidable effect of influencing others to also engage in reductionism (cf. Peter's outer-in function influenced "even Barnabas" at the Antioch church, for which Paul had to rebuke Peter, Gal 2:11-14).<sup>7</sup> Jesus' words may sometimes sound harsh (Mt 18:6-10), but such language is necessary to communicate his unambiguous message that to continue in reductionism and reinforce reductionism in others is unacceptable and, essentially, condemned. Therefore, it is hermeneutically inexcusable to claim that Jesus' relational language is not clear to us and to assume a

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<sup>7</sup> For an important discussion about Paul's involvement with Peter in this passage, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology: Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process*, 16-17.

position of non-understanding.

On the other hand, for his disciples to undergo redemptive change to a child-person—thus freed from reductionism (i.e. defined and determined by human contextualization)—involves perceiving and engaging each other from inner out in new relationships together. This transformation means no longer functioning from outer in, in the comparative-competitive process, but with the same vulnerableness needed to receive Jesus' whole person, thus also to receive the Father (18:5). In this way, Jesus' followers participate in the kingdom of heaven—as the new creation family in communion together, sharing fully in new wine table fellowship, and worshiping the triune God in his relational language, speaking to and for God such that God is distinguished and thus made known to the world (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:16-23).

The issue of vulnerableness is the key to Jesus' hermeneutic and relational involvement of a child-person, and is irreplaceable for communion together with Jesus behind the curtain and with the veil removed. We simply can no longer ignore his relational imperative and file it away in our biblical information folder. We cannot relationally trust God (e.g. taking the steps that involve risks, cf. Mary, Levi, the former prostitute, and Zacchaeus) without being vulnerable with him. We cannot experience his relational grace without being vulnerable in the depths of our hearts, which has to include bringing before him our sin of reductionism. We cannot relationally experience the whole of God in his righteousness, faithfulness, and family love without our vulnerableness with him. And we cannot know and understand the whole of God's relational language in all of Scripture (cf. Jn 8:43) without our vulnerable involvement with him. Being vulnerable both defines our whole person and determines our whole function with nothing less and no substitutes for who, what, and how we are, which is the reciprocal response compatible to and congruent with God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with us.

Therefore, we must not fail to deeply hear and embrace in our hearts Jesus' relational message behind this 'critique of hope'. Jesus has communicated the necessary critique to his followers to help us see and take up our relational responsibility for the change necessary in order to participate in God's whole life now. His critiques are only in God's response with family love to our human relational condition embedded in reductionism (cf. Heb 12:5-6). Making relational connection with the whole of God by becoming vulnerable and humble is not beyond anyone's means as we reciprocally engage with the Spirit's relational work with us. It is, however, beyond the function of the wise-learned person. That is to say, our old interpretive framework that focuses outer in on what we 'have to do' is what makes God seem so hard to know and relationally far away from us. Without epistemic humility, we are the ones who make our relationship with God complicated; indeed, by remaining in our fragmentation, reductionism, and referentialization from our human context, we make God "hidden," while reasoning that God is unknowable or a mystery. To show us how we need to change, Jesus' metaphor of the child-person calls us to relationally trust him with the hermeneutic of a 'child'; this is our vital relational responsibility. To any concerns we have about how difficult it is to know and understand God, and compatibly respond, God has already addressed his people in only relational language. "So simple a child-person can do it" is a way to rephrase God's relational words to the Israelites, first spoken through Moses to Israel:

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" nor is it beyond the sea, so that



you have to ask, “who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it (Dt 30:11-14, NIV).

What is beyond our capabilities is to make relational connection with the whole and holy God on our own terms from self-determination, terms which keep us relationally “hidden” and thus unavailable to God. To counter the lies from reductionism that tell us to exercise our own wisdom (cf. Gen 3:5-6), to depend on our bottom-up constructions (cf. Gen 11:1-9), and turn to our theological conclusions (cf. Job 42:3), Jesus tells us that we have to become the child-person who is vulnerable with our whole person from inner out (cf. the temptations and lies from reductionism that Jesus faced, Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-12).<sup>8</sup> While becoming vulnerable is a threatening prospect for many of us, it is an inescapable matter requiring our choice. It is our relational responsibility to take steps *with the Spirit* to relationally trust the Father to relationally receive us in our unembellished, unmasked, forgiven, whole person from inner out (as in “welcome one such *child-person*,” *dechomai*, to readily accept, Mt 18:5; cf. Mt 19:14; Mk 10:14-16; Lk 18:15-17; Rom 8:14-16). It is also our choice to relationally count on him to keep his specific word that “My grace is sufficient for you” to make relational connection together behind the curtain without the veil (2 Cor 12:9; 3:16-17). The hermeneutic of a child is indispensable to make these choices, and is also the irreplaceable key for ongoing relational connection to further know and understand God with maturity.

The **third key interaction**, in progression from the first two interactions, specifically illuminates the compatible relational response for worship (Mt 21:12-16; cf. Mk 11:15-18; Lk 19:45-47), an interaction which took place between Jesus and some scribes and chief priests (temple leaders). Soon after Jesus’ celebratory entry into Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple and cleansed it of the persons and activities that had reduced the temple to “a den of robbers” (v.13; cf. Jer 7:11)—that is, constructed a fragmentary context shaped by fragmented persons and relationships that further fragmented its participants. Jesus thus restored the temple to its primary function in wholeness as God’s relational context for relational involvement together as “a house of prayer” open to all persons (Mk 11:17), those who functioned inner out with righteousness (“who choose the things that please me...to love *me* and to be *my worshipers*” (Isa 56:1-7). This restored temple function was immediately evident as blind and lame persons came to Jesus there and were made whole (healed); and in uncommon function the children (*paidas*) shouted in the temple “Hosanna to the son of David!” (Mt 21:14-15). The chief priests and scribes became angry and confronted Jesus about the children proclaiming such worship in the temple; the indignation of these temple leaders only exposed their own fragmentary condition from a reduced theological anthropology (ontology and function), illuminated as follows:

Part of the relational outcome for the temple [being restored] involved children crying out “Hosanna to the Son of David.” Certainly in our tradition we have no problem with this but within the limits of those leaders’ epistemic field they strongly objected to the improbable. The improbable was twofold for them: (1) the whole of God’s theological trajectory as Subject embodied by the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of Jesus, who to them—within the limits of their tradition—

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<sup>8</sup> The temptations of Jesus need to be understood in terms of reductionism and lies from Satan. For a helpful discussion, see T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 19-23.

was a mere object transmitting information about God that they disputed; (2) and by implication equally improbable to them—yet based more on their ontology and function rather than their tradition—was essentially that these children knew better than the leaders what they were saying—improbable because the leaders had the key knowledge about God in general and about the messiah in particular from their rabbinic education. Based on an ontology and function defined by what they did and had, there was no way children could make definitive statements about the probable with certainty and without error, much less about the improbable; and they needed to be kept in their place in the socio-religious order based on reduced ontology and function.

Jesus' response to them redefined the person and transformed the existing relational order. He pointed them to God's relational action having "prepared praise" from children (*katartizo*, 21:16). *Katartizo* connotes either to complete or to repair and restore back to completion (cf. Eph 4:12), 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 family. 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 integrally constitutes the whole ontology and function of the new relational order (Lk 10:21, NIV).<sup>9</sup>

In this interaction, Jesus again emphasizes the contrast between how a child-person functions, and how the 'wise and learned' function in relation to him. The child-person's hermeneutical means (*aisthētērion*) paid attention to Jesus' whole person as he restored the temple to its qualitative-relational whole function, signified in part by his healing the blind and lame. The children thereby recognized who Jesus was and celebrated his wonderful (i.e. distinguished) work to restore God's relational context in which persons are made whole too. Having this relational knowledge and understanding—the outcome Jesus made conclusive is "revealed to little children," (Lk 10:21)—these child-persons compatibly worshiped Jesus for all to hear, thereby uncommonly as worship leaders with the veil removed. In contrast to the children, the limited framework and lens of the chief priests and scribes focused entirely differently: they did not recognize *who* Jesus was disclosing as he restored the temple ("my house," Mt 21:13; Isa 56:7); nor did they rejoice in *what* was embodied in Jesus' whole person, that is, replacing the physical temple with the relational context and process of the whole of God for "all peoples" ('*am*, denoting all tribes, all humanity, Isa 56:7) in the qualitative new temple reconstituted behind the curtain to remove the veil (Eph 2:14-22). These temple leaders did not know and understand who and what the children clearly knew; they were the 'wise and learned' from whom "these things are hidden *from their hermeneutic*" (Lk 10:21). What is more, they wanted these children suppressed (essentially, to be silenced)—the common negative (even hostile) reaction from reductionism in the presence of wholeness and righteousness (cf. the disciples "bothering" Mary). Those who function without the veil always pose a threat to those with the veil; and worship language (such as above) is a key indicator making evident

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<sup>9</sup> T. Dave Matsuo, *Jesus into Paul: Embodying the Theology and Hermeneutic of the Whole Gospel*, 207.

this threat.

This brings us to a vital matter concerning worship language that we need to carefully listen to. Jesus' response to the indignation of the chief priests and scribes pointed them to their own Scriptures: "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself'" (Mt 21:16; cf. Ps 8:1-2). Here again is the irony that child-persons, signified by "infants" (*nepiōn*) and "nursing babies" (*thelazontōn*) who do not yet speak, are the ones whose vulnerable involvement makes their hearts available for relational connection with the whole and holy God whereby praise comes forth. Without the presence of a veil, they are the ones who listen to and speak in God's relational language. Jesus' words here (taken from Ps 8) are about the nature and function of God's relational language, not referential language. He directs the temple leaders to this major Psalm (8:1-2) which opens with praise for who, what and how God's presence (signified in the OT by 'his name') is. To simply state Jesus' point:

Only God is "distinguished" ('*addiyr*, insufficiently rendered "majestic" to set God apart) and only God can speak for himself. Relational language is the only language God speaks, the only language that can speak *to* God and *for* God; therefore, praise significant to God can only be composed by relational language from the lips of those who speak God's relational language. Referential language is unable to speak to or for God.

The Hebrew for "prepared" or "ordained" is *yāsad* (v.2), meaning to establish firmly, appoint, assign, lay a foundation (cf. Ps 78:69, 102:25); God thus definitively established that the only praise that can distinguish him is the qualitative relational response of child-persons who do not rely on referential words, but are whole-ly involved with their whole person from inner out. Those in referential language cannot distinguish God—though they may state loads of information about God—and are therefore rendered silent (v.2), unable to speak to or for the distinguished God. In Jesus' response (noted in the block quote above), the Greek *katartizō* (translated as "prepared" or "ordained") connotes "either to complete or to repair and restore back to completion." The praise in relational language ordained in OT times needed to be restored back to completeness, to wholeness because such praise had become de-relationalized and fragmented from the whole person by the reduced involvement of referential language uttered by the 'wise and learned' who "honor me with lips but their hearts are far from me," which Jesus rebuked in another interaction (Mt 15:8-9).

We need to hear again Jesus' unmistakable claim as to who can speak to and for God in his relational language in worship; and we need to be hermeneutically corrected by his relational words. This is not optional but imperative, his relational imperative for our worship to have significance both to God and to those who participate. Worship in referential language can certainly speak about God, but it will be always worshiping a fragmentary God, a reshaped God who does not speak for himself, including an unknown God, and thus engaged by worshipers who honor this God with lips but distant hearts without relational connection. In other words, referential language cannot distinguish God's vulnerable self-disclosures, so that God cannot be distinguished in our midst as gathered worshipers.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This impoverished outcome is parallel to the scholarly field of biblical interpretation, in which a vast quantity of referential information has come from a variety of 'criticisms'—which are various interpretive lenses that pay attention to only particular fragments of God's relational self-disclosures (historical facts, literary elements, etc).

## Composing Primary Liturgy

The hermeneutic issues underlying all worship language are unavoidable for those who claim the gospel, follow Jesus and proclaim his good news. These issues for Jesus are defining priorities that must be attended to. Any hermeneutic can compose liturgy. The critical question is whether that liturgy is primary or merely secondary in its significance.

Liturgy behind the curtain is the primary framework for ‘singing the new song’ (discussed in chap. 1) that integrally signifies the gospel and distinguishes the Subject of not simply good news but the ‘best news’. Therefore, singing the new song can only be composed by relational language in the conjoint qualitative and relational significance of communion together without the veil as God’s new creation family. Only liturgy behind the curtain distinguishes the whole of God, and only on this basis of vulnerable involvement composes the worship of the Trinity, nothing less and no substitutes.

Singing without this integral qualitative and relational significance only composes “new” songs in referential language in a secondary worship framework still operating in front of the curtain. This hermeneutical distinction is critical to understand. Anything less and any substitute of our person (both individually and corporately) and in our response of worship (including discipleship) can no longer be interpreted as having any significance to the whole and holy God—whose Face is now vulnerably present *before* us and intimately involved ongoingly for communion together *with* us.

“Therefore, my brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to *engage in direct relational connection*...by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain...let us *intimately connect with the whole of God in reciprocal response with our whole heart, singing to him the new song*” (Heb 10:19-20,22). The following song (on the next page) illuminates the composition of primary liturgy, that was composed in the key of Jesus with the Spirit and sung with Paul (2 Cor 3:16-18).

## 'Singing' the New Song<sup>11</sup>

Sing the new song to the Lord  
Sing the new song to *our* Lord  
(*Joyfully*) —the veil is gone  
the veil is gone  
[embrace the whole of God]

Note: [ ]s hummed (or the like); no words aloud, no instruments played

Sing the new song to the Lord  
Sing the new song to *our* Lord  
—you are holy  
you are whole  
—we're uncommon  
we are whole  
[embrace the whole of God]

Sing the new song to the Lord  
Sing the new song to *our* Lord  
(*Passionately*) —you compose life  
in your key  
—life together  
intimately  
—no veil present  
distance gone  
[embrace the whole of God]

Sing the new life with the Lord  
Sing the new life with *our* Lord  
—you are present  
and involved  
—we *be* present  
now involved  
[embrace the whole of God]

Sing this new song to *you* Lord  
Sing this new life with *you* Lord  
(*Joyfully*) —the veil is gone  
the veil is gone  
[embrace the whole of God]

[embrace the whole of God]

[embrace the whole of God]

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<sup>11</sup> By Kary A. Kambara and T. Dave Matsuo, © 2012. Printable sheet music available online at <http://4X12.org>.



## Chapter 5      The Language of Whole Worship

“The LORD our God has been gracious in...  
giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes...  
he has granted us new life to *worship the whole of God.*”

Ezra 9:8-9, NIV

Therefore, since we are receiving the *irreducible family of God*...  
let us give thanks *in relational language*,  
by which we offer to God acceptable worship

Hebrews 12:28

In this final chapter of our study, what I hope emerges is a deeper understanding and appreciation for God and God’s wholeness, in order to deepen our ongoing communion with the whole of God and from this relational reality to transform our Communion practice. The whole of God now dwells in the hearts of his people (God’s relational whole) in the irreducible relational context behind the curtain and by the nonnegotiable relational process without the veil. Liturgy behind the curtain composes the new song of communion together to make our Communion celebrations whole-ly pleasing to our God.

Ezra’s above prayer in relational language to God is profound and relevant for liturgy behind the curtain today. In OT times, God’s relational context was signified by God’s sanctuary (or tabernacle, temple). Ezra has summed up the relational reality of God’s initiative of relational grace toward his people to establish them specifically in God’s sanctuary (“place of holiness,” *qōdeš*), where God’s presence dwelled. Ezra’s words “God gives light to our eyes” recall God’s definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26), in which God’s vulnerable Face shines on them to newly establish a change (*siym*) for relationships together in wholeness (*šalôm*); this relational outcome would include the hermeneutic means to vulnerably receive God’s self-disclosures for understanding and knowing God (cf. Ps 67:1-2).

For our own hermeneutical correction and maturity, it is important for us to recognize Ezra’s interpretive lens and what he focused on. The immediate situation of Ezra’s prayer was soon after the Jerusalem temple had been rebuilt, which was of great significance for the returning exiles for Israel’s identity that composed Second Temple Judaism. Ezra’s primary focus was on their covenant relationship with God, and only secondarily about the physical temple building. His prayer hereby reflected both Ezra’s sensitivity to the qualitative and awareness of the relational, specifically toward God. His language therefore used the word “sanctuary” to highlight God’s presence (*qōdeš*, Most Holy Place; also *miqdāš*, a place or thing consecrated to God, e.g. Ex 25:8; Dt 16:2,6,11), rather than the term for the physical temple (*hēyḵāl*, cf. Ezra 3:6,10,; 4:1; 2 Kgs 24:13).

The sanctuary specifically referred to the place where God's presence would dwell in the midst of his people; and only God could determine where the sanctuary would be built, and how his presence could be encountered (written in the law). God's presence (*pāneh*, face, the front of, presence) is also signified in Scripture by his "Name" (e.g. Dt 12:11: 16:2,6,11; 1 Kgs 5:5) and "glory" (e.g. Ps 26:8; Ezek 10:1-4,18; 43:1-2), which Jesus whole-ly embodied (2 Cor 4:6). God's presence dwelled in the sanctuary to be "among you" and "walk among you," (Lev 26:12); yet, the people's presence with this holy God always had to be mediated through the priests' intercession with sacrifices. Moreover, only the high priest could enter the inner sanctuary, the Most Holy Place, once a year to present the blood of sacrifices for Atonement before God's most vulnerable presence there. Thus, for most of the people, their encounter with the whole and holy God was indirect at best.

In the NT, God's relational context undergoes an unimaginable shift from sanctuary in the tabernacle or temple building to the hearts of God's new creation family—that which distinguishes us—as the new "place" for the whole of God's vulnerable presence in the Face of Christ to dwell (Jn 14:23; Eph 2:18-22; 2 Cor 6:16). And now that the Spirit has come to dwell in our hearts (Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13-14), the trinitarian *relational process* goes even deeper for us (Rom 8:14-16). Being who and whose we are as God's people, what emerges even more clearly is our relational responsibility as the new covenant family of God. How much more deeply we can experience God Face to face because Jesus entered into the "most holy place" behind the curtain to make his sacrifice before the Father (Heb 9:11-15); and by this Jesus accomplished his conclusive relational work in the vulnerable involvement of love (not merely sacrifice) that tore the curtain open so that we can enter in. We are now able to join him both in his involvement and sacrifice of love 'behind the curtain' for intimate communion Face to face with the veil removed, and therefore to participate directly in his life in the new covenant. This participation in God's life composes liturgy behind the curtain in the language of whole worship.

## **Whole Ecclesiology for Whole Worship**

This undeniable theological reality yearns to be the experiential truth of the practice by Christ's church: The temple has been reconfigured without the curtain, and reconstituted to be the dwelling of God in the hearts of his family (Jn 14:23; 17:26; Eph 2:21-22) for Face-to-face relationship together without the veil (2 Cor 3:18; 4:6). Worship of the whole of God can only take place in this new relational context (Jn 4:21-23); and this involves by its nature the communion of reciprocal Face-to-face-to-Face relationship together—that is, the vulnerable involvement of our whole person in compatible response to the whole of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement composed by the face of Christ. This new relational process is inseparable from the new relational context of God's temple in which/whom the whole of God dwells. This integral relational context and process composed by God's Face are the irreducible and nonnegotiable terms necessary for communion together in order to compose our liturgy behind the curtain that both distinguishes and has significance to the whole of God.



As the previous chapters in this study have illuminated—and it cannot be overstated—to have communion with God behind the curtain necessitates taking up our relational responsibility to engage in God’s intimate relational process with our compatible relational involvement from inner out, vulnerably, with nothing less and no substitutes for our whole person. This is not only an individual responsibility, but corporate responsibility as God’s covenant family. For our growth, the letter to the Hebrews reinforces how we need to take up our corporate relational response. The writer could very well be addressing us today as those worshipers who maintain our relational distance by remaining in front of the curtain. While we too often find ourselves in a secondary sanctuary embedded in practices and traditions engaged from outer in, we are urged to see their parallel to “external regulations” (i.e. from human contextualization, Heb 9:10), associated with the old physical temple to justify ourselves (“clear the conscience,” 9:9, NIV), or simply to feel acceptable before God. To remain worshiping in front of the curtain is to relationally disregard the new covenant by Jesus’ blood (9:11-27). Thus the writer of Hebrews urges us as worshipers to join in Jesus’ involvement and sacrifice, “the new and living way of *Jesus’ whole person, not just his death on the cross*” through the curtain (10:19-20), to “draw near to God *who is vulnerably present with hearts vulnerably in relational trust, believing that his grace is sufficient* [10:22]...because he who promised *can be counted on to keep his word*” (10:23). These relational dynamics for worshipers are the reciprocal response of relational trust (faith) in who, what, and how God is. Faith as this relational trust in God signifies the depth of involvement with God (i.e. to be his “righteous ones,” 10:38a) for liturgy behind the curtain that God seeks. The blessed outcome of this communion together is what God promises as our “eternal inheritance” (9:15; 6:15; 10:36), which Jesus definitively disclosed means to know and understand the whole and holy God (Jn 17:3; cf. Jer 9:24). This relational process and outcome have become obscured either by theological fog or by practice no longer connected to this theological reality and its relational significance.

In corporate worship, when we “shrink back”—that is, keep relationally distant in front of the curtain (knowingly or unknowingly)—God cannot enjoy communion with us, he cannot count on us to be his righteous ones, and accordingly “I will not be pleased *with you*” (Heb 10:38b). These words are all relational messages from the heart of God. The transcendent holy God wants us to know and understand him—the relational reality of which needs to transform our worship language! Our relational responsibility, which needs to express itself in corporate worship, is faith as relational trust with our whole person from inner out: “let us *intimately engage* God with a *vulnerable* heart in full assurance of faith (Heb 10:22). Faith expressing itself in the depth of involvement of family love is the only thing that has relational significance to the whole of God and ourselves (cf. Gal 5:6) to compose whole worship. This is our integral relational responsibility to be sufficient ecclesialogically to compose liturgy behind the curtain for communion with the transcendent holy God, to participate in God’s relational whole on his terms—that is, whole ecclesiology for whole worship to speak to and for God.

Now that the Spirit has relationally replaced Jesus to be with us in our hearts forever (2 Cor 1:22), the Spirit is vulnerably present and intimately involved for ongoing reciprocal relationship together. Jesus has made it clear that as long as we are relationally involved with him just as he is with us, the whole of God will dwell in us to compose us as family (Jn 14:15,23; 15:9-10). In reciprocal relationship together, the Spirit connects

each of our hearts with the Father's heart (Rom 8:14-16, 26-27; Gal 4:6-7), and further composes us together in family love. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul prays deeply to the Father on behalf of the church's corporate reciprocal involvement with the Spirit for their maturity in intimate communion (Eph 1:17-18; 3:16-19). He prays "that *the whole of God* may dwell in your [pl.] hearts *for the intimate communion to relationally know and understand God's heart and participate in God's relational whole*" (3:19). In order to grow as family together ("receive the kingdom of God," Heb 12:28; "inherit the kingdom of God," Gal 5:21) we need to ongoingly reject defining ourselves and treating others from outer in, and ongoingly engage in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit ("keep in step with the Spirit," Gal 5:26, NIV, cf. 1 Cor 2:12). Only in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, we can corporately embody the whole of God as the new creation family (whole ecclesiology) to distinguish God "so that the world in the world may know ... may believe ...." (Jn 17:20-23). God's relational imperatives are for our ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit as Jesus' relational replacement, who deeply connects our hearts with the Father to compose us together as his very own family—"the Spirit of adoption, and by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom 8:15). Thereby our worship is made whole conjointly in our theology *and* function.

In this relational primacy, God's thematic relational actions have always gone toward establishing an uncommon family (signified by "house," e.g. Num 12:7; Ps 23:6), among whom his presence (signified by Face, Name, glory, embodied Word, 'where I am') could dwell for communion together and to build his new creation family, that is, God's relational whole. Just as the Trinity cannot be reduced to a single person, or three separate persons, and still be the Trinity, God's relational whole is also irreducible to fragments of persons or relationships and still be God's new creation family. Accordingly, it is insufficient that our worship is focused only on Christ (ignoring or paying little attention to the Father and the Spirit) as an individual in an overly christocentric focus. If we are to mature from a diet of "milk," then we need to digest the "solid food" of the whole of God (Heb 5:12-14). Moreover, it is insufficient to worship merely as an individual because God's relational whole is the new temple composed of his people together, in relational likeness of the Trinity. Therefore, God's relational whole can neither be constituted by an individual, nor by a gathering of disparate individuals. This involves the necessary composition of whole ecclesiology for whole worship.

Of further importance, God's relational whole is irreducible to outer-in efforts at unity in ontological simulation. In many worship services today, claims and sincere efforts are made, yet in referential language, about being Christ's body, about unity as God's people both as a local church body and with the global church. We thus speak (even boast) about who we corporately are (at least theologically), but often do not engage in relationships from inner out as God's new creation family, resulting in ontological simulation that leaves us fragmentary (e.g. as we continue to make false distinctions based on outer-in criteria as discussed in chap. 2). The composition of God's relational whole is transformed only by equalized and intimate relationships from inner out together intimately as "one" (Jn 17:21-23) in relational likeness of the Trinity (Jn 17:21,26); otherwise the old temple remains standing without the new disclosed (Heb 9:8). God's relational whole as 'one' with the whole and holy God is the relational outcome of Christ's gospel, the best news for the human relational condition, for our deep human need to relationally belong (both individually and corporately together) to our

creator, transcendent God and intimate Father. For the most part, the relational reality (and experiential truth) is that the church has yet to embody the theological truth and reality of its qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity. For this reason, we desperately need transformation of our hermeneutic means (*aisthesis*, for maturity, Heb 5:14) from inner out by God's relational grace; this irreplaceable transformation would establish us firmly with the whole of God Face to face and as God's relational whole together face-to-Face-to-face.

Whole theology and practice of God's new creation family—in the ecclesiology to be whole—is in contrast to and in conflict with reductionism, which means always being challenged by what prevails from human contextualization. Being God's relational whole is to be ongoingly defined and determined by our participation in God's life ('in Christ')—that is, defined and determined “from above” (Jn 3:3,7), or ‘top-down’. And our theological anthropology (ontology and function) can be whole only from inner out. Top-down and inner out are always challenged by human contextualization, which is human shaping from outer in constructed from ‘bottom-up’ (cf. Gen 11:1-9). Even from early in the history of the church, these issues presented major struggles that the churches apparently were not readily aware of. Therefore, in further expressions of his family love, Jesus spoke to these very dynamics—thus composing his ecclesiology to be whole—in his address to his churches in his post-ascension discourse in Revelation (Rev 2-3). In relational language, Jesus challenged several churches' fragmented/reduced practices engaged from outer in, and their function from bottom up (human contextualization). For ecclesiology to be whole, the church cannot function, for example, as did the churches at Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea.<sup>1</sup> These three churches could be easily recognizable among our churches today.

First, the church at Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7) was hard working and dedicated to doctrinal purity (orthodoxy), but they operated under referential language. Jesus strongly rebuked them (“I hold this against you”) for their failure to ongoingly function in the primacy of relationship for making relational connection with him and each other (“you have forsaken your first love”). Without their relational involvement with the whole of God as God's relational whole on God's relational terms, this church could not distinguish itself as God's new creation family. Unless they returned to God's relational primacy—which inseparably included all their relationships together—they would lose their relational significance to Jesus (v.6).

The second church was at Sardis (3:1-6). This church had a notable reputation for “being alive” (v.1) based on their active involvement in ministry and service. Yet, to Jesus their work was not whole, “complete.” This church was defined and determined from outer in by a reduced theological anthropology (ontology and function) by what they did (ministries and service) and had (high reputation, or “name”), and therefore lacked qualitative and relational significance to God (“you are dead,” v.1; compare the contrast in Rom 6:11). Although undoubtedly self-affirming, their practice and reputation could not distinguish them from inner out as God's relational whole.

The church at Laodicea is the third example of a church needing correction from Jesus (3:14-22). This church defined itself by what they had, great wealth (“I am rich,” v.17), and did in eye medicine and textiles (“blind and naked”). Their relational

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of Jesus' post-ascension discourse to the churches for the ‘ecclesiology to be whole’, see T. Dave Matsuo, *Sanctified Christology*, 260-70.

involvement with God was shallow (“neither cold nor hot...*but* lukewarm,” v.16), and therefore distasteful (“about to spit you out of my mouth”). Because they defined themselves from outer in, this reflected their failure to account for their sin of reductionism and need to be made whole from inner out (“I need nothing,” v.17).

Each of these churches has a modern counterpart: doctrinally-correct churches (Ephesus), mega-churches (Sardis), consumer churches (Laodicea). Therefore, Jesus’ relational words to these churches need to be listened to, received and responded to by churches today. In his discourse, he makes unmistakably clear that we, his worshipers individually and corporately have vital relational responsibility to account for, the significance of “let anyone who *understands my relational language respond accordingly*” (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). For Jesus, his new creation family requires nothing less and no substitutes but for ecclesiology to be whole. Thus, he stands at the door of our heart knocking in pursuit (3:20); he does not break the door down in unilateral relationship, but awaits our compatible, reciprocal response to open our hearts in vulnerable likeness. This is deeply affirming to us—can you ‘hear’ his heart?

Whole ecclesiology is the indispensable hermeneutic leading to the understanding required to compose whole worship. Conversely, whole worship cannot be experienced apart from the distinguished understanding of God emerging from the communion of whole ecclesiology.

## **Building Whole Communion**

The primary work of the church that composes language of whole worship is our compatible relational response together in the trinitarian process of family love (cf. Rev 2:4). To engage in this liturgy together involves this primacy of relationship by “faith *relationally* working through love,” thereby rendering any other defining distinctions without significance (“counts for anything,” Gal 5:6). This relational process of family love unfolds with the understanding that faith as relational work is relational trust in the whole of God (Eph 3:12), specifically now in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit (Eph 1:17; 3:16-17). To engage in this reciprocal involvement with the Spirit *is* to participate in the triune God’s life as God’s relational whole—that is, as the new creation family in whose joined-together hearts the whole of God’s presence dwells (Eph 2:21-22, cf. 3:20-21). Our vulnerable involvement in family love (*agapē*) has two inseparably conjoined functional dimensions: (1) to corporately worship God (Eph 5:18b-20), and (2) to build each other up as the new creation family (Eph 4:12b-16). These dimensions are inseparable and irreducible because we cannot rightly (i.e. with any relational significance to God) worship God without family love for each other (cf. Jn 13:34-35; 1 Jn 2:9; 3:10; 4:21). And we cannot love each other without first having been loved deeply ourselves by God who in his relational grace is vulnerably presence and intimately involvement (Eph 5:1-2; 1 Jn 4:7-11,19).

Whole ecclesiology for whole worship—as Paul made definitive in Ephesians in conflict with reductionism<sup>2</sup>—means that those who plan and lead worship need to ensure that, above everything and everyone else, the whole of God is the One we come together

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<sup>2</sup> For a full discussion of Paul’s theology unfolding in ecclesiology for the church to be whole, see T. Dave Matsuo, *The Whole of Paul and the Whole in His Theology*.

to worship. Anyone less or any substitute is a subtle shift in focus, for example, to the worship leaders, musicians, singers, preachers, other performers, or special guests. God has loved us first (from the beginning, Dt 7:7-9), whereby God, in reciprocal relational terms, expects to be our first love (cf. Ex 20:3; Rev 2:4). This hermeneutic must determine the dynamic flow of our worship. The whole of God inseparably—the Father who has adopted us, the Son in whom we are composed as family, and the Spirit now vulnerably present and involved for reciprocal relationship together to complete the relational process of family love—deserves (indeed, is due) our affirmation, appreciation, and adoration for who, what, and how the whole and holy God is. This relational response cannot be reduced to quid pro quo in an exchange process—nothing less and no substitutes but the reciprocal relational process of love. The Psalms beautifully illuminate this covenant relational framework that first praises and blesses God for who, what and how God is (e.g. the function of doxologies, cf. Rom 11:33-36), and then integrally acknowledges and thanks the whole of God for the depth of his relational involvement with us. For example, Psalms 135:19-21 through 136:1-9 has this relational flow.

In Psalm 135, the ancient liturgist begins the communal call to worship (vv.1-2) with the imperative *hallelu Yah*, “praise the LORD.” God’s transcendence, faithful involvement are recounted; and God is conclusively distinguished from idols made by humans. Then God’s people bless the LORD. Five times the poet invokes “*bārak*” meaning “praise” or “bless” (vv.19-21), in the reciprocal relational response to God’s blessing in his vulnerable presence and intimate involvement, as God promised in his definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26). This is why we also need to *yādāh*, “give thanks” (Ps 136:1-9). *Yādāh* also means to speak out, sing, and includes confessing our sins—all of which compose our compatible reciprocal relational response to the God who is present and involved (“his steadfast love endures forever,” Ps 136). Moreover, God created the universe, and then didn’t leave it (as in deism), but “by his understanding” (v.5, NIV) he is whole-ly involved in his creation made whole in his likeness. And God is intimately involved with us in very person-specific ways because he deeply knows us (“he who remembered us in our low estate,” v. 23; cf. Mt 6:8,28-30). *Bārak* and *yādāh* integrally and irreducibly compose our compatible reciprocal relational response to God for his presence and involvement (in creative, communicative and salvific action) for the primary purpose of covenant relationship together. *Bārak* without *yādāh* keeps God transcendent by reducing the Trinity without the embodied Christ and relationally present Spirit; *yādāh* without *bārak* makes the focus more about us in a subtle shift to results of God’s actions. This fragmentary language is disembodied and/or de-relationalized from God the Subject in relationship.

The integrated worship language of *bārak-yādāh* must by its nature compose our compatible reciprocal relational response for the covenant relationship to be whole, which is further composed in relationship together by the ecclesiology of the whole. *Bārak-yādāh* also helps us grow in affirming the primacy of God’s life in whole (not in fragments) into whose whole (not parts of) our life is integrated. We participate in God’s whole life, and not the other way around whereby God revolves around our lives; the latter emerges from a fragmented God more easily rendered to our shaping. The former is how we need to grow in our thanksgiving, so that when we thank God for how he has loved us individually, loved us collectively, and loved us as his family, the whole of God will receive all our praise and thanks that sound consonant in his ear and delight his heart.

In fact, ancient Hebrew and Greek made no distinction between praise and thanksgiving. Another word that is often translated as “give thanks” is *tôdāh* (e.g. Ps 100). *Tôdāh* connotes both praise and thanks, and together with *yādah* both reflect a more relational language framework than our “thanks.” In our modern age, we interpret giving thanks to God based on something he has done, focused more on the gift or action than on his person. This hermeneutic is neither surprising nor unexpected in a prevailing exchange system where the person is secondary. Also, thanking in our modern sense can also shift more of the focus on us—that is, on the recipient more than the giver—which is expressed in so many of our worship songs. It is edifying, then, if not confronting, for us that thanksgiving is included within praise of who, what and how God is—integrally composing whole worship language. Relationally this is parallel to Psalm 34:2: “My soul [*nepeš*, soul, innermost being] makes its boast in the LORD” (cf. Ps 44:6-8; Jer 9:23-24; 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17). The word for “boast,” *hālal*, means also to celebrate and denotes rejoicing and praising God, and is the word in the imperative hallelujah, “give glory to God.” “Boast” is given its definitive basis most clearly in Jeremiah:

“Thus says the LORD: “Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the *capable* boast in their *abilities*, do not let the *privileged* boast in their *resources*; but let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD” (Jer 9:23-24).

This is not the shallow boast of cognitive information about God but the deepest boast of knowing and understanding God in the innermost. This boast is to ‘sing’ as God’s very own family who are qualitatively *tāmiym* (be whole and who function in the primacy of relationship with *šēdāqāh* (righteousness)—made new from inner out because God loved us first (“first” as both in primacy and in the order of action), therefore reciprocally singing the new song in response to the whole of God.

The second dimension of family love to compose whole ecclesiology and language necessary for whole communion (inseparable from corporately worshipping God) is loving each other by building each other up together as God’s family (Jn 13:34; Eph 4:12b-16). Participating in God’s life in whole worship means for all to participate as a full members of God’s family together (Eph 2:19; 4:16; 1 Cor 12, 1 Pet 2:9), to see and be involved with each other as sisters and brothers (Rom 12:10; Phil 2:4-5), the firstborn among whom is Jesus (first in significance, Rom 8:29). This is how we need to understand submission to God as our first love, by giving primacy to his relational terms of our whole person from inner out in communion together face to Face and also to each other face to face to Face (cf. Jn 13:34-35). Whole ecclesiology engages the primacy of family love in our new creation family relationships, Face-to-face-to-face, and composes whole language of communion together for whole worship; from this determining basis, Communion then can be transformed to composition in whole language.

Corporate worship emerges whole only when we are engaged in the primacy of the new creation family. Hereby, all other secondary concerns (e.g. service, including ministry) are integrated into what is primary to God. The secondary aspects of church practice, though not unimportant, can no longer be allowed to become substitutes for the vulnerability and depth of relational involvement in family love with each other just as God has vulnerably loved us—not at a distance in transcendence or de-relationalized in

mere sacrifice. Giving primacy to relationships is neither convenient nor efficient, especially if our ecclesiology lens is shaped by business models, which emphasize efficiency and results, not to mention their stratifying relationships. Yet, to maintain relational distance in any part of God's family (i.e. to stay in front of the curtain without the veil removed) is to partake of Jesus' table fellowship "in an unworthy manner" (1 Cor 11:27). Our language of Communion needs to celebrate being sisters and brothers who have been equalized together by relational grace in the communion of family in likeness of God, so that no outer-in distinctions are allowed to create or maintain divisions (as in Col 3:10-11). And equalized relationships are also inseparably intimate relationships together, thus barring all relational stratification or distance. In likeness of the Trinity, there are no equalized relationships without intimacy, and no intimacy without being equalized. There certainly are still functional differences, such as church and worship leaders, teachers, deacons, and so forth, which define secondary roles that cannot determine the primacy of relationship together—as constituted in the Trinity (Eph 1:22-23; 3:19; 4:13; Col 1:19; 2:9-10). When the secondary becomes primary, however, these unique functions need to be redeemed from inner out and submitted to God's relational primacy for the building up of the God's new creation family (Eph 4:11-13; 5:21). Those in positions of leadership especially need to embody equalized and intimate relationships (by inner out change of *metamorphoō*, not outer in change of *metaschematizō*) characterized by their whole person vulnerably involved in relationship with the whole of God—nothing less and no substitutes—and thus also with the rest of the family. It is on this basis of being whole that Paul defined the function of church leadership to build God's family "to full maturity, to the measure of the *pleroma* of Christ" (fullness, complete, whole, Eph 4:13).

Mary demonstrated this leadership in whole worship as she vulnerably functioned as a whole equalized person in intimate communion with Jesus; and Jesus distinctly points all the rest of us who claim the gospel to her example as new wine in a new wineskin (Lk 5:38 with Mk 14:9). Yet, Jesus also knows that some of us will resist in choosing new wine (Lk 5:39), which is reflected in our theology, our hermeneutic, our language and its practices.

In prevailing terms, it is an uncomfortable process, this ongoing process to be whole by being equalized and growing in intimate relationships in Jesus' new relational order (Heb 9:10, NIV). It is certainly more comfortable to maintain the status quo of more shallow, stratified and distant relationships in churches and academy, and worship engaged on the basis of roles that characterizes so much church and worship leadership today. Additionally, as mentioned in chapter two, to be made whole in equalized and intimate relationship means letting go of the benefits we receive in the old relational order of the comparative process. Consider these examples: for clergy, this means letting go of being treated as more important than the laity (which the laity also needs to let go of); for the preacher or teacher, this means letting go of any self-serving efforts in a comparative process (e.g. seeking affirmation from others), otherwise they will not be vulnerable with God to be able to speak to and for God; for worship leaders, this means letting go of being front and center of attention in corporate worship; for the worshipers in the pews/chairs, this means letting go of the comfort of anonymity, passivity as an audience, and dependence on the worship team to mediate relational connection with the Lord. These are ways, including the related hermeneutic, that church and worship leaders

need to take responsibility to help the new creation family of worshipers emerge and flow as the new wine.

In worship planning, and especially in Communion, therefore, we need to express love for each other by mutually helping each other in the redemptive change we all need—the inseparable change of both dying to the sin of reductionism and openly emerging whole from inner out as the new wine. This is the thrust of the writer of Hebrews: “*Actively pursue wholeness among yourselves in uncommon relationships without which you cannot speak to and for God to distinguish him for others to perceive. Take care that no one lacks* [hystereō, to lack, be in need, destitute, fall short] *relational grace so that reductionism does not take root and grow*” (Heb 12:14-15). Church and worship leadership need to take the lead in submission to the Spirit in compatible reciprocal relationship together to address these vital matters that affect all of us (Eph 5:18b-21).

God’s church needs a new song to distinguish the whole and holy God in God’s full glory that is composed of his qualitative being as heart, his distinguished relational nature, and his vulnerable and unfailing involvement with us—now fully dwelling in us as his new temple. For this utmost relational purpose, our old language of Communion needs to be transformed and made whole-ly new in the relational language of God. Before this liturgy of new wine can emerge and flow completely, we need to address some entrenched and perhaps beloved old language of Communion. This will likely increase our tension, as it did for those at Jesus’ first new wine table fellowship (Lk 5:33).

### **“Remember Me Whole”**

As this study has unfolded, what emerges as a key for the church to mature in “acceptable worship” (Heb 12:28) is the redemptive change of any Communion practice composed “in an unworthy manner” (1 Cor 11:27). For the most part, prevailing Communion (or the Eucharist) practices are patterned with a focus on only a few of Jesus’ words (important as they are), namely, the so-called words of institution “in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:23-25). The consequence is that we celebrate a disembodied Object and de-relationalized Subject in Communion—that is, remembering a fragmented person in narrowed-down referential terms. In the following interaction between Jesus and some disciples, John’s Gospel exposes referentialization of Jesus’ words, and in that exposure John provides us sufficient basis to challenge today’s referentialized and thus de-relationalized Communion practices.

Even before Jesus’ last and pivotal table fellowship, some of his disciples came to their own conclusions about what Jesus meant when he linked his flesh with bread to eat, and his blood with drink (Jn 6: 26-68). These were disciples who stopped following Jesus (v.66) based on having interpreted Jesus’ words through their narrowed lens of referential language. These disciples’ lens focused on only a few of Jesus’ words *apart* from (1) the integrity of his person presented, (2) the quality and relational content of his communication, and (3) the depth level of his relational involvement. By referentializing his words, they detached Jesus’ words from his whole person, thereby fragmenting Jesus’ whole person. Thus, while Jesus was initially openly disclosing his intimate relationship with his Father, they paid attention to only a few words (a selective bias), and they ended up with no more than the absurd conclusion that Jesus was discussing cannibalism (6:52).



This is how they disembodied and de-relationalized Jesus' discourse on eating his body and drinking his blood, which in relational terms was only about engaging in intimate relationship together (cf. vv.29,40,54-57).

They not only failed to hear Jesus' relational language and disclosures about the Father, but asserted their fragmented interpretation in referential language (6:60). Yet, such conclusions should never be surprising given the selective bias of their hermeneutic. Such interpretive lenses, used by many of Jesus' disciples (past and present), referentialize his relational language, and thus fail to hear all that Jesus was vulnerably disclosing as necessary for communion with the whole of God. John's Gospel exposes this hermeneutic issue in this interaction and throughout his Gospel (cf. Nicodemus' narrow hermeneutic, as previously mentioned, Jn 3:4).

The critical issue in saying that Communion is disembodied and de-relationalized is not about whether the bread and cup become Christ's body and blood (as in transubstantiation);<sup>3</sup> nor is it about linking Communion with a sit-down meal shared together, which was the earliest church practice of the Eucharist patterned on Jesus' table fellowships. Rather, disembodied and de-relationalized Communion gives primacy to fragments of a few of Jesus' words (e.g. "do this in remembrance of me") or some secondary aspect (e.g. referential information in the prayer preceding Communion, known in church tradition as the 'Great Prayer of Thanksgiving') of the Communion practice *apart* from the relational reality of the intimate communion of shared life together as the new creation family. However, if our language composes liturgy behind the curtain, we necessarily encounter the whole of God made vulnerable to us through Jesus' whole person (Heb 10:19-22). For the reality of this encounter to have relational significance, our Communion must go beyond the elements of the past in remembrance (*anamnēsis*) of his sacrifice that secures the future, as in "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:27). Our Communion must be composed by the face of Jesus (not merely "body" and "blood" in ongoing communion with the whole of God (and God's glory, 2 Cor 4:6) in the new covenant composing God's new creation family. The Face of God made vulnerable by Jesus cannot be reduced to the cross or remain on the cross but must be engaged face to Face in order to have reciprocal relational connection compatible to and congruent with the whole of God's relational response to us.

How Jesus is remembered has deep theological and relational implications. Anything less of the Face of God and in our face-to-Face response keeps God behind the curtain and maintains our response in front of the curtain, both of which signify worship in the old temple (Heb 9:8). The extent of our listening to Jesus' words in relational language will be the determining issue, both in understanding the whole of God theologically and for the connection needed in communion together relationally. As Jesus' made conclusive: "Pay attention to *all my words* you hear; the *hermeneutic* you use will be *the Jesus you remember*" (Mk 4:24).

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<sup>3</sup> The following summarizes the main interpretations for the Communion elements: **Transubstantiation**—When the words of the sacrament are spoken (either Jesus' words of institution [Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24], or the *epiclēsis*, i.e. the invocation of the Spirit upon the elements), the substance of bread changes to substance of Christ. **Consubstantiation**—Christ's substance coexists with the bread and wine's substance. **Transsignification**—Communication through signs, words, and gestures can contain God's presence. By these, there's a changed significance. Bread and wine mean one thing, and when words are said, it changes the meaning. **Memorialist view**—The significance of the elements is only cognitive.

Our common practice of ‘remembrance’ reduces Christ (unintentionally), but we can engage the relational work to “remember me whole.” *Anamnēsis*, translated as ‘remembrance’, also denotes commemoration or celebration. Therefore, to partake in Communion that is restored to its full dynamic relational significance is to “do this in *celebration with me*,” in the same significance as celebrating with “the bridegroom” at the new wine table fellowship (Mt 9:15). And this celebration is embodied vulnerably in the present without the veil (no constraint or relational distance), as we make the choice to take our place at the family table (set with the bread and cup) as adopted daughters and sons; that is, as those unreduced persons who securely belong in the new creation family, no longer relational orphans (Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4-14), and for which the Spirit is present for reciprocal relationship together to connect our hearts with the Father’s heart (Rom 8:15-16, 26-27; Gal 4:6). We need to change our hermeneutic, language and thinking: “Remember me whole” in order to celebrate the relational reality and experiential truth of who and what the whole of God is and how the whole of God has acted to bring us together (Col 2:9-10); we celebrate the vulnerable Face of the whole of God now dwelling with us in our hearts by the Spirit as family together in wholeness, congruent with Jesus’ prayer (Jn 17:20-26); we celebrate together with our compatible reciprocal response of our (individual and corporate) vulnerable face(s) in God’s qualitative image and relational likeness (2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:23-24); we celebrate his relational response of grace that removed the relational barriers and ongoingly enables us to grow further and deeper together with God as his very own beloved daughters and sons (Eph 2:13-22); and we celebrate being sisters and brothers in equalized and intimate relationships together (Col 3:10-11).

To celebrate Communion like this is the new wine emerging and flowing completely, not constrained in theology as referential knowledge, but with vulnerable hearts in how we come together to share in Jesus’ table fellowship, along with Mary, Levi, the former prostitute and Zacchaeus. This distinguished involvement is the relational work of God’s new creation family making the primary *primary*—indeed, to transpose referential, diminished and minimalized Communion into Jesus’ new song in whole Communion with relational connection without the veil. For example, to counter the individualistic practice of partaking in Communion, we need ways to have persons physically come together (e.g. gather around the altar table); we need help to make connection with each other (eye contact at the very least), to pass each other the bread, or to say a word of affirmation to each other, thus to actually *share* together to embody the significance of communion in Communion. We need Jesus’ new song to replace the old fragmented Communion dirge (e.g. everyone inward and looking down), the specific notes and lyrics for which need to be composed with the Spirit. This is not about innovation as an end in itself, but transformation of our ecclesiology to be whole for transformation of Communion together to compose whole worship.

I suggested in a previous chapter that we drop the phrase ‘words of institution’ and instead call Jesus’ words ‘formative family words’ to shift our thinking from fragments to Jesus’ ongoing relational work with the Spirit to make us whole together in likeness of the Trinity (as in Jesus’ formative family prayer, Jn 17). It also would be helpful to replace “remembrance” with “celebration” to shift our focus from the past and inadvertently ignore the Spirit’s presence as Jesus’ relational replacement for communion

‘here and now’. “Celebration” also reminds us that the choice is ours to make to enter boldly and confidently behind the curtain face-to-face here and now in the Spirit. There are many other ways we have fragmented Communion which specifically need to be transformed as we submit ourselves to Jesus’ relational imperative to change and grow in God’s primacy for relationship—in other words, to “remember me whole” indeed.

Jesus’ relational language integral to building whole Communion composes the lens to be able to recognize and transform outer-in practices, such as reciting words without the relational involvement of hearts (Mt 15:8-9; Mk 7:6-8). We also become attuned to overemphasis on individual persons that fragments the whole (e.g. overly christocentric focus, or making Communion only about “Jesus and me”). We begin to have a distaste for the primacy of secondary matter, or other influences from human contextualization that reduce any part of God’s relational whole. And we feel the pain *with* God when God cannot count on his family to make relational connection together. These are areas for further relational work that need to be taken up by worship thinkers, leaders and planners with the purpose of building up God’s relational whole. They also need to ensure that all aspects of worship have relational clarity, that is, that God is the One we are worshipping—for example, our songs focus on God and we sing directly to God, both expressed in the second-person as Subject involved in relationship together. And while worship leaders cannot ensure the vulnerable involvement of each worshiper, they need to lead with their own vulnerability for communion together both behind the curtain and without any veil. Worship planners also are responsible to provide the opportunities for worshipers (individually and corporately) to praise, bless, give thanks directly to God without their mediation, and participate in Communion together with their whole person, nothing less and no substitutes.

Although the outward forms of Communion vary widely across the church spectrum—from high liturgical churches, in which templates of structured patterns are followed, to low or Free church practices—the vital issue to God is the qualitative depth of relational involvement during Communion of the worshipers from inner out. Communion without the primacy of the ecclesiology of worship is an institutional practice without significance both to God and his family. The church in worship without the primacy of communion in relationship together is an institution without significance both to distinguish the whole of God and to be distinguished as God’s whole. Whole ecclesiology for whole worship is irreducible to the whole of God and thereby is nonnegotiable for God’s whole.

Therefore, the primacy God gives to relational connection is our hermeneutic lens to deconstruct any Communion practices that reduce God’s relational whole. Any deconstruction, no doubt, raises tension about the place of church tradition. Essentially, to remember the whole of Jesus is to listen to all his words, notably about tradition among God’s people (Mk 7:7-8) and his unavoidable critiques of church practice (Rev 2-3)—remembering the primacy of his words that construct whole ecclesiology for whole worship. Primarily, then, ‘remember Jesus whole’, namely at his table fellowships composing this distinguished communion together, must be our hermeneutic lens for composing beautifully (i.e. whole-ly) our language for building whole Communion into maturity with new wine.

## Maturing with New Wine

The journey of God's people to wholeness is certainly confounded functionally by hermeneutical ambiguity, which results from the uncontested epistemological illusion and ontological simulation composed by reductionism. The new will not emerge whole from current conditions but only from redemptive change. Yet, it is exciting to anticipate the emergence of God's new creation family in whole ecclesiology, vulnerably engaged for whole worship as an uncommon 'distinguished family *time*' in contrast to a common gathering. How the whole of God's vulnerable heart has longed for us to respond reciprocally in God's relational likeness, as a compatibly vulnerable people composed of hearts joined together in family love (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:23)! Family love, engaged face to face jointly in equalized and intimate relationships, will be the evidence of our maturity (as Paul made definitive for the church, Eph 4:13-16). And this new wine will be unmistakable in distinction to the common's hold on so much of our worship with old wine (thinking perhaps "the old is good, *enough or even better*," Lk 5:39). It is vital for our maturing (*teleioō*, to make complete, qualitatively whole from inner out, not merely holistic from outer-in; from *teleios* in Eph 4:13) to understand that maturity involves the vulnerableness of a child-person in order to go deeper into the understanding of communion with the whole of God. That is, maturing signifies being made whole in the primacy of intimate communion with Jesus' vulnerable face, the Face that makes us whole. The Face in whole constitutes us whole (*plērōma*, fullness, complete, Col 2:9-10, cf. 2 Cor 4:6), which is the only maturity defined by Paul for whole ecclesiology (Eph 1:23; 4:13, cf. Col 1:28).

The OT counterpart to *teleios* (n.) is *tāmiym*, which we have identified as the qualitative function of our whole person from inner out, inseparably functioning with *šēdāqâh* (nothing less and no substitutes composing righteousness). In Psalm 18, the poet David expresses from his own relationship with the whole and holy God that the *tāmiym* of God (v.30) composes our *tāmiym* (v.32). As we have seen throughout this study, God's whole terms require the vulnerable involvement of our hearts in compatible response to the vulnerable heart of God (cf. Ps 15:1-2). However, both *teleios* and *tāmiym* (and their various forms) are also translated into English as "perfect" and its related words, presenting another difficulty in translation, to be discussed shortly.

In God's relational context and intimate relational process, one outcome of maturing is deeper understanding about our theological anthropology. Maturity/perfection in the biblical sense is never about outer-in change (*metaschematizō*) as we commonly think (functionally if not theologically) about maturity and perfection from human contextualization, but only about inner-out redemptive change of *metamorphoō*. That is, *teleioō* only means being redemptively restored to whole ontology and function from inner out (not perfect or blameless without sin), and only in communion together with Jesus' whole person face to Face, behind the curtain, heart to heart—yet not only as individuals, but in the corporate relationships necessary to compose God's relational whole. *Tāmiym* and *teleios* converge with *šālôm* (peace as wholeness) to compose conclusively the relational outcome of the whole of God's relational response of grace to make whole human persons together as God's whole (Num 6:24-26; Jn 14:27; Eph 2:14-17; Col 3:15). We cannot reduce the outcome of this distinguished relational process to some epistemological illusion or ontological

simulation of perfection (individually and corporately), that is, without reducing the whole of God and God's response and fragmenting its results for the gospel and all who claim and give thanks for it.

As we have previously discussed, redemptive change (*metamorphoō*) requires leaving behind the 'old' so that the new wine can emerge and flow. For the new wine to be thus released, we need to deconstruct our outer-in efforts at maturity (and 'die to' the self-determination underlying those efforts), the indicators of which are shaped by our human contexts—notably reducing our theological anthropology. Many of our notions about maturity are normative and sometimes necessary as we grow up, for example, having certain character virtues and acquiring skills necessary to function as responsible adults and to get along with others in our private and public lives. *Teleios*, however, is not defined by these indicators, nor does maturity as wholeness come with the advancement of age and life experiences (quantitative *bios*), or even certain changed behaviors (though these may be important). *Teleios* can never be constrained to having "arrived" at a certain place in one's life in a comparative process based on outer-in criteria from human contextualization; this is the false assumption of 'the wise and learned' and temple leaders discussed earlier, not to mention the critical boast of "the wise" (Jer 9:23-24). The new wine can neither emerge nor flow by practicing an outer-in approach to maturity as God's daughters and sons.

Because we bring this outer-in view of maturity to our discipleship, our ecclesiology, and thus our worship, we falsely believe that we become mature based on refining what we do or have. This outer-in view in the last couple of decades has increasingly included getting more training and accumulating more referential knowledge to better serve God—consider the alternative presented in the primordial garden (Gen 3:5) and to Jesus (Lk 4:6)—for example, to better lead worship, preach, lead churches and teach in the academy with greater authority. In general, besides church leadership, the persons who are considered to be mature disciples are those who participate the most in ministry, mission, and service. The relational consequence of this so-called maturity from such distinctions (and its comparative-competitive nature) for the church is fragmentation and relational distance (not to mention burn-out and perhaps bitterness). This fragmentation is what Paul strongly confronted in the churches at Corinth (1 Cor 1:10; 2:1,6), and its related false distinction-making at Galatia (Gal 3:28; 5:7; 6:15) and Colosse (Col 3:11); and this fragmenting process is what prevails in many of our churches (e.g. the clergy-laity relational divide).

A further hermeneutic impasse arises from the English translation of both *teleios* and *tāmiym* as "perfection" and "perfect" (adj.) because they connote in our modern vernacular a quantitative superlative status that has no flaws or blemishes in a comparative process (e.g. Heb 10:1,14; Ps 18:30,32). These notions of "perfect" feed right into our susceptibility to reductionism. When, for example, Jesus tells us to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," (Mt 5:48), we perceive God in superlative adjectives, then try to measure up to that unattainable standard in a comparative process. We fear making mistakes or looking foolish, and therefore minimize taking risks for fear of failure. Some of us thus function as perfectionists and demand the same outer-in "perfection" from others, which embeds us all in secondary matter. Anyone leading worship who embraces this view of maturity and perfection will be susceptible to these self-concerns (e.g. much prompting of the congregants emerges from this), to fall into

using referential language (e.g. for embellishment), and perform in front of the curtain while God is on the other side, even with the desire to give God acceptable worship. Moreover, whenever worship and church leaders function in outer-in “perfection” (*hypokrisis*, the wearing of masks in playing a role, Lk 12:1), this teaches the rest of the congregation to do the same. This influence to function from outer in is the significance of Jesus’ warning against the yeast of the Pharisees, and what Paul rebuked Peter for (Gal 2:11-14), and also warned the churches about (Gal 5:9; 1 Cor 5:6-8). A little yeast of *hypokrisis* affects the entire dough; so it is that outer-in function of church and worship leaders permeates the entire church, to reduce the whole.

*Teleios* as maturity and ‘perfection’ are to God only the inner-out relational function in wholeness, and only by the redemptive work of God’s relational grace—grace as the only basis to establish us with God and as the ongoing base for our function to be whole from inner out in relationships together as new wine. As such, then, maturity indicates our theological anthropology (ontology and function) made qualitatively and relationally whole, conjoining (1) the person from inner out in the qualitative image of the whole of God and (2) such persons vulnerably involved in God’s relational context and intimate relational process of family love, in new relationships that are both equalized and intimate, in relational likeness of the whole of God, the Trinity. In God’s qualitative image and relational likeness, maturity functions in God’s daughters and sons as those transformed to the new wine of communion together for whole ecclesiology—with nothing less and no substitutes for who they are as persons and whose they are as God’s family. These are the relational dynamics necessary to mature our worship, to distinguish our communion for whole Communion, the blessed outcome of which is to know and understand our whole and holy God’s heart in face-to-Face-to-face reciprocal relationship together.

Maturing in new wine brings us back to the vulnerableness of a child-person. In chapter four we noted the irony that persons who are mature (*teleios*)—that is, those who have the hermeneutic means (*aisthētērion*, Heb 5:14) to hear and respond to Jesus’ relational language—are only those who function with the vulnerability of a child-person (Lk 10:21; Mt 18:3). Those persons who are mature thereby ongoingly participate in communion together Face to face and relationally know and understand the whole of God (Jer 9:24). The integrity of the person we present to each other, the integrity and quality of our communication for relational connection, and the depth of our relational involvement with each other in family love—corporately in the image and likeness of the Trinity—compose vulnerable maturity of *teleios*. This is why Jesus makes it a relational imperative to change and become a child-person.

### **Maturing in God’s Family Love**

The depth of this intimate involvement in family love is the function signified in Jesus’ relational language in the Sermon on the Mount: “*be vulnerably involved in family love as your Father is vulnerably involved, including with you*” (Mt 5:48). And family love involves making ourselves vulnerable to each other, whereby we become aware of each other in specific ways, involved in the depth of our hearts—that is, growing in both sensitivity to the qualitative and awareness of the relational. Vulnerableness with each other necessitates listening well, responding to the other person as needed, and

reciprocally sharing ourselves openly, even with critique (cf. Col 3:16). Relational language is an irreplaceable dimension in these relational connections of family love, which Paul illuminated beyond a list of virtues in order to mature in whole ecclesiology (e.g. Eph 4:25-32; Col 3:8-9). We must remove language (both spoken and through our nonverbal actions) that creates relational barriers (e.g. false presentations, hiding one's whole person), and let family love compose our relational language to build each other up together (Eph 4:15; Eph 5:18b-20; Col 3:12-17). In and for family love, Paul urges the church in corporate life, notably in worship: “*with your whole person be relationally involved with the Spirit*” (Eph 5:18b), and extend family love to each other to compose whole ecclesiology for whole worship:

“Speak *only in relational language that communicates whole-ly from inner out* in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:19-20; cf. Col 3:15-17).

Here Paul illuminates a vital issue about music as the unique inner-out idiom of relational language for worship. It is first important for us to understand that Paul is able to speak for God in God's relational language because Paul himself has been made mature in wholeness from inner out by God's relational grace (2 Cor 12:9). As a mature child-person, Paul uses his hermeneutical means (*aisthētērion*, Heb 5:14) in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, who has transformed Paul's interpretive framework and lens (*phronēma* and *phroneō*, Rom 8:5-6). On this basis, Paul urges the churches to build each other up in family love for which music plays a vital part. Yet, there is an important distinction that Paul makes about music that we need to fully understand in order for our worship to mature.

Music has two inseparable and irreducible dimensions—its qualitative nature and its unique relational function to connect hearts in communion together. Music's qualitative nature is its universal ability to touch and stir the depths of our hearts, thereby to orient our own qualitative nature toward the transcendent God. However, the qualitative nature of music alone does not make heart-to-heart connection. In this way, music's qualitative nature functions in ways similar to the beauty of creation, visual arts, poetry, and icons in Orthodox worship and devotions. These are all qualitative ‘signs’ that stir our hearts and point us to God. For relational connection to be made, music's other dimension, its unique relational function, is needed for music to serve its whole function in worship. This is because the God of heart who is relational and vulnerably present for reciprocal relationship together has created us *with* music for intimate communion together.<sup>4</sup>

Paul deeply understood that these two dimensions of music are integrally conjoined for music's qualitative-relational function for communion together. What is more, these two dimensions are inseparable for music to be whole from inner out and must not be fragmented. That is, if we engage in music only for its qualitative nature (i.e. for affect, as in musical performances in worship, for background music, or mere entertainment), we as listeners are rendered (i.e. reduced to) a passive audience, though perhaps a deeply moved audience. In this case, music becomes fragmented and an end in

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<sup>4</sup> For a fuller discussion about music's qualitative nature and unique relational function in worship, see *A Theology of Worship: ‘Singing’ a New Song to the Lord*, 76-86.

itself, with the result that the focus of attention in worship shifts to the musicians, singers, or choir and the affect they produce. Conversely, if music is engaged only for its relational function separated from its qualitative nature by primacy given to the quantitative elements (e.g. technique, volume), and thereby without the qualitative involvement of our hearts, then any relational connection will only be shallow, in ontological simulation of communion.

Paul's words integrate the qualitative-relational dimensions of music because he deeply understood music in its integral function as relational language, the necessary means to communion for whole ecclesiology. Furthermore, he understood whole theological anthropology and why we need to corporately sing and make melody in our hearts to the whole of God as the basis for our psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Music is irreplaceable in God's relational language when expressed whole-ly from inner out (i.e. beautifully) from the hearts of God's new creation family. In other words, nothing less than whole ecclesiology in whole worship is sufficient to distinguish the church as God's new creation family.

For our worship to become mature, then, we need to redeem any use of music that is fragmented. This redemption of music is contingent on the inner-out maturing of all the worshipers—worship leaders, musicians, singers and all the persons in the pews. To be sure, our maturing of worship and as worshipers is only from inner out (*metamorphoō*), never from outer in (*metaschematizō*). Any outer-in efforts on our part to change our worship, even with sincere intentions, reflect being immature (i.e. not qualitatively whole) in reduced theological anthropology, without the hermeneutical means of the mature (Heb 5:14). This was the issue Paul addressed in the Corinthian church, whose reductionism caused fragmentation in their relationships (1 Cor 1:10-13). Paul called them out for remaining immature, signified by infants still needing milk (3:1-2; 14:20; cf. Eph 4:14; Heb 5:12-13). In the same way, any outer-in efforts we make to mature our worship only serve to maintain an immature worship, reflecting also an immature ecclesiology and pneumatology (Eph 5:18b).

A further shift that the relationally mature engage—from outer in to inner out—is to grow beyond involvement with God only on a situational basis to the depth of ongoing relational involvement with the Spirit. Situational involvement goes from situation to situation without deepening in communion and knowing and understanding God, though one may gain something from each experience (cf. 2 Tim 3:7). This level of involvement with God is seen in worshipers who depend on getting “refueled” Sunday to Sunday, going over the same immature diet of milk (Heb 5:12-13, 6:1) because they do not partake of solid food consisting of ongoing relational involvement that God can count on to be nothing less and no substitutes (i.e. in righteousness, *dikaiosynē*, v.13, the Greek counterpart to *ṣēdāqâh*). Not only the worshipers in the pews/chairs, but preachers, who sermon after sermon preach the basics of Christian faith (e.g. Heb 6:1), unknowingly reinforce this limited involvement; they too are inadvertently immature, in contrary function to be whole and thus unable to help the maturing of the church to be whole as Christ composed and Paul defined (Eph 4:12-13; Col 3:15-16). Furthermore, our church practices that revolve around the church calendar events as the high points in church life (especially Christmas and Easter) reflect an immature ecclesiology defined and determined more in situations and by events rather than *in* and *by* God's relational context and relational process in ongoing communion together.



Therefore, in worship service (as in the rest of our week), our ongoing reciprocal involvement relational process with the Spirit needs to be compatible with the same relational terms that Jesus made imperative for his followers. “Ongoing” relational involvement focuses not quantitatively on “every single minute,” but only qualitatively on our compatible face-to-Face vulnerable presence with God so that he can count on us for relational connection. We can relationally count on God’s vulnerable presence because vulnerably present is how God *is* in God’s relational nature and qualitative being (the sum of God’s glory in the face of Christ, 2 Cor 4:6). And so to be mature is to be vulnerably present corporately together as God’s whole, the temple, the church, the new creation family. Each worshiper is accountable for his or her vulnerable involvement in the corporate face before God’s Face. This is what Peter meant when he referred to God’s people as a holy priesthood (1 Pet 2:9-10); we individually and corporately together enter behind the curtain to join Jesus in his sacrifice, to worship the whole and holy God face to Face.

If it is not yet apparent, this hermeneutic of worship language challenges the perspective that persons (e.g. new Christians) undergo transformation (the process of maturing, i.e. sanctification) merely on the basis of regular participation in church, of which attending worship services is a vital part. The thinking is that ‘immersion’ in church life and practice (often described as transformative) are sufficient to establish persons in a new identity, which includes learning the language of Christian practices (cf. the total immersion to learn Spanish by living in Mexico). Immersion in church life and practice is merely ‘total immersion’ (not ‘whole immersion’), if only immersed in God’s relational context (e.g. of corporate worship) but without the necessary reciprocal relational process together with the Spirit for relational connection that constitutes *teleios* and *tāmiym*. Total immersion is insufficient to mature us, even if we master the language of ‘churchspeak’, as accomplished by long-time Christians, dedicated Christian servants, church leaders, and persons in the academy. However well-meaning and hopeful the concept of total immersion is, it is a mindset based on assumptions that are insupportable when weighed against Jesus’ whole person and relational language as he was vulnerably involved with persons throughout his incarnation. In addition, Jesus’ formative family prayer conclusively defines what maturing in wholeness is (Jn 17:13-26), which Paul echoes for the church’s ‘whole immersion’ with the Spirit to relationally experience “the fullness [*plērōma*, completeness, whole] of God” (Eph 3:16-19).

Maturity in wholeness means to take engaging steps into ‘whole immersion’ in both God’s distinguished (uncommon) relational context and vulnerable relational process for compatible reciprocal relational involvement with the whole of God, in communion together behind the curtain and with the veil removed—corporately as God’s relational whole. Irreducible and nonnegotiable to our shaping and terms, only by whole immersion in the whole of God’s relational whole does the new wine emerge, flow and mature. Maturity makes relational ‘demands’ on us, just as relational grace does: the responsibilities of reciprocal relational together. Responsibilities cannot be engaged apart from relationship together and its reciprocal nature, or else they are undertaken in a reduced theological anthropology (ontology and function). In fact, they are the same demands from Jesus’ words in simply the relational language of family love. To become mature is to participate in God’s life by God’s intimate relational process of family love (Gal 5:6), expressed in the two irreducible and inseparable dimensions mentioned earlier

in this chapter: (1) to worship who, what, and how the whole of God is, and (2) to build each other up as the new creation family. These are the two inseparable dimensions (Jesus' relational imperatives, cf. Mk 12:29-31; Jn 13:34) that the whole of Scripture makes imperative. Nothing less and no substitutes can determine these relational responses or fulfill these relational responsibilities.

These two dimensions compose our language for whole ecclesiology in whole worship, signifying our PASS into communion together with the whole of God in whole immersion. PASS is the acronym for Praise, Affirmation (with Adoration and Affection), Submission and Service. Worship is our PASS to intimate relationship with God; that is, worship integrally composes our relational response of PASS to God as follows: **(P)** – **Praise** and blessing (*bārak*) give primacy to the whole of who, what and how God is, which inseparably includes thanksgivings (*bārak-yādah*) for God's intimate involvement with us. **(A)** – To God we give **affirmation**, appreciation, adoration, and affection in compatible reciprocal response of love as daughters and sons who have been adopted and now securely belong in the new creation family. The primacy of praise and affirmation/adoration are the integral relational dynamics giving basis to and integrating all our other involvement in submission and service to be qualitatively whole from inner out.

**(S)** – The whole of God is the One to whom we give ourselves in **submission** to his whole terms for relationship together. This understanding of submission (*hypotassō*) acknowledges who, what, and how the whole of God is that can be counted on in relationship together (God's righteousness), and responds with our whole person from inner out in faith as relational trust. In other words, we respond compatibly with who, what and how we are that God can count on in relationship together (our righteousness, cf. Eph 4:24). In this submission to the whole of God we also submit in family love to each other for the building up of the whole (Eph 4:15-16; 5:21) in likeness of the trinitarian persons together. Just as Christ submitted himself to the Father to extend and embody family love to us, so also God's new creation family shares this love among ourselves in submission to one another. This whole understanding of submission in family love redeems our common negative notion of submission that reduces persons. That is, in human contexts, submission usually connotes a person of inferior status acquiescing to (or being forced by) another person in a position of superiority, as in power relations constructed on false human distinctions from outer in; or submission is compliance out of obligation or duty, which appears reasonable but is insufficient to distinguish God's family in love. In contrast to and in conflict with this view that reduces the person to an object who is acted upon, or who acts in secondary terms without the depth of response, submission in family love is only possible by those who function as subjects in the primacy of relationship together. These are persons who have been forgiven and deeply loved by the Father and only on this relational basis, loves God and others just as they have been loved (Jn 15:9, 17:26). Without having been loved first in communion together with the whole of God, we don't have family love to give (1 Jn 4:7-21).

**(S)** – In our submission to God and to each other in family love, and only from this basis, we serve God and each other. In the OT, one of the words for worship (*'abad*, Ex 3:12) also means to work (Gen 2:5), to minister or serve God (e.g. as the Levites, Num 3:7-8, cf. Ps 22:30). The Greek counterpart is *latreuo* (cf. Mt 4:10). Rendering service to God composes part of our worship of God. Yet, and this is critical for our

hermeneutic of worship, **service**, like submission, must be understood anew through the lens of family love, never giving primacy to ‘what to do’ but only in the depth of how to be involved with the other person. To serve God as part of our worship only has significance to God in the primacy of relationship, the outcome of which is communion together. Service in family love gives primacy to the other person’s whole person from inner, not to just see the one we serve as a “need” or problem to fix. This common outer-in approach to service reduces both the person being served as well as the one serving. Serving has two dimensions in response to God: (1) to serve the family of God and (2) to extend service outside the church. Serving the church is to build each other up so that we are all equalized in intimate relationship together to be whole in God’s relational grace (Eph 4:3-7), thus redeeming any individual efforts to build oneself up (Heb 12:15). Service to each other also cares for each others’ whole persons, deeply from the heart (1 Cor 12:25).

Serving each other to build up the new creation family in love involves the maturing with new wine that Paul especially worked for (along with submission to God’s relational terms of grace), in his conjoint fight for the gospel and against reductionism. This is the primary focus of all his letters to the various churches. Whenever Paul writes about particular behaviors, he, like Jesus, speaks only in relational terms to build up God’s new creation family from inner out to be whole (mature) in family love. Perhaps, then, the hermeneutical key for reading Paul is his “song” about love (1 Cor 13). We must not remain focused on how beautiful his words sound (the qualitative only) regarding love (*agapē*), nor think of this love in only individual terms. Paul is engaged in rigorous relational work to (1) fight against reductionism of persons and relationships in the church, in order to (2) build up the church in the depth of vulnerable relational involvement in relational likeness of the Trinity (whole person to whole person). This is the relational work of family love that our partaking in whole Communion needs also to affirm and enact, or else, in Paul’s words, we partake “of the Lord in an unworthy manner” (1 Cor 11:27).

Furthermore, for our corporate worship to become whole (mature), we need, for example in prayers for the church, to grow beyond focusing on persons’ physical or situational needs—that is, fragments, which are important but not the whole person—in order to give primacy to whole persons. This is a dimension, again, for which church and worship leaders need to take the lead by their own openness, in the deeper nurturing of God’s family in our innermost during our family communion together in worship. The gospel we claim and proclaim demands this because God has relationally responded to and provided for our qualitatively whole person (again, not merely holistic), the most essential of which is our human relational need. Recomposed language for whole Communion (upper case “C”) embraces this relational function to mature in new wine. As discussed earlier, instead of remembering Jesus’ few disembodied words of institution, whole language of Communion shifts to the encouragement and celebration of our being made whole from inner out by the vulnerable Face of Jesus who is present and vulnerably involved with us today in the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17-18).

In a simple way to remind ourselves, PASS captures the significance of these essential relational dynamics that Jesus embodied at his distinguished table fellowship, and that we as his family must also embody together to mature as new wine in God’s family love.

## The Hermeneutic of Nothing Less and No Substitutes

The whole of God has enacted everything necessary that God had to engage to establish us as his new creation family; and given Jesus' formative family prayer, this relational reality is now and not just for the future (Jn 17:21-23). The Truth is ongoing that God's very heart is vulnerably present in the Spirit for intimate communion with us, singing in only qualitative-relational language throughout the whole of creation and in Scripture. Yet, as God's new creation family, our response to God that composes our worship has needed hermeneutic correction for a long time. We have strained to "remember me whole." We have not listened in relational language to Jesus' whole person as the embodied Word who communicates only in God's family language, illuminating God's relational messages and provisions for relationship together in wholeness. Jesus also makes clear for the church what are the very basic issues involved on our part to complete this relational connection necessary to compose the communion by which whole ecclesiology for whole worship grows and matures. In hermeneutic correction, Jesus' messages are waiting to be received and responded to.

Beyond the dissonance of our noisy silence in worship constituting worship in front of the curtain with the veil covering our hearts, God deeply desires to be heard and responded to<sup>5</sup>—but only Face to face behind the curtain with the veil removed, nothing less and no substitutes. God wants us to be able to boast that we know and understand the whole and holy God in the primacy of relationship together. God has set us apart to be the distinguished family that speaks to and for God in uncommon communion in wholeness. Yet, the ongoing Truth illuminates that God does not accept just any worship because just any worship cannot distinguish who, what, and how God is in communion together with new wine. Remember, then, these words that point to Jesus' hermeneutic for worship language: "the *depth of your vulnerable involvement with your whole person that you give will determine the depth of knowing and understanding God you get*" (Mk 4:24).

I believe that the Spirit, in the formation of the biblical canon, intentionally didn't include any descriptions or prescriptions for 'how-to-do' worship. The Spirit knows that our tendency would be to focus on the secondary of what to do, notably by referentializing the Word, and thereby ignore or diminish the primacy of God's relational language. For this reason, this study does not give sample liturgies and orders of worship, which so often have been reduced to templates constraining ontology and function, both God's and ours. In family love, however, I invite you in communion together with my husband and me to praise, affirm and submit to the whole of God, singing nothing less and no substitutes but "Hallelujah Whole." The whole of God's presence is undeniably distinguished as vulnerably present and intimately involved, whereby we composed this song for his new creation family to vulnerably sing to the Trinity with our compatible corporate response. Then, on this relational basis, we will indeed speak to and for the whole and holy God who makes himself relationally known and understood for communion in new relationship together in wholeness—the best news we can claim and proclaim.

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<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Paul Ricoeur for his original words (that express wanting more in literary hermeneutics), on which this sentence is based. Ricoeur's original words were, "Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again". *La Symbolique du mal* (Paris: Aubier, 1960). *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.

“Since we are receiving the *irreducible family of God*...let us give thanks *in relational language* by which we offer to God acceptable worship” (Heb 12:28).  
Therefore, let us mature together with new wine and respond with nothing less and no substitutes but God’s relational whole!

### **Hallelujah Whole<sup>6</sup>**

(Mt 15:8-9, Jn 4:23-24, Col 1:19-20)

1 Hallelujah! nothing less  
Hallelujah! no substitutes  
The whole of God be present  
The whole of God **be praised!**  
Nothing less no substitutes

**Chorus:** Hallelujah, hallelu, hallelu  
Hallelujah, hallelu, hallelu  
Praise to You, to You, to You  
Praise You holy! Praise You whole!  
All of You—all of You!

2 Hallelujah! nothing less  
Hallelujah! no substitutes  
The whole of God be involved  
The whole of God **responds!**  
Nothing less no substitutes  
(chorus)

3 Hallelujah! nothing less  
Hallelujah! no substitutes  
The whole of God be embraced  
The whole of God **exalted!**  
Nothing less no substitutes  
(chorus)

4 Hallelujah! nothing less  
Hallelujah! no substitutes  
The whole of God highlighted  
The whole of God **give thanks!**  
Nothing less no substitutes  
(chorus)

**Ending:** *slowing* All— of— You!—

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<sup>6</sup> By T. Dave Matsuo and Kary A. Kambara, ©2013. Printable sheet is available online at <http://4X12.org>.



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