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## A Relational Hermeneutic Toward Connective Ecclesial Leadership

Dwight Jason Friesen

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**GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY**

**A RELATIONAL HERMENEUTIC TOWARD CONNECTIVE ECCLESIAL LEADERSHIP**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

**BY  
DWIGHT JASON FRIESEN**

**PORTLAND, OREGON**

**MARCH 2005**

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**PRESENTED: MARCH 16, 2005**

**TITLE: A RELATIONAL HERMENEUTIC TOWARD  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Len Sweet, who began as hero, became teacher, moved to mentor and is showing signs of friend; your love for Christ's church, passion for clear communication and academic excellence is contagious.

To Kent Yinger, whose warm hospitality, attention to detail, penetrating questions and love for God's Word echoes in my heart. Thanks for guiding me through this process.

Thanks also to the other George Fox mentors: Jules Glanzer, Larry Shelton, Steve Delamarter, Dan Brunner, MaryKate Morse, Charles Kamilos, Paul Anderson and Chuck Church for our conversations along the way.

To Chuck Conniry, whose vision and determination birthed this Doctoral program, and whose encouragement was more vital to me than he ever knew.

To the unflappable farm-boy turned techno-theologian, Loren Kerns, whose infectious love for the patristics, ear for well crafted research and refusal to let details fall by the wayside, many thanks.

To *The Sweet 16*, Pete, Ray, Marty, Eric, Earl, Shane, Greg, Terry, Donna, PRay, Rob, Craig, Chad, Warren, and Duff; thanks for making our journey a joy.

To Quest: a Christ-Commons: this faith community has embodied grace and carved out space for me to study and experiment with what I was learning in a real world environment. So many in this community have shaped what these pages hold. Special thanks to Jeffery, Thomas, and Jacob whose tangible support month in and month out translated into food on the table. To Don and Leah who came and sat in my studio so I wouldn't be alone, to Alison who aided me in research, and to Deb who data entered so many books, to those who proof-read, and to all who endured my theological deconstructions, to say I couldn't have done this without you is an understatement.

To mum and dad Friesen for their practical support and unending prayers and to mum and dad Klassen who took care of our family as I have traveled and studied; thank you. Thanks for loving me by loving my wife and my son.

To Ken and Michelle who gave me the "drive" to keep going. To Dallas and Leanne who are in so many ways co-laborers in this endeavourer. To Bevan and Carolyn who embody so many of my relational dreams.

To my colleagues at Mars Hill Graduate School who have given me a place to belong and to become as I wrestle with the interplay of text, soul and culture. To Dan & Becky Allender, Roy Barsness, Christie Lynk, Kirk & Heather Webb, Bryan Burton, Brian McLaren, Nancy Murphy, Steve Call, Carl Raschke, Nancy Press, the late Stan Grenz, and other faculty, staff and students whom I have the privilege of engaging.

To my Blue Highway, Hothouse NW, Missional-Coop and other metro-Seattle colleagues; Paul & Sarah Steinke, Clinton & Brooke Wilson, Greg Lewis, Tom & Christine Sine, Jim & Barb Henderson, Mark & Grace Driscoll, Karen Ward, Eric Likkle, Eugene Cho, Rachelle & Paul Mee-Chapman, Neil & Margaret Tibbott, Casey & Andrea Cerretani, Justin Baeder . . .

To my Allelon'ing, Resonate'ing, Emerging, Oozing colleagues who challenge me to think and help me to see, especially to Joseph Myers, Tim Keel, Doug Pagitt, Andrew Jones, Rudy Carrasco, Mark Humphries, Jason Clark, Mark O, Adam Cleaveland, Chad Canipe, Geoff Holsclaw, Jordon Cooper, Len Hjalmarson . . .

The more I have studied the more I am thankful for the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before. I find myself rejoicing in the texts written in the movements started and process of shaping the ethos of this time and this place. To Jürgen Moltmann, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Søren Kierkegaard, Michael Jinkins, Steven Strogatz, John Milbank, John Cobb, Albert-László Barabási, Duncan Watts, Mark Buchanan, Roger Penrose, Francis Fukuyama, Steven Johnson, Douglas Griffin, Margaret Wheatley, Brian Greene, Richard Pascale, Carl Zimmer, Eberhard Jüngel, Kallistos Ware, Mioslav Volf, Graham Scorgie, Zygmunt Bauman, Peter Senge, Kenneth Badley, Michael Henry, James Arminius, John Webster, John Howard Yoder, Dallas Willard, Menno Simons, Stanley Hauerwas, Clark Pinnock, Thomas Oden, Daniel Taylor, Kenneth Gergen, Graham Ward, Robert Kegan, Alistair McFadyen, LeRon Shults, Catherine Keller, John Zizioulas . . .

To the women and men who from my childhood and beyond have been teaching me to read: Mrs. Funk, Mr. Lundy, David Cunningham, Richard Rorty, James K. A. Smith, Christopher Hall, Paul Ricoeur, James Paul Gee, Anthony Thiselton, Umberto Eco, John Searle, Jacques Derrida, Jürgen Habermas, Lev Manovich, David Crow, Martin Heidegger, Grant Osborne, Roland Barthes . . .

I owe much to the brave souls who have courageously bridged disciplines: Thomas Torrance, Wolfhart Pannenberg, John Polkinghorne, Nancey Murphy, Alister McGrath, Paul Davis, Blaise Pascal, James Loder, Warren Brown, Arthur Peacock, Michael Polanyi . . .

To lovers of the church and mission: E. Stanley Jones, Lesslie Newbigin, Robert Coleman, Howard Snyder, Alan Roxburgh, Robert Webber, Robert Banks, Paul Hiebert, Darrell Guder, Bill Hybels, Wayne Boldt, Kelvin Gardiner, Matt Boda, Rick Warren, George Hunsinger, Gerard Kelly, Michael Frost, Alan Hirsch, Rodney Clapp, David Bosch . . .

To students of the Bible who have teased out new connections: Walter Brueggemann, N. T. Wright, Walter Wink, Tremper Longman III, Richard Hays, John Goldingay, Jim Davis, Larry Hurtado, Stanley Porter, Joanna Badley, Gordon Fee, Scott McKnight, Craig Keener, Cynthia Long-Westfall, Conrad Gempf . . .

No doubt the list goes on.

To Pascal; some of my favorite moments are your surprise visits to my studio; thanks for reading and coloring with me, for sharing my passion for Lego™, for inviting me to play and for reminding me to blow out my candles. “Mommy loves you, Daddy loves you and Jesus loves you. And remember, I’m \_\_\_\_\_ \_ \_.”

To my wife, Lynette whose beauty and love permeates my being and whose influence and presence echo through these pages. If you’re reading this, *it* must be finished; O yah baby! Thanks for pursuing *us* by offering *self*.

And to *The Three* who invite me to dance and won’t take “no” for an answer.

. . . I am because of you. Cheers!

## ABSTRACT

The modern western church is experiencing a crisis of hermeneutic. The pervasive hermeneutic or interpretive lens employed by modern Christ-followers has engendered a largely static view of church structure and leadership. Simply put, the Western church fails to see relationally.

This problem of “visual impairment” will be addressed by crafting a relational hermeneutic composed of three distinct and overlapping lenses: a theological/biblical (*God*) lens, a sociological/ontological (*humanity*) lens and a scientific/network (*the cosmos*) lens.

*Lens 1:* God is social. For orthodox Christ-followers a relational hermeneutic begins with a God who is social; a Tri-unity of Divine persons, each lovingly serving the others in an interanimating, interpenetrating *perichoretic* dance. This relational God empties self in the loving act of creation through which human beings are created bearing God’s relational image. The image of God in humanity may best be seen in the purposed oneness of diverse peoples and communities. The self-revelation of God to humanity through creation, the sacred text of the Christian Scriptures, Christ’s incarnation and the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit all reflect the relational mission of God which is to reconcile all unto Godself.

*Lens 2:* As image bearers of Divine interconnectivity the sociological lens of our relational hermeneutic is an extension of God’s life given to creation. The beauty and complexity of human interrelatedness and social construction reflects the *being* of God. By focusing on the *us* of the *I-thou*, we will see all interpersonal relations as *I-us-thou*; thus all interpersonal relations reflect the Tri-unity of God. The *us* of *I-thou* is a living, dynamic spirit, both inseparable and distinct from both *I* and *thou*.

*Lens 3:* All that God created is interconnected. Human beings are part of God's created order; to be *part of* connotes relationship. We will explore this relationship through recent discoveries within the *network sciences* to aid us in seeing how all that is, is interconnected. We will present scale-free networks as a key for seeing life, structures and institutions relationally. After a brief explanation of network theory, scale-free network theory will be employed to bring the relationship between the Kingdom of God and Christ's church into focus; thus presenting a relational ecclesial structure.

Together, these three lenses compose a relational hermeneutic. As a "vision test" we will apply this relational hermeneutic to leadership within a connective structure; examining the 'being' and 'act' of hubbing-leadership. Characterized by *kenotic* service which is called forth by the faith-community, the hubbing-leader seeks to connect others to whatever is required, (God, one another, creation, etc.) in such a way that the oneness of God is manifest in human experience.

This relational hermeneutic begins in the Tri-unity of God, is extended to image humanity through the *imago Dei* and lived into by joining in the *missio Dei* of reconciling all unto Godself.

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## GLOSSARY

**Christ-Cluster.** Christ-clusters are the ‘soul’ of the church. They are relational groupings of Christians responsible for discrete, Holy Spirit guided and cluster determined cellular functions.

**Christ-Commons.** Christ-commons are the ‘body’ of the church. They are open environments which make space for Christ-Clustering to occur. Institutional church structures are an example of a Christ-commons.

**Cluster.** A cluster is a grouping of nodes linked to the same hub in network.

**Commons.** A commons is an open environment which encourages the self-organization of clusters.

**Hermeneutic.** Hermeneutics is discipline that studies and delineates principles or methods for interpreting. Though the term hermeneutic has been used to describe the discipline of interpreting written text, the term can also used more generally as a “way of seeing.”

**Hub.** A hub is a node within a scale-free network with a disproportionately large number of nodal connections.

**Link.** A link graphically represents relationships between nodes within a network.

**Network.** Networks are systems of interconnected components. In mathematics, a network is usually called a graph. To put it another way, network theory is the applied mathematics counterpart of graph theory. Networks are conceptual models for mapping relationships.

**Node.** A node represents a unit of being in a network map.

***Perichoresis.*** *Perichoresis*, also referred to as circumincession or the Divine-dance. *Perichoresis* describes the inner life of the Triune God; signifying the mutual interanimation and dynamic reciprocity of the Divine persons. This relationship can only be understood as an irreducible relational dynamic that simultaneously affirms both individuality and mutuality.

**Scale-Free Network.** A Scale-Free Network is a specific type of network in which the distribution of connectivity can be extremely uneven. In scale-free networks, some nodes act as “very connected” hubs using a power-law distribution. This kind of connectedness dramatically influences the way the network operates, including how it responds to catastrophic events. The World Wide Web, the Kingdom of God and many other large-scale networks have been shown to be scale-free networks.



## CHAPTER 1

### WHY RELATIONALITY?

*Something is on the way out and something else is painfully being born.  
It is as if something were crumbling, decaying and exhausting itself,  
while something else, still indistinct, were arising from the rubble . . .  
We are in a phase when one age is succeeding another,  
when everything is possible.<sup>2</sup>*  
- Václav Havel

### A Crisis of Perception

Doug has a love/hate relationship with the church. Some of his fondest memories, his life shaping moments and his deep relationships have been with the body of Christ. He entered professional ministry to help other people experience what he had experienced. Over the years he has had a front row seat to a spectacular Divine drama: breathtaking redemptive narratives, broken relationships reconciled, hope discovered and embraced and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> "A Matter of Perception" by Naomi B. 1999. <[www.naomib.com/AMG.htm](http://www.naomib.com/AMG.htm)>

<sup>2</sup> Václav Havel, "The New Measure of Man," *New York Times* (New York, NY), July 8, 1994, Op-Ed page.

His front row seat has also enabled him to witness the horror of the Bride of Christ morph into the Bride of Frankenstein; wreaking havoc on those in its path. Annual meetings that went sour, cruel unsubstantiated rumors spread throughout the body, declining numbers, shrinking budgets and the sinking feeling that he simply wasn't good enough. He had come to dread random phone calls from parishioners wanting to speak with him, fearing that they too were about to tear away yet one more strip of his dwindling dignity. When he attended conferences or read of large churches he often wondered how those leaders were wired; how they were able to be relationally connected in the detailed lives of the people in their churches. Doug used to love being with people and now he increasingly saw them as interruptions.

When he and his wife Renee left seminary they would often talk and dream late into the night with anyone who would listen about the wonder and beauty of doing life together. They dreamt of running their church like a finely oiled machine; being known and knowing others, about participating in the day-to-day life of their neighborhood as they let the light of Christ shine through them. They dreamt about bearing with one another, and about loving through disagreements, and about finding small practical ways to demonstrate their love for Christ by loving the members of their church family. They knew that "tune-ups" would be necessary from time-to-time and saw such maintenance as part of their calling.

Five years into their first pastorate those passionate late night conversations were a distant memory. "Youthful idealism; borderline utopianism," he said to comfort himself. Words like: defensive, exhausted, stale, scared, dry, and alone were now regularly appearing in his journal. Renee was also growing disillusioned with vocational ministry.

She subtly dreaded board meeting nights. As she watched Doug return home with mixed feelings, having often been misunderstood. She knew it was becoming too much for her. She had started to go to bed before he returned just so she wouldn't have to see the discouragement on his face. Sometimes she even faked sleeping. After five years he and Renee were done. "Forget 'tune-ups'!" said Doug, "we've crashed and burned; it's a write-off. We're just lucky to be able to walk away." Doug submitted his resignation with nowhere to go; maybe he could work with Renee's dad.

While packing up his study and his dreams he came across a binder filled with essays he had written while in grad school. A wave of nostalgia washed in. He sat flipping the pages, reading a paragraph here and there. He thought of some of his professors, his fellow students and the passion he had once lived and breathed. "What a far cry from this," he thought looking at his boxed up life.

When Doug found the essay he had written on Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*<sup>3</sup> he read the entire thing through – twice – with glossy eyes. "What had gone wrong *here*?"

Working with Renee's dad was OK. Doug liked to joke that he went from hocking "Eternal Fire insurance" to auto insurance, rarely eliciting little more than a slight chuckle. He and Renee had a hard time finding a church to attend, so for a while they quit going altogether. For the first time in their lives they slept in on Sunday mornings, and liked it.

As Doug and Renee talked with the people they were meeting in their new life they were surprised how many connected with their story. Their feelings of being disappointed

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<sup>3</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1954).

or hurt by the institutional church found ready “Amens,” as did the sense of new freedom in their post-church life.

- “Since I quit ‘going to church’ I have more time with my family and I love it.”
- “Now that I don’t have committee meetings, I’m getting to know my neighbors; it feels like they actually want to know me.”
- “Today, when I hear of a financial need or I see a friend who needs help I give, I don’t need to wait for a ‘church response.’ I am the response.”
- “Since I ‘dropped out’ of Sunday School and midweek programs our family has started to volunteer one Saturday each month at a neighborhood food bank. We’re making a real difference, I think Christ is pleased.”
- “My husband and I go for walks on Sunday mornings. We talk and pray. And we’re no longer content with Christian clichés; instead we wrestle with God - together.”

Doug and Renee began to deconstruct the church and began to find others who wanted to deconstruct as well. They started a small group in their home. Often their conversations were as profane as they were prophetic. They discussed the church’s hierarchical power structures, external measurements of success, programmed spirituality, church marketing that seemed more image conscious than concerned with honesty, the myth of the priesthood of all believers, the disproportionate amount of money spent on buildings and religious professionals, and how so much church-growth seemed to stem from clergy’s instinctive grasp at self-preservation. Their conversations often took them back to Christ’s interactions with the religious leaders of His day.

Jesus’ ministry was so relational. He had such authority but refused to wield power, there was no discernable program; instead He met each person uniquely.

After awhile God's Spirit began to challenge Doug, Renee and their small group. They began to sense that they could do more than deconstruct what they had experienced; God might actually be inviting them to begin something constructive. Maybe they could be a Christ-community; a church without power structures and permission systems, without dogmas of exclusion but with open doors of invitation.

But how?

As eye opening and life changing as Doug's seminary experience had been, it had not trained him to see relationally. By God's grace, Doug is beginning to sense that his vocational ministry burnout may be one of the greatest gifts God has given him . . . to date. Doug, Renee and their community still have a love/hate relationship with church but they are growing hopeful. They find themselves asking: Are there other Christ-communities wrestling with the implications of relational theology in the practice and structure of church life? How do I learn to see relationally and think connectively?

\*\*\*\*\*

*The ability to perceive or think differently  
is more important than the knowledge gained.<sup>4</sup>*

– David Bohm, quantum physicist

*What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.*

– Mark 10:9, *New American Standard Version*

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<sup>4</sup> David Bohm as quoted by Joseph Jaworski, *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1996), 172.

### **Seeing the Problem as Seeing the Solution**

The questions echoing in the hearts and minds of people like Doug are the questions this project will explore. Simply put, the problem facing today's Western church which this project addresses, is that we do not see relationally. We need corrective lenses. In contrast with the clear vision of God – which is unified/difference in Godself – human beings' vision moves to divide; we separate sacred from secular, body from soul, now from future/past, me from you, invisible from visible, etc. The pervasive interruptive lens employed by modern Christ-followers has engendered a largely static view of church structure(s) and leadership. This dissertation presents a relational hermeneutic which equips readers to see God, humanity and creation as interconnected. When this relational hermeneutic is applied to the study and praxis of ecclesiology the people of God will be better prepared to live into the *imago Dei* thus incarnating the *missio Dei*.

In an effort to address the problem of divisive-vision as it applies to church this dissertation will craft a relational hermeneutic equipping the people of God to live into God's dream for *Shalom*, which is the Reign of God announced by Christ and testified to by the people of God.

### **Summary of Chapters**

The second chapter articulates the methodology employed in this project. The chapter will argue for the necessity of employing a methodology reflective of the study; thus, claiming the study of relationality must be conducted relationally. Neither classically qualitative nor quantitative this methodology will constructively and dialogically bring

three hermeneutical keys, or lenses into sync. The chapter will lay out the rationale behind constructively engaging an interdisciplinary exploration in the process of lens crafting.

Chapter three is the largest chapter in the project as it comprises three sections each contributing to a clearer vision of interconnection. One larger chapter instead of three smaller chapters underscores the interpenetrating relationality of these three sections in the construction of a unified relational hermeneutic. The chapter begins by presenting theological/biblical lens (3.1) in which God's interrelationality is explored as the hermeneutical key to human social-being, and the relationality intrinsic to revelation. God is presented as a social-God; one/three; three/one; Father, Son, Holy Spirit in a *perichoretic* interpenetrating relationship which simultaneously affirms both individuality and mutuality.

It is this relational God who has created human beings *imago Dei*. Thus image bearers of the Divine, human beings are best seen as relational or social beings. Human beings are not just created for relationships rather we have our being in and through relationship. Our being is in relationship with God, with other humans and with the entire created order. To relate is to have a connection, and God created humanity to enjoy deep interpersonal connection with Godself. The tacit oneness which the first man and first woman enjoyed with God was altered by their disobedient act, objectifying their knowledge/experience of God; isolation in the wake of sin has been part of the human story ever since.

God's ongoing acts of creating intrinsically establish relational links between Creator and creation. The mission of God is to invite the created into God's oneness, thus



God initiates dialogue with humanity through the Holy Spirit, through creation, through Scripture and through Jesus.

*The Three's*<sup>5</sup> invitation is not just to a connection to Godself but is an invitation to an *interpersonal* connection with God. In this sense, all special revelation is God's personal invitation to *perichoretically* dance with God.

The social/ontological lens of section 3.2 invites the reader to see the dynamic and creative nature of interpersonal relations. To have a relationship is to have a connection; and these connections are not static but are living and dynamic. Though this section focuses on interpersonal relationality the reader will gain a sense that all existence is, in fact connected. For example, the fact that we can speak of something implies knowledge of; and "knowledge of," is a form of connection.<sup>6</sup> A connection between two people does not automatically imply an interpersonal connection. Connections are diverse: economic, geographical, political, gender, chemical, social, biological, etc.; connections are so complex that it is impossible to articulate this fully.

We will see that interpersonal relations are best understood as living, dynamic *spirits*. As two persons (*I-thou*) engage interpersonally it is the *spirit (us)* who animates the connection. The *spirit* of *I-thou* is neither static nor an objective being, rather the *us* is living and dynamic. As such all interpersonal relationships are trinitarian (*I-us-thou*). The

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<sup>5</sup> *The Three* is a title for God which highlights the oneness of the Divine "persons" while providing a way around use of the term "person" in reference to *The Three*. Its use stems from the work of David Cunningham. David S. Cunningham <info@theologybooks.com>, "On the Trinity," Wipf and Stock Publishers, <<http://www.theologybooks.com/site/feature.cfm?tkey=69>>, 15 May 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Though "knowledge of" implies a relationship, "knowledge of" is not required for a connection to exist, as it is virtually impossible to detail all the connections contributing to even one person's being.

*us* is living, *perichoretically* informing, transforming, interpenetrating and interrelating with both *I* and *thou*. The *us* cannot be *us* without the *I*, and *I* cannot be *I* without the *thou*, and *thou* cannot be *thou* without the *us*. The *us* can be uniquely described and is distinguishable from both *I* and *thou* yet simultaneously inseparable from both *I* and *thou*. The *us*, like all living beings is continually becoming, so even though an *us* can be described, the description is always past tense.<sup>7</sup> In this way, the inner relational dynamic of *perichoresis* is the hermeneutical key to understanding interpersonal relationality. Because the *I-us-thou* is rooted in time and place, the *us* is morphing and developing. With even the slightest development in one party to the relationship, the whole of the relationship may be changed.

The network science lens of section 3.3 will present scale-free networks as a key for seeing life, structures, and institutions interrelationally. After a brief explanation of network theory, scale-free network theory will be employed to bring the relationship of the Kingdom of God with churches into focus.

The Kingdom of God is a vast shaping network, linking all of creation to its Creator. Each node of creation is related to every other node through a dynamic web of constantly morphing links. The study of networks seeks to understand the how's and why's of connection and until recently network theory could not explain clustering phenomena; it is the reality of clustering that makes scale-free network theory so vital. Scale-free network theory accounts for the clustering of nodes around hubs (or

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<sup>7</sup> The socially constructed descriptions of *us* are eschatological in that descriptions, or names, call forth future 'being' and 'action.' For example, the *us* of Dwight/Lynette has been named *marriage*; *marriage* is a name both Dwight and Lynette live into.

disproportionately popular nodes), serving as a hermeneutical key to the relational structure of life, opening new vistas for understanding and experiencing the living relationship between God's World, God's Kingdom and God's churches.

We will see that within God's "scale-free kingdom" churches are best understood as Christ-clusters. Christ-clusters are groupings of nodes responsible for discrete Holy Spirit led/cluster-determined cellular functions. These Christ-clusters are both distinct from, though synergistically and simultaneously related to the institutional church. Institutional structures like churches, denominations, para-church organizations, families, colleges, and even corporations can serve as a type of 'commons' for Christ-clustering; such institutional structures can be seen as the "body" while the clusters can be seen as the "soul" - we dare not separate the two.

Chapter four serves as a vision test for the interdisciplinary lens crafted in the previous chapter. This fourth chapter will take a close look at ecclesial leadership through this relational hermeneutic; examining the 'being' and 'act' of leadership within the many and always dynamic Christ-clusters and structures of God's scale-free kingdom. Though the chapter draws on the categories of 'being' and 'act' for the sake of organization the two cannot be separated, they are like two sides of a coin.

Commonly held modern theories of leadership have often assumed a leader to be an individualized, autonomous self, and ontologically created as leader with their leadership to be the exercise of said selfhood. This chapter claims leadership within a Christ-cluster is a socially constructed ethos, created and called forth by each Christ-cluster.

*Kenosis* is essential to the ‘being’ and ‘act’ of the leader in a Christ-cluster, as leadership must self-empty for the ongoing *perichoretic* formation of the communal-ethos. The ethos of these Christ-clusters invites people to empty themselves in hubbing servant leadership. Those people responding to the ethos invitation to serve a hubbing role will missionally link beyond the safety of their indigenous community as they bridge to other nodes and clusters. Hubs engage with those nodes linking to them so as to introduce life-stimulating chaos into the organism. The relational reign of God is the ultimate reality that draws creation forward.

My hope and prayer is that this dissertation will help clarify the interrelatedness of all creation in God and aid those who love and serve Christ’s church in thinking and seeing connectively. This understanding of the dynamic nature of human interpersonal relations has radical implications for theology and praxis. Our first step toward grappling with those implications will be to understand the research methodology we will employ in this dissertation. How will we research this problem?

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*Learning to observe the whole system is difficult.  
Our traditional analytic skills can’t help us.  
Analysis narrows our field of awareness and actually  
prevents us from seeing the total system.<sup>8</sup>*

— Margaret J. Wheatley

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<sup>8</sup> Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Roger, *A Simpler Way* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), 140.



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## CHAPTER 2

### A CONSTRUCTIVE INTERDISCIPLINARY METHODOLOGY TOWARD RELATIONALITY

*Avoid Fields.*

*Jump Fences: Disciplinary boundaries and regulatory regimes  
are attempts to control the wilding of creative life.<sup>2</sup>*

– Bruce Mau

*The ultimate goal of the human sciences [is] not to constitute but to dissolve man.<sup>3</sup>*

– Claude Lévi-Strauss

Writing a methodology is in no way a small task; after all, a methodology is an applied-epistemology. We live in what appears to be an especially turbulent epistemological era in the human narrative.<sup>4</sup> Thus, this brief attempt at articulating *my*

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<sup>1</sup> “Trinity” by Jackson Faddis, 2003. <<http://www.aranjis.com>>

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Mau <[institute@brucemaudesign.com](mailto:institute@brucemaudesign.com)>, “Incomplete Manifesto,” Bruce Mau Design Inc., <<http://www.brucemaudesign.com/manifesto.html>>, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, The Nature of Human Society Series, ed. Julian Pitt-Rivers and Ernest Gellner (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 247.

<sup>4</sup> Of the abundant texts exploring the epistemological shifts in the Western world, Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Theory and History of Literature, ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, vol. 10 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), and Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late*

process of *knowing*, or *coming to know*, with respect to the claims of this dissertation cannot be divorced from these tumultuous times.

Epistemology is concerned with questions of knowledge. Can we know? If so, what can we know? How do we know we know? Can anyone else know what we know? What processes do we engage to live with functional confidence in our knowing? Methodology aids us in developing an awareness of our processes of knowing. The specific question in this dissertation before us is; how will we build a case for seeing church and leadership through a relational hermeneutic?

Since René Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*<sup>5</sup> argument, the primacy of individual reason has dominated the modern Western worldview and has been more recently termed "modernity." Among other things modernity placed great emphasis on the possibility of objective truth assuming that the pursuit and ultimate attainment of such absolutes was not only desirable and possible but inevitable, given enough time. In this way of thinking faith was a weak substitute for certainty. John Locke famously defined *belief* as a persuasion which falls short of knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Newbigin, in articulating Locke's perspective wrote:

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*Capitalism, Post-Contemporary Interventions*, ed. Stanley Fish and Fredric Jameson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991) have been among the most shaping for me.

<sup>5</sup> *Cogito ergo sum* translated from Latin meaning, "I think, therefore I am." The argument that is usually summarized as "cogito ergo sum" appears in *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in which Descartes attempts to build an entire philosophical system from scratch, with no prior assumptions. In order to begin this undertaking, he reasons that since all his beliefs were derived from potentially misleading sense data or potentially fallacious logic, he would trust nothing he had previously taken to be true. That is to say, he would systematically doubt all that could conceivably be doubted. However, this leads him to discover that the one thing that he cannot doubt is his own existence. After all, he claims, something nonexistent is incapable even of the act of doubting. Thus the formulation, "I think, therefore I am," was the starting point of his philosophy. Although the ideas expressed in *cogito ergo sum* are most commonly associated with Descartes, they were present in many of his antecedents, especially Augustine's *Si Fallor, Sum*; "if I am wrong, I am" who makes this argument, and anticipates modern refutations of it.

<sup>6</sup> James Fieser and Bradley Dowdne <jfieser@utm.edu; dowdne@csus.edu>, "John Locke (1632-1704)," University of Tennessee at Martin: The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/1/locke.htm>>, 2005.

“certainty is a matter of knowledge, not of faith. Faith is what we have to fall back on when certain knowledge is not to be had.”<sup>7</sup>

Since at least the time of Fredrick Nietzsche the supposed inherent “goodness” of the modern project has been brought into question.<sup>8</sup> The emergence of postmodernity, while firmly rooted in Cartesian sensibilities,<sup>9</sup> began the process of modern epistemological self-critique or deconstruction.<sup>10</sup> It became increasingly clear that modern scholars could not agree on what the unalterable and static principles should be. The empirical methods which had been generally understood as the objective means by which scientists would gather information about the world in order to develop theories began to be held more loosely. Michael Polanyi’s response to Europe’s positivism,<sup>11</sup> growing scientism<sup>12</sup> and the objectification of the process of scientific discovery served as an important antecedent in this realm. Polanyi’s articulation of *Personal Knowledge*<sup>13</sup> at the University of Aberdeen’s

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<sup>7</sup> James Edward Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Robert C. Greer, *Mapping Postmodernism: A Survey of Christian Options* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 13-24.

<sup>10</sup> It is often debated whether Postmodernity is a break with the modern project or merely its continuation; see Steinar Kvale, “Themes of Postmodernity,” in *The Truth About the Truth: De-Confusing and Re-Constructing the Postmodern World*, ed. Walter Truett Anderson, A New Consciousness Reader (New York, NY: A Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam Book, 1995), 18-25. For purposes within this study that distinction is less important than the “postmodern” limits on certainty and the challenge to the procession and articulation of objective absolute truth.

<sup>11</sup> Positivism (later to be known as logical positivism thanks to the Vienna Circle) is an idea of a science without theology or metaphysics, based only on facts about the physical/material world.

<sup>12</sup> Scientism usually refers to the acceptance of scientific theory and scientific methods as applicable in all fields of inquiry about the world, including morality, ethics, art, and religion. Here, science is held to be the ultimate recourse in questions of public policy and even religion.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

1951-2 Gifford Lectures followed by his exploration of the process of tacit knowing<sup>14</sup> contributed to the understanding that knowledge or discovery is not merely objective, as enlightenment thinkers had been arguing, but is inseparably linked to the person(s) engaged in the act of discovery and rests on a bed of faith. There is, Polanyi suggests, an interplay or dance of subjectivity with objectivity. Increasingly the researcher is understood as intrinsically connected to their research not so as to discredit the research but to better appreciate the uniqueness of the research. Dispassionate study, which was highly valued in empirical research is increasingly understood as a myth. The question, “Why am I<sup>15</sup> writing *this* dissertation and not different one?” is not only a valid question, but could further illuminate its findings, and not just in scientific realms but in philosophical, theological and personal realms.<sup>16</sup>

Until the middle of the twentieth century modern research most often sought to divorce the researcher from the act of study, usually limiting itself to the exploration of a subject to research within one discipline; and the more specialized the better. One could say the modern project<sup>17</sup> separated, isolated and individuated while the turn to relationality rejoins, socializes and networks. Among other things, the postmodern turn to relationality seeks to appreciate connections which animate and give connective-purpose to those things which were often isolated in modernity. The turn to relationality does not reject the study of things in isolation; rather, it helps us appreciate the limitations of what can be known in

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1983).

<sup>15</sup> It is important to note that my use of “I” assumes “I-in-community,” a socially constructed self.

<sup>16</sup> James William McClendon Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*, 1974, 2d ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> By *modern project* I am referring to goal of establishing an authoritative ethics, aesthetics, and knowledge based on an ‘enlightened’ rationality rooted in a belief in a rational, orderly and comprehensible universe. The modern project is a quest for knowledge self-evident to reason.



isolation. To reappropriate Christ's words, "What therefore God has joined together, let no [person] separate."<sup>18</sup>

Though I am not suggesting we should cease dissecting frogs in high school biology classes, I would go so far to say that we not only learn different things but can learn more about our relationship with frogs by keeping the frogs alive and engaging the frogs connectively. I claim that in the crafting of a relational hermeneutic which will aid us in seeing connectively, the research methodology itself must embody interdisciplinary connectivity.

In order to have – as the title of this chapter suggests – a constructive interdisciplinary methodology toward relationality, the starting place in this research is to identify and make use of an epistemology which draws the theological and scientific forms of reason together. Drawing the modern poles of theology and science together would entice us to dance beyond the epistemological dichotomy of foundationalist objectivism and nonfoundationalist relativism, what Wentzel van Huyssteen, John Franke, Stanley Grenz and others term Post-Foundationalism. The modern dualisms of consciousness and world; self and society; mind and body; theology and science become increasingly irrelevant as the turn to relationality continues.<sup>19</sup> Science, philosophy and theology are showing signs of the turn to relationality.

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<sup>18</sup> Mark 10:9, *New American Standard Version*.

<sup>19</sup> The philosophical turn to relationality seems to be traced back to Immanuel Kant. See F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 11-33.

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*History is precisely a matter of looking through one's own spectacles . . . those who are unaware that they are wearing spectacles are merely less likely than their colleagues to know when they need cleaning.*<sup>20</sup>  
– N. T. Wright

*In the absence of epistemology what we are left with is hermeneutics.*<sup>21</sup>  
– Richard Rorty

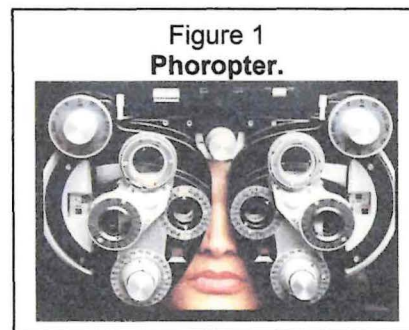
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### **Lens Crafting**

The method we will follow in this study is what I am terming “lens crafting.” The method is neither qualitative nor quantitative as typically defined; rather, we will engage in a dialogically constructive process of syncing three relational hermeneutics in the formation of one lens to better equip the reader to see relationally.

Consider the way an optometrist aligns the multiple lenses of a phoropter (Figure 1) in configuring a single pair of eyeglasses for her patient. This project will align:

1. A biblical/theological lens,
2. A sociological/ontological lens, and
3. A network theory/emerging science lens in the creation of one relational hermeneutic.



The reader may sense the inherent precariousness of this method, as it cannot make objective claims to certainty. Meaning within relational constructs is always in process of becoming. Returning to the allegory of eyeglasses; most people who wear corrective

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<sup>20</sup> Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Versions* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 1998), 17.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Human Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 315.

lenses must regularly return to their optometrist. Even the most carefully crafted prescription will eventually cease to serve the patient; as every patient is a living, aging and dynamic person with constantly morphing vision requirements; often impacted by factors outside of self. Rather than discouraging, this ongoing process of lens crafting serves to reify *telos* for the optometrist while serving as an impetus for interpersonal relations between optometrist and her patient. Due to the inability to correct fuzzy vision once-and-for-all, the optometrist seeks to craft the best lens possible so as to serve the patient in that moment and for that time. Every lens is temporal and simultaneously vital for sight in that moment, thus this crafting process is an ongoing constructive process.<sup>22</sup>

### Constructive

By constructive, I am emphasizing the creation or intention to construct something which will be useful, laudable or hopeful; a *theologia viatorum* is, “a theology on the way toward further constructive development.”<sup>23</sup> Intrinsic to the term *constructive* is an understanding that what is being presented is in some way “in process” – it will be edited, altered and may even be discarded.

Qualitative research (i.e., comparative, historical studies) is generally understood as relating to the quality of an experience or situation rather than to facts that can be measured quantitatively (i.e.: mathematical, scientific, statistical studies). This modern dichotomy of qualitative versus quantitative research has itself taken a turn toward relationality.

Quantitative research was once heralded as pure, empirical, and scientific; it was thought to

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<sup>22</sup> The fact that the long-term relevance of the allegory of ‘the optimist’ maybe in question further illustrates the ongoing, iterative and time/space specificity of all language and knowledge; corrective laser eye surgery and other technical advances may render the Phoropter a relic of the medical past.

<sup>23</sup> Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 9.

be objective, the preferred model of trustworthy research. That has changed; though we still rely heavily on scientific method we hold no illusion of its pure objectivity.

Increasingly we understand that to state an objective, or even to observe, is to shape the outcome. There is growing consensus that no research can claim objectivity; or to put it another way, there is a qualitative aspect to any form of quantitative research.

Constructive research is not pure theoretical research but is engaged to be applied to address specific, practical questions. The aim of this project is not primarily to gain more knowledge for its own sake, but to help church leaders and institutions see and live relationally.

### **Interdisciplinary**

Interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research is a form of relational research. It seeks to connect or reconnect separate disciplines. The post-enlightenment drive to specialization has spawned many new areas of study and whole new disciplines. It can be argued that life has no subjects, categories or disciplines. Subjects, categories and disciplines are socially constructed tools enabling critical thought and conversation. As Stan Grenz writes, “The pursuit of dispassionate knowledge divides the scientific project into separate disciplines and gives special status to the specialist, the neutral observer who has gained expertise in a limited field of endeavor.”<sup>24</sup> Or David Eastman of the University of California writes:

Herein lies one of the major crises of modern knowledge. It is what I have called the Humpty Dumpty problem. To understand the world it has seemed necessary to analyze it by breaking it into many pieces (i.e., the disciplines and their own divisions). But to act in the world, to try to address the issues for the understanding of which highly specialized knowledge was presumably sought, we need to somehow reassemble all the pieces. Here is the rub. Try as we may, we are no more

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<sup>24</sup> Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 4.

able than all the king's horses and all the king's men to put our knowledge together again for coping with the whole real problems of the world.<sup>25</sup>

With the dawning of the enlightenment project, church leaders and theologians found themselves assuming a defensive posture, desperately trying to preserve Christian orthodoxy. Christian thinkers often did this by isolating its perceived “fragile eggs” – they tried to place Humpty Dumpty in a secure egg crate. Only to discover upon opening the crate that Humpty Dumpty was a fractured shell of his past life. One can only imagine how life might be different had more theologians entered the very conversation which seemed to threaten the beliefs the church held so dearly. An expanding vision of God could have been found by engaging that which seemed most threatening, or as physicists say, “life exists at the edge of chaos.”<sup>26</sup> Could it be that those ideas, beliefs and ideologies which appear threatening to orthodox Christians may contain an invitation to abundant life? Theology, which had been the axis of the academy pre-enlightenment was in the height of modernity scarcely considered a serious discipline. The post-enlightenment era rendered theology little more than a curious field of study for people who weren’t able to make the logical move to reason and science.

The subject matter of any study is determinative of its research method. Thus as we will be studying relationality, we will do so relationally; seeking to draw connections between disciplines. Though my aim is to use these findings in the service of God’s

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<sup>25</sup> David Easton, "Divided Knowledge Across Disciplines, Across Cultures: The Division, Integration, and Transfer of Knowledge," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Science* XLIV, no. 4 (1991): 12.

<sup>26</sup> Stuart Kauffman, *At Home in the Universe: The Search for the Laws of Self-Organization and Complexity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 26.

kingdom, to explore relationality from *only* a biblical/theological perspective would be shortsighted. In van Huyssteen's introduction to *The Shaping of Rationality* he states:

For theology, an all-important focus of its dialogue with our contemporary culture will therefore be found in two seemingly unrelated issues: on the one hand, the tremendous problems that arise if theology should choose to abandon its interdisciplinary, cross-contextual obligations and retreat to the insular comfort of sectarian notions of theological rationality; on the other hand, contemporary theology's enduring but uneasy relationship with what is often perceived to be a very superior scientific rationality.<sup>27</sup>

Interdisciplinary study is certainly not new; scholars from a variety of fields have often studied the same subjects. What often contributed to the conflict have been the differing methodologies employed. For instance, both theologians and scientists have expended great energies and thought in the study of our universe's beginnings. It is not so much the studying of an issue from differing vantage points which makes conversation difficult, it is the differing methodologies that make conversation difficult. For instance, analytic study would require the theologian to begin from a premise that would say, 'the scientist has no bearing on what I am doing,' and vice-versa.

The real cleavage . . . is not so much between disciplines. Psychologists, sociologist, anthropologists, political scientists, and historians frequently study the same topics . . . *The real problem is not a lack of communication between disciplines, it is a lack of appreciation of different methodologies.* It is this partisanship about research methods that not only impairs interdisciplinary communication but has divided certain disciplines into hostile factions.<sup>28</sup>

Interdisciplinary research requires humility with respect to methodology and with respect to the place of knowing in any objective form. Methodology is the language of research and meaningful interdisciplinary dialogue requires patience to learn and love the

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<sup>27</sup> J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *The Shaping of Rationality: Toward Interdisciplinary in Theology and Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 6.

<sup>28</sup> T. L. Brink, "Quantitative and/or Qualitative Methods in the Scientific Study of Religion," *Zygon*, no. 30 (September 1995): 462, emphasis mine.

language of the other to resist the natural inclination to jump to conclusions.

Interdisciplinary collaboration has great potential for originality and contribution but forging a common language is a difficult task. Interdisciplinary research is a focused dialogue involving two or more different subjects or areas of knowledge exploring together in such a way that the sum of their findings is greater than the individual researched components.<sup>29</sup> Interdisciplinary inquiries tangibly evidence the assertion that no single discipline has all the “answers”; not even theology, philosophy, mathematics or physics. This paper will dialogically draw three hermeneutical lenses together toward the goal of crafting a lens that will serve the Western church in seeing relationally.

### **Purpose**

This project’s basic goal is simple; to see and to live connectively. The project will craft a lens, initiate a conversation and construct a bridge.

*A lens:* This project offers an approach to seeing connectively; it will present all of creation rhizomically<sup>30</sup> interlaced. Briefly looking through the lenses of Christian theology, social ontology and network science the reader will have a clearer vision of the dynamic and pervasive nature of interrelatedness.

*A conversation:* This project can in no way be perceived as the final word on relationality, rather it contributes to an *enfolding* conversation or an invitational conversation which leaves open chairs around the table, bidding others to come, sit and dialogue. We will see in section one of the next chapter that the conversation goes back to

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<sup>29</sup> Ken Wilber, “Home,” <<http://www.integralnaked.org/avantgarde/>>, 11 January 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Rhizome is a somewhat elongate usually horizontal subterranean plant stem that is often thickened by deposits of reserve food material, produces shoots above and roots below, and is distinguished from a true root in possessing buds, nodes, and usually scale-like leaves. Most grasses and bamboos have rhizomic root systems.

the very interrelatedness, and interanimation of the Triune God. It is hoped that this project might contribute to, encourage, and further conversations exploring relationality.

*A bridge:* This project will serve a linking function. It constructs bridges between commonly held static perceptions of modern church and institutional structures and more relational viewings of those same structures and institutions. This project will not present a full-fledged ecclesiology but will present a transforming vision of our current structures, systems and churches as relationally knit together in the dynamic reign of God.

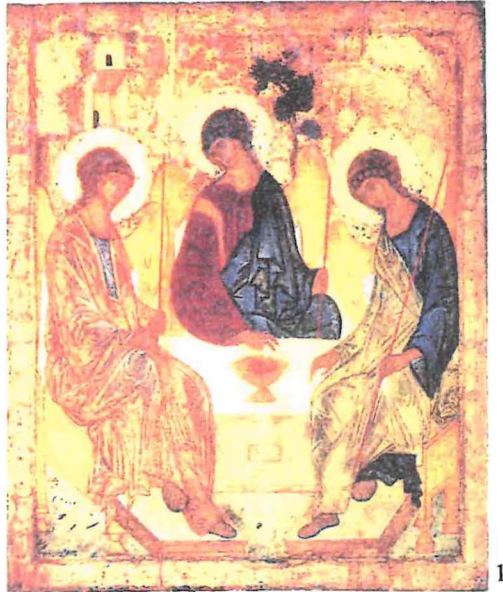
As you have already noted from chapter one, this dissertation clearly states a problem, posits a concise thesis which engages this problem, and in the next chapter begins the process of weighing the relevant data within a conversation between disciplines and within the range of my ministry experience, and will produce a clear unique ministerial outcome benefiting the larger Christian community.

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*The crowd told [the blind men] to be quiet, but they only shouted louder,  
'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!'  
Jesus stopped in the road and called,  
'What do you want me to do for you?'  
'Lord,' they said, 'we want to see!'  
Jesus felt sorry for them and touched their eyes.  
Instantly they could see!  
Then they followed him.  
— Matthew 20:30-34*

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## CHAPTER 3

### THEOLOGICAL, SOCIOLOGICAL, AND SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF RELATIONALITY

*Nothing is itself taken alone.  
Things are because of interrelations or interconnections.<sup>2</sup>*  
— Wallace Stevens

*How do I learn to take beautiful photographs?  
There is no lack of subject matter. There is only lack of vision.  
This is why I've contacted you. How do I find vision?<sup>3</sup>*  
— from a letter to a photographer posted anonymously

Seeing differently is often brought about by crisis. Such cataclysmic revolutions of perspective, or paradigm shifts<sup>4</sup> are rarely something a person or a community intentionally

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<sup>1</sup> "The Holy Trinity" by Andrei Rublev (c. 1370-1430). Scala/Art Resource, New York: NY.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace Stevens as quoted by Leonard I. Sweet, *Quantum Spirituality: A Postmodern Apologetic* (Dayton, OH: Whaleprints, 1991), 108.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Reichmann <mreichmann@rogers.com>, "Learning to See," The luminous landscape, <<http://www.luminous-landscape.com/essays/learning-to-see.shtml>>, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962, Second Edition, Enlarged (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

pursue as much as such shifts are thrust onto a person or community. In the introduction to this volume, Doug, Renee and their growing community of ecclesial misfits did not set out to “see relationally” as much as they were motivated to find a new way of seeing born of the death of their inherited mechanistic and atomized view of the world. Today’s revolution(s) of perspective within philosophy are frequently referred to as the “postmodern turn.”<sup>5</sup> Throughout this work I will articulate facets of the crisis leading to a new lens of perception, and building a case for a turn to relationality.

This chapter will draw together that which would have been separated in the modern era. With its three sections – each distinct yet overlapping – this chapter crafts a lens enabling readers to see relationally. It is only in and through seeing our interconnection and interanimation with God (section 3.1), one another (3.2) and creation (3.3) that we are moved to love and serve. When we fail to see our interconnection we feel free to pursue self; and pursuit of self over-against relationship is what Christianity understands to be sin. Sin trades deep intimacy for divorce. God’s response to humanity’s move-away has not been to further the separation, rather God chooses to pursue reconciliation. *Atonement* is how we understand God’s act of dealing with the human problem of relational separation. Thus, the *missio Dei* is to bring all of creation into oneness which God does through Christ and in the power of the Spirit. *At-one-ment* is the *telos* or end/purpose of existence and we will see hints of this oneness in this chapter. And

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn*, Critical Perspectives: A Guilford Series, ed. Douglas Kellner (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 1997).

so with a squirt of Windex™ and a lint-free cloth we begin by examining our theological lens.

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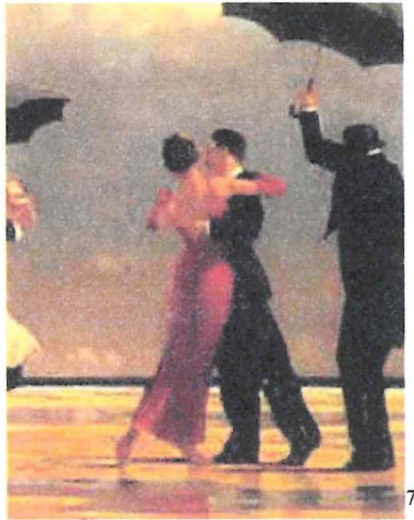
*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face:  
now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*<sup>6</sup>

— Paul, the Apostle

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12, *The King James Version* (Authorized).



### Section 3.1

#### Theological Lens: *Perichoresis* as a Hermeneutical Key to Theological Relationality

*Suddenly, there is a curve in the road, a turning point.  
Somewhere, the real scene has been lost, the scene where you had rules for the games and some  
solid stakes that everyone could rely on.*<sup>8</sup>  
— Jean Baudrillard

When people speak of their spines they usually do so because their backs are causing great pain; there is a sense in which this is also true of theology. Theologies are born to address the needs of the day; when Christ's body experiences "pain" theologies are born. The symptoms reported by the Western expression of Christ's body suggest a dislocation, an isolation, a failure to belong and a hunger for community.

In recent years we have been reminded *ad nauseam* of the snare of individualism; Western churches have experimented with small groups and house churches; we're

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<sup>7</sup> "The Singing Butler," by Jack Vettriano.

<sup>8</sup> As quoted in: Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Turn*, 4.

constantly re-evaluating our ecclesiology; and we collaboratively brainstorm alternatives to ‘doing church.’

I propose that the “pain” which Christ’s body is experiencing is a form of teleological dislocation born of faulty ontology; we have lost sight of the God in whose image we are created. Teleological dislocation reflects a misplaced *telos* or purpose, and ontology deals with the question of being. Human beings as *imago Dei* are created for *shalom*. In Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.’s “breviary of sin” *shalom* is described as:

The webbing together of God, humans, and all of creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight . . . We call it peace, but it means far more than the mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, *shalom* means *universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight* – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts are fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.

“The way things ought to be” in its Christian understanding includes the constitution and internal relations of a very large number of entities – the Holy Trinity, the physical world in all its fullness . . . In a shalomic state each entity would have its own integrity or structured wholeness, and each entity would also possess many edifying relations to other entities.<sup>9</sup>

I claim God is relational. God is *agape*, God is charity or love; God is community. For humanity to be created *imago Dei* is relationality. This “Theological Lens” proposes that God’s story revealed through the Christian sacred texts is best seen through relational eyes, and that salvation history be understood and experienced as God’s reconciliatory story. God invites Christ-followers, Christ-communities and the entire cosmos to be

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<sup>9</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 10, emphasis in original.

reconciled unto God, and to relate intimately with God in the “*perichoretic* dance” which God in Godself delights in dancing.

### **God is Relationship**

In claiming that God is relationship I am claiming God is best understood as love; to be love requires: Subject, Object and Relationship. This is God’s Tri-unity. God’s being is relational, in that God relates with Godself in perfect intimacy and oneness, as the Three Persons of the Godhead interpenetrate, interanimate and reciprocally love one another in self-emptying community. God’s relating is inseparable from God’s being. This is what it means for God to be relationship;<sup>10</sup> God relates with Godself in perfect unity or Tri-unity.<sup>11</sup>

Though the word “trinity” is not found in the Bible, nor is the idea fully delineated within the narrative Christian sacred text, the idea signified by the word is evident throughout the text.<sup>12</sup> This Trinitarian paradox of one God/three “persons” is central to the Christian understanding and experience of God. Carl F. H. Henry, one of the founders of the evangelical movement, wrote in his *magnum opus*; “at the heart of Christianity’s revelation of God is a Trinitarian form of monotheism. That the living God is triune – that

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph A. Bracken, “Trinity: Economic and Immanent,” *Horizons* 25 (September 1998): 7-22.

<sup>11</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 226-61.

<sup>12</sup> Some of the more specific texts are: 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 5:7; Matthew 28:19; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 20-21.

three eternal persons coexist within the one divine essence – is the distinctive Christian affirmation about Deity.”<sup>13</sup> Baxter Kruger warmly writes:

God is not some faceless, all-powerful abstraction. God is Father, Son and Spirit, existing in a passionate and joyous fellowship. The Trinity is not three highly committed religious types sitting around some room in heaven. The Trinity is a circle of shared life, and the life shared is full, not empty, abounding and rich and beautiful, not lonely and sad and boring.<sup>14</sup>

Or as the late Stanley J. Grenz writes: “through all eternity the Father loves the Son, and the Son reciprocates that love. This love is the Holy Spirit, who is the relationship of the Father and Son. Through all eternity, therefore, God is the social Trinity, the community of love.”<sup>15</sup>

One God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Three unique persons yet one God. Plurality and oneness; unity and diversity. It is from this plurality and singularity that Christians understand God to be community. God is the community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, enjoying perfect and eternal fellowship. God, therefore, is relational – perfect relationship. “God is not *he* only but also *they*.”<sup>16</sup>

In an attempt to describe the relational structure and unity of the Trinity, John Damascene and other church fathers employed the concept of *perichoresis* to signify the mutual interanimation and dynamic reciprocity of the divine persons. This relationship can only be understood as an

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<sup>13</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God Who Stands and Stays: Part Five, God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. 5 (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1982), 191.

<sup>14</sup> C. Baxter Kruger, *The Great Dance: The Christian Vision Revisited* (Jackson, MS: Perichoresis Press, 2000), 17.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 47.

<sup>16</sup> J. I. Packer, “God,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 275, emphasis in original.

*irreducible* relational dynamic that simultaneously affirms *both* individuality and mutuality.<sup>17</sup>

The term *perichoresis*<sup>18</sup> was coined to describe the inner life of God and the interrelationship of the three persons of the Trinity. In a move of theological creativity the term *perichoresis* was coined to provide a sense of relational movement as each person of the Trinity lovingly empties self in the service of the other members of *The Three*. *Perichoresis* is the God-dance; the divine dance of the persons of the Trinity. A basic meaning of the word is “a complete mutual interpenetration of two substances that preserves the identity and properties of each intact.”<sup>19</sup> Each person of the Trinity interpenetrates the others; relating with one another in perfect intimacy, love and oneness. *Perichoresis* “contains the image of intimacy and of pure reciprocity that does not result in confusion or loss of identity.”<sup>20</sup> It also reveals a oneness that is more than the unity of spirit that may exist between people bound together closely in love or friendship, as the Divine persons relate internally. The Trinity’s *perichoretic* relating is a mutual outpouring of self so they dance together as One. This *kenotic* movement of complete self-emptying in the service of the other ultimately lifts high the one who becomes lowest.

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<sup>17</sup> Gregory Scott Gorsuch <1999>, “Perichoresis as a Hermeneutical Key to Ontology: Social Constructionism, Kierkegaard, and Trinitarian Theology,” Common Ground, <[http://www.commongroundseattle.org/temp\\_07.html](http://www.commongroundseattle.org/temp_07.html)>, 1999, 1, emphasis in original. Gorsuch’s essay is a summary of the dissertation he submitted to the faculty at the University of Edinburgh titled: *Relational dynamics and the logic of spirit: An interdisciplinary inquiry into the tripartite structure and irreducible dynamic of perichoresis in person, community and Trinity*.

<sup>18</sup> The reciprocal dance-like, interanimation, and interrelated existence of the three “persons” of the Trinity is also referred to as *circumincession*. *Circumincession* is a Latin form of the Greek word *perichoresis*. *Peri* (περί) carries meanings of: toward, to, around; while *choros* (χορός) suggests dance.

<sup>19</sup> Verna Harrison, “Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1991): 53-65: 54.

<sup>20</sup> David E. Bjork, “Toward a Trinitarian Understanding of Mission in Post-Christendom Lands,” *Missiology* 27, no. 2 (April 1999), 231-44: 235.



Christ demonstrated this relational reality when he declared: “Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”<sup>21</sup> Or in one of Christ's final public teachings:

Jesus shouted to the crowds, “If you trust me, you are really trusting God who sent me. For when you see me, you are seeing the one who sent me. I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the darkness. If anyone hears me and doesn't obey me, I am not his judge – for I have come to save the world and not to judge it. But all who reject me and my message will be judged at the day of judgment by the truth I have spoken. I don't speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me gave me his own instructions as to what I should say. And I know his instructions lead to eternal life; so I say whatever the Father tells me to say!”<sup>22</sup>

Jesus claimed that to have heard him was to have heard the Father. The two of them, Father and Son, are one as James Torrance wrote, “The heart of the New Testament is the relationship between the Father and the Son.”<sup>23</sup> It is this kind of *perichoretic* oneness which Christ yearned for in his “High Priestly Prayer,” when he prayed; “My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father – that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John 14:10-11.

<sup>22</sup> John 12:44-50.

<sup>23</sup> James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> John 17:21.

## God Created Humans in God's Image for Relationship

Christ's prayer for his followers to experience the oneness which he and his Father share demonstrates God's dream to include humanity in the Trinity's *perichoretic* dance. Baxter Kruger in his little book titled, *The Great Dance*, writes "The idea of creation does not arise in a vacuum or divine boredom or loneliness or sadness. The idea of creation flows out of the glorious life shared by the Father, Son and Spirit."<sup>25</sup>

Within Divine intimacy marked by love and service God creates for intimate relationship. God creates human beings to dance with Godself "in the cool of the evening."<sup>26</sup> It is as though *The Three* open a place at the table of Divine fellowship inviting humanity to a love feast. God has created human beings for a tacit oneness with God, with one another and with the entire created order. As in the pre-fallen state of Eden's garden, God declared that "it was *not* good for the man to be alone,"<sup>27</sup> so God set about to create a suitable partner for the first man. Anthony Hoekema writes, "God has placed man into a threefold relationship: between man and God, between man and his fellow man, and between man and nature."<sup>28</sup> In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis wrote, "The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us."<sup>29</sup> A few pages later Lewis writes, that God reveals Godself, "not simply to men

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<sup>25</sup> Kruger, *Great Dance*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Genesis 3:8-9.

<sup>27</sup> Genesis 2:18.

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 75.

<sup>29</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1960), 163.

who are individually good, but to men who are united together in a body, loving one another helping one another, showing Him to one another. For that is what God meant humanity to be like; players in a band, or organs in one body.”<sup>30</sup>

Then God said, “Let us make people in our image, to be like ourselves. They will be masters over all life – the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the livestock, wild animals, and small animals.” So God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them. God blessed them and told them, “Multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters over the fish and birds and all the animals.”

And God said, “Look! I have given you the seed-bearing plants throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. And I have given all the grasses and other green plants to the animals and birds for their food.” And so it was.

Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was excellent in every way.<sup>31</sup>

God created social human beings in God’s own relational image.<sup>32</sup> As such the image of God is best seen in the purposed oneness of diverse communities. Ours is a world marked by purposed separation. Purposed separation has been punctuated by modernity’s individualization which further atomized human separation. Within an individualized cultural context, the rediscovery of the social-image of God will transform the way we see self and society. Seeing connectively invites living connectively; and living connectively encourages an ethic which serves *us* in the broadest sense of the word. The language of *codividual*, *social-self* or *relational-self* might aid us in speaking with greater theological precision regarding the nature of human *being*.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 1:26-31.

<sup>32</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

When we look at Christ we see the Father, and the Spirit. The Christian doctrine of the incarnation posits that Christ reveals God to humanity. Jesus Christ serves as both the abbreviation and as the fullness of the *The Three*, so that in seeing Christ we see the Father and the Spirit; this is Divine social construction. I both am and am part of the image of God. “God is a person and men are personal, made in his image. . . Therefore, he deals with man as a person, and allows the creature to be himself. The world is not simply a pure function of the Deity. There is a divinely intended *two-sidedness* in the relationship between God and man. The dialogue is completely real.”<sup>33</sup>

God created human beings in God’s own image for intimate relationship; mutually loving by choice. Pinnock also writes, “The biblical story of the creation of man shows Adam to be living in fellowship with God, and able to choose between loving obedience and rebellious disobedience.”<sup>34</sup>

God created humanity *imago Dei* for intimate relationship, with Godself, with each other and with creation. Let’s take a moment to examine this statement in greater detail.

Male and female are created *imago Dei*;<sup>35</sup> in the image and likeness of God. The word “image” has often been used to suggest a photo or plastic representation but no

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<sup>33</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, “Responsible Freedom and the Flow of Biblical History,” in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1975), 95-109: 107.

<sup>34</sup> Pinnock, “Responsible Freedom,” 98.

<sup>35</sup> Understandings of the meaning of “created *imago Dei*” or in the image of God has morphed over time. In the fourth century Audiani argued the anthropomorphic notion that human beings physically bear God’s image. While this view treats seriously the plastic connotation of “image” this view does injustice to the anthropomorphic nature of biblical language about God. God is invisible; God is spirit, therefore immaterial. Augustine took God’s being in Trinity as the prototype for what it means to be in his image looking for *vestigia Trinitatis* in humans. Augustine suggested the trinity of human’s memory, intelligence and will. Though there is an attraction to the Trinitarian inspired notion of this approach it falls short because of an inherent dualism in its

longer. Today image is everything. In an era which understands perception to be reality, image becomes reality. “Likeness” qualifies image in at least a couple of ways:

Limitation, humanity is not identical to God; and amplification, humanity is actually a reflection of God.<sup>36</sup>

God is ultimately none other than the divine Trinitarian persons-in-relationship, a relationship characterized by a mutuality that can only be described as love, the *imago Dei* is ultimately human persons-in loving-relationship as well. Only in relationship – as persons-in-community – are we able to reflect the fullness of the divine character.<sup>37</sup>

Emil Brunner argued that the Divine ‘us’ and ‘our’ of Genesis 1:26<sup>38</sup> is reflected in humans as the ‘them’ of Genesis 1:27.<sup>39</sup> The image of God is not the possession of the individual but of the person-in-community expressing his “existence-for-love” by actual “existence-in-love.” This has sometimes been dubbed the societal nature of the image of God. Karl Barth took this societal argument further by suggesting that it is as humans in relationship relate with God that the image of God is most fully seen.

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formation and location of the image ‘in’ human beings, the Bible suggests that human beings ‘as such’ are created in the image of God. A third definition of image has argued in terms of humanity’s dominion. As God reigns over all, God has created humans to reign in likeness. Fourth, there is an ethical or cognitive argument. God is holy and righteous etc, therefore humans are as well. This was John Calvin’s position, which he argued was restored by grace. Though a thorough exploration of the historical development of the *imago Dei* is outside the scope of this paper my usage of *imago Dei* presupposes a Trinitarian perspective.

<sup>36</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, “Image of God,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 328-29.

<sup>37</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and John R Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 228.

<sup>38</sup> “Then God said, ‘Let us make people in our image, to be like ourselves. They will be masters over all life – the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the livestock, wild animals, and small animals.’” Genesis 1:26.

<sup>39</sup> “So God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27.

Building on Brunner and Barth, Anthony Hoekema looked at Christ as the true image of God. Paul wrote to the Christ-community in Colossae that “Christ is the image of the invisible God,”<sup>40</sup> suggesting that if we wish to understand what the image of God in humanity really looks like we must look first at Christ.

In looking at Jesus we see a person whose life was wholly directed toward God. Jesus related intimately with his Father; and did nothing apart from his Father. His food was to do the will of his Father. Christ spoke of God with familial closeness, calling God *Abba*. We also saw in Jesus one whose life was wholly directed toward his neighbor; when people were hurting, outcasts, sinners or marginalized they found acceptance and love in the person of Christ. For Christ Jesus did not come to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.<sup>41</sup> His love ultimately cost him his life, which is the greatest form of love that a person lay down their life for their friends. Christ also rules over nature. With a word from his mouth Christ calmed the storm that threatened the lives of his friends. He defied the laws of gravity by walking on water; and was able to direct his followers to catch fish, to heal disease, make a small meal large.<sup>42</sup>

In looking at Jesus Christ, we see the perfect image of God. We witness the proper functioning of God’s image to include relating intimately with God, relating deeply with one another, and relating meaningfully with the cosmos.

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<sup>40</sup> Colossians 1:15.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew 20:28.

<sup>42</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 73-74. In speaking of “Christ as the true image of God” Hoekema outlines a threefold set of relationships. Christ as wholly directed toward God; Christ as wholly directed to the neighbor and Christ who rules over nature.

## ***Relationship with God***

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* states that, “Man’s primary purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”<sup>43</sup> To enjoy a person is to relish in intimacy, it is to relate with warmth and depth.<sup>44</sup> Dallas Willard stated “God has created us for intimate friendship with himself-both now and forever. This is the Christian viewpoint.”<sup>45</sup>

All humanity owes its very existence and essence to God. This is the human’s first and most important relationship. All human capacity for love and intimacy finds its origin in the Three personed God. “To be a human being,” says Hoekema,

... in the truest sense, therefore, means to love God above all, to trust him and obey him, to pray to him and to thank him. Since man’s relatedness to God is his primary relationship all of his life is to be lived *coram Deo* – as before the face of God. Man is bound to God as a fish is bound to water. When a fish seeks to be free from the water, it loses both its freedom and its life.<sup>46</sup>

As Paul addressed the people at Mars Hill he spoke of a personal God. The notion of a personal God was a new and radical idea for Hellenistic thought which from at least the days of Aristotle viewed God as having a disengaged role in the universe as the “unmoved mover” or “prime mover.”<sup>47</sup> To the Greeks Paul declared, “For in him we live

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<sup>43</sup> Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism in Modern English* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986), 5.

<sup>44</sup> Rich Hurst, *Intimacy: The Search for Significance* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Ministry Resources, 1997), 27-32.

<sup>45</sup> Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 10.

<sup>46</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 76.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Edward, “God and the Philosophers,” in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 316-20: 316.

and move and exist. As one of your own poets says, ‘We are his offspring.’”<sup>48</sup> Paul shocked his audience in suggesting that God and humans could relate with one another so intimately. As Packer says, “God has made mankind in his own image, personal and rational, for eternal loving fellowship with himself. In a communion that rests on two-way communication: God addressing to us words of revelation and we answering . . . .”<sup>49</sup>

### ***Relationship with Each Other***

It is almost absurd to argue that we are relational beings created for intimate human relations. Yet the modern West has so emphasized the autonomous individual that we no longer perceive ourselves societally.<sup>50</sup> To be created in God’s relational image is to be relational by nature.

This need for relationship is central to human existence. From infancy we crave attention, and will die from the lack of it. Numerous studies have demonstrated the disastrous effects on children when loving relationships are withheld. Dr. Lis Berkman’s *Alameda County Study* discovered that medical patients who were the least relationally connected were three times more likely to die in the nine-year period under the study than

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<sup>48</sup> Acts 17:28.

<sup>49</sup> J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1979), 164.

<sup>50</sup> Kenneth Gergen, “The Healthy, Happy Human Being Wears Many Masks,” in *The Truth About the Truth*, ed. Walter Truett Anderson (New York, NY: A Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam Book, 1995), 136-44. Gergen argues that we must abandon the assumption that normal development equips the individual with a coherent sense of identity, stressing instead that every person carries the potential of many selves, capable of being realized in different social settings.



those who had stronger social ties.<sup>51</sup> Human beings are relationally created; and not just to have interpersonal relations but created so that relationships are constitutive of the self.

One of our great fears in life is to be alone. Belonging is so important, that when we need to discipline behavior which hurts community we enforce “time outs,” requiring people to withdraw from relationship; whether they are young children sitting in the corner or adults in prison; to force separation is to punish. To live in isolation is to lose oneself, human beings need others to know self.

In Genesis chapter two after God created Adam, we see the great need of the human heart for connectedness. In the pre-fallen state of creation God declares that Adam’s aloneness is *not* good. Adam was in the context of a perfect creation, he enjoyed an unbroken relationship with God and yet apart from human connection Adam was incomplete. It was not enough for an individual person to relate perfectly with God and relate perfectly with creation the individual needed to be in relationship with another human. God creates a suitable partner, and human love is born, community is born.

To be created in God’s image means that human essence is relational – it is *perichoretic*.

### ***Relationship with Creation***

Having looked briefly at our relationship with God and with other humans we now look to our relationship with the cosmos. To speak of having a relationship with creation is to alter our use of the word “relate.” We relate to God and others as persons, yet we do not

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<sup>51</sup> Edward M. Hallowell, *Connect: 12 Vital Ties That Open Your Heart, Lengthen Your Life and Deepen Your Soul* (New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1999), 5-6.

relate to the created order in that same way; part of what it means to relate is a causal connection, or a harmonic connection.

Consider the relationship that the Creator enjoys with creation. God involves the earth in the ongoing act of creation. In the Genesis chapter one creation account we read “*Let the land burst forth with every sort of grass and seed bearing plant.*”<sup>52</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg comments, “[God’s] second commandment to the earth is even bolder than that! God commands the earth to bring about animals.”<sup>53</sup>

Throughout the Scriptural narrative we see God’s relational reign over creation. From the parting of the Red Sea, to Jonah being swallowed by a great fish; from the virgin birth, to turning water into wine; from Christ healing the sick to the resurrection of Jesus; from sustaining all of creation to the ongoing act of creation, God demonstrates personal connection to the cosmos.

In speaking of humanity’s relationship with the creation I return to Hoekema’s reference to *fish* and *water*. Human beings are creatures; we are created and we live and move and have our being in creation. The created order is our only context for being, and any attempts to disconnect from creation result in an artificial dualism. Our relationship with creation is *perichoretic* in that there is an irreducible relational dynamic which simultaneously affirms *both* the uniqueness of humanity over creation and the mutuality of humanity with the creation.

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<sup>52</sup> Genesis 1:11, emphasis mine.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Jay Oorad, “Future Perfect: A Conversation with Wolfhart Pannenberg,” *Books & Culture: A Christian Review* (Carol Stream, IL), September/October 2001, 18-20: 19. Issues of Intelligent Design and Darwinian evolution theories aside, Pannenberg’s point is clearly that God invites creation to participate in the ongoing drama of creation.

Throughout history humans have taken the creation mandate to exercise dominion and subdue the earth as a hierarchical command rather than an opportunity for human beings to embody God-like relational service. Though we rule over creation, we name it, and steward it – for better or worse – the cosmos also rules over us. We cannot control death, weather patterns, planetary movements, even our dependence on the earth to produce food to sustain us hints of our *perichoretic* relationship.

One of the most beloved poems in Scripture is a beautiful relational metaphor describing the *perichoretic* dance of God, human beings and creation.

The LORD is my shepherd;  
I have everything I need.  
He lets me rest in green meadows;  
he leads me beside peaceful streams.  
He renews my strength.  
He guides me along right paths,  
bringing honor to his name.

Even when I walk  
through the dark valley of death,  
I will not be afraid,  
For you are close beside me.  
Your rod and your staff  
protect and comfort me.

You prepare a feast for me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You welcome me as a guest, anointing my head with oil.  
My cup overflows with blessings.  
Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me  
all the days of my life,  
And I will live in the house of the LORD forever.<sup>54</sup>

Since this threefold relationship is unique to man, and since he images God in each of these relationships, we may conclude... that the proper functioning of the image

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<sup>54</sup> Psalm 23.

of God is to be channeled through these three relationships: to God, to neighbor and to nature.<sup>55</sup>

### God's Self Revelation is Relational

The act of relating creates connection. God's connection with humanity begins God's act of creation. *Creation* is a beginning, and where there is a beginning there is a story. Stories by their very nature are relational. In telling a story it is related to those hearing it. "A story is the telling of the significant actions of characters over time."<sup>56</sup> To tell a story is to give an account which links to another establishing connection and shaping an ethos.<sup>57</sup>

It is essential to evangelical theology that Christ-followers approach special revelation as relational. The high-point of all revelation is not an abstract concept or ideology but the very person of Jesus. Jesus Christ, God incarnate; the Word become flesh; Truth. The apostle John opens his gospel saying:

In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. He was in the beginning with God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn't make. Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone . . .

So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 81-2.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Taylor, *Tell Me a Story: The Life-Shaping Power of Our Stories* (New York, NY: Bog Walk Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>57</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being & Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1962), 185-208.

<sup>58</sup> John 1:1-4, 14.

Alister McGrath writes:

Scripture centres on and enfolds Christ, who can be known definitively only through its medium. Scripture, when rightly interpreted, leads to Christ; Christ can only be known properly through Scripture . . . Despite its high view of Scripture, evangelicalism has resisted the temptation to identify the text of Scripture itself with revelation. Scripture is regarded as a channel through which God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ is encountered.<sup>59</sup>

This center point of revelation is the person of Christ, and the only way to know a person is to enter into a relationship. As Karl Barth affirms:

When Holy Scripture speaks of God; it concentrates our attention and thoughts upon one single point and what is to be known at that point . . . If we ask further concerning the one point upon which, according to Scripture our attention and thoughts should and must be concentrated, then from first to last the Bible directs us to the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>60</sup>

As Leonard Sweet writes, "The point of Christianity is not a point. The point is a person."<sup>61</sup> Revelation is a person and the only way to intimately know a person is in the context of relationship. Thus Scripture is God's love story; it is the narrative through which God reveals Godself, through which God's relational reign is demonstrated, and through which God's passionate pursuit and wooing of all is seen. Jürgen Moltmann puts it this way:

The salvation of the creature consists in being admitted into the circle of divine relationships and mutual indwellings of the Father, Son and the Spirit. Their mutual indwelling thus includes human beings: "Whoever abides in love abides

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<sup>59</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 54.

<sup>60</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1936-75), 52-4.

<sup>61</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *Jesus Drives Me Crazy! : Lose Your Mind, Find Your Soul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2003), 59.

in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). The indwelling is also the mystery of the new creation: “So that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).<sup>62</sup>

Revelation is God’s love story; this love story provides humanity with a glimpse of God’s meta-narrative.<sup>63</sup> Though theologians have often referred to this story as Salvation History, I prefer to describe it as God’s reconciliatory meta-narrative. The theological language of reconciliation and adoption appropriately places relationship at the core of God’s story in a way that salvation and justification do not.<sup>64</sup>

The Scriptural text communicates God’s heart for intimate relationship. We get a sense of God’s heart when we hear him call Abraham God’s friend,<sup>65</sup> or refer to David as a man after God’s own heart,<sup>66</sup> or when John is seen as the beloved disciple.<sup>67</sup> On an even

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<sup>62</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, “The Unity of the Triune God: Remarks on the Comprehensibility of the Doctrine of the Trinity and Its Foundation in the History of Salvation,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (1984): 157-71: 168.

<sup>63</sup> In the postmodern context meta-narratives are subject to great criticism and most often rejected *carte blanche* because of their treatment and interpretation of history. It is often argued that all meta-narratives can be little more than reductionist or revisionist, as the re-teller of the meta-narrative must make broad sweeping statements to support his or her claim. I would support this rejection of meta-narratives if there were not a personal Creator, who is sovereign over creation. And though I cannot claim unwavering certainty for my understanding of God’s meta-narrative, by faith I maintain that God, indeed, has a story. God’s story is a good and loving story. History’s power and authority lie with God himself. God mystically brings this story alive the Holy Spirit, inviting all to participate *perichoretically* by faith, in God’s unfolding narrative of intimacy.

<sup>64</sup> I have deliberately chosen not to use the term “Salvation History.” Use of the concept of Salvation places the primary emphasis of the story on sin and the need for creation’s sin to be atoned for. Of course this is a vital part of the Christian story. But it is not the heart of the story. The emphasis of God’s story is his invitation and dream for his creation to commune intimately with God. Concepts of “Reconciliation” and “Adoption” better communicate the heart of God’s central desire to intimately relate to and with creation.

<sup>65</sup> 2 Chronicles 20:7.

<sup>66</sup> 1 Kings 11:4.

<sup>67</sup> John 13:23.

broader level, the selection and use of relationship-centric metaphors further demonstrate God's longing for deep relating.

Throughout the Old Testament, God is portrayed as a faithful loving husband, as well as an ardent suitor. Though Israel constantly goes astray, God is constantly seeking her out... He entices her with the promises of blessing and satisfaction that go with ardent love of one's Creator.<sup>68</sup>

Consider the message of Jeremiah where God reminisces, "I remember: how eager you were to please me as a young bride long ago, how you loved me even through the barren wilderness."<sup>69</sup> Or consider the performance art of Hosea and the "bride" metaphors of Ezekiel illuminating the fickle love of God's people. The intimate relationship of groom and bride is picked up again in the New Testament.

God speaks of entering into a covenant relationship with God's people as he builds a people unto Godself, God's people are described as God's children. John writes, "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"<sup>70</sup> Images of intimacy continue throughout the New Testament with pictures of family, the interdependence of the body, a flock of sheep in the loving care of the Good Shepherd, the abiding image of a branch in the vine, or the image of a nation; where once we were not a people but in relationship with God we become a nation. A nation with no barriers of race, or gender, we become one under God.<sup>71</sup> And of course

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<sup>68</sup> C. Steven Evans, *The Quest for Faith: Reason and Mystery as Pointers to God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 63.

<sup>69</sup> Jeremiah 2:2.

<sup>70</sup> 1 John 3:1.

<sup>71</sup> Dwight J. Friesen, "Biblical Community: God's Design for His People," an integrated paper submitted to the faculty of Trinity International University (Deerfield, IL: Religion department, 1995), 13-20.

there is Christ's favorite image; the image of the Kingdom of God. This upside-down Kingdom is unlike any for under God's relational reign the weak become strong, the foolish confound the wise, the captives are freed, the lost are found, the lame walk, the blind see, and the dead are resurrected to newness of life.<sup>72</sup>

Millard Erickson in dealing with the question of whether special revelation is propositional or personal concludes:

Revelation, then, is not propositional; it is personal. To a large extent, one's view of faith will reflect his understanding of revelation. If revelation is regarded as the communication of propositional truths, then faith will be viewed as response of assent, of believing those truths. If, on the other hand, revelation is regarded as the presentation of a person, then faith will correspondingly be viewed as an act of personal trust or commitment.<sup>73</sup>

Or as J. I. Packer writes:

Biblical writers, prophets, poets and teachers alike cite Scripture as *God's word of address to all* its readers and hearers. To regard Scripture as the *Creator's present personal invitation to fellowship*, setting the standards for faith and godliness not only for its own time but for all time, is integral to biblical faith.<sup>74</sup>

To approach the Scriptural narrative as anything less than God's love story is to reduce God to propositional abstraction. God becomes *something* rather than *someone*. In a similar way we can know much about a Hollywood celebrity but not intimately relate with the celebrity. The Word does not become text, the Word becomes flesh. The Word is to be related with personally, intimately; *perichoretically*.

God is relationship, and from God's own *perichoretic* Tri-unity has created humanity. We are image bearers of God's relationality. Human *being* is therefore

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<sup>72</sup> Donald A. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978).

<sup>73</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 191.

<sup>74</sup> Packer, *God Has Spoken*, 164, emphasis mine.



*perichoretic*. Human beings are relational not simply because we have relationships but because our very being is relational. No human can come into existence nor continue to exist autonomously. Revelation is God's great invitation to God's creation to participate in God's divine dance.<sup>75</sup>

As this section closes, it does not end; for all that we will study going forward will echo with the relationality of the Creator. As we anticipate the engagement of a sociological/ontological lens in the next section we will keep linking back to our growing understanding and deepening knowledge and experience of the relationality of God.

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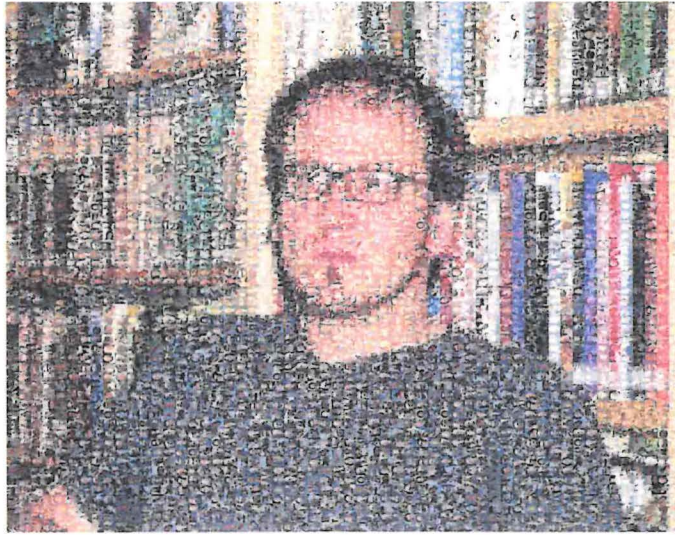
*May they be one, as we are.*<sup>76</sup>  
– Christ, talking with his Father

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<sup>75</sup> This statement further reflects the essential relationality of creation in that natural revelation is itself a relational invitation to itself. Or from another perspective, humanity's social ontology is an invitation from God to exist relationally.

<sup>76</sup> John 17:22, my paraphrase.



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## Section 3.2

### Sociological Lens: I-Us-Thou as a Hermeneutical Key to Seeing Interpersonal Relationships

*This we know, all things are connected like the blood which unites one family...  
 Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.  
 Man did not weave the web of life; He is merely a strand in it.  
 Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.*<sup>78</sup>  
 – Ted Perry, (inspired by Chief Seattle)

*Relationship issues stand at the heart of postmodern culture.*<sup>79</sup>  
 – Leonard I. Sweet

Sociology is generally understood as the study of social rules and processes that bind and separate people not only as individuals, but as members of associations, groups, and institutions. A typical textbook definition of sociology describes it as: “the formal

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<sup>77</sup> “Socially Constructed Self Portrait.” This photo of the author is made up of hundreds of pictures of family, friends, acquaintances, teachers, pastors, theologians, and figures from history, etc, (if only I had a picture of everything and everyone, I might be less piculated). *AndreaMosaic*, was the software used to create this image. <<http://www.andreaplanet.com/andreamosaic/>>

<sup>78</sup> As quoted by Keith Parkins, “Genetic Engineering: Paradise on Earth or a Descent Into Hell?” <<http://www.heureka.clara.net/gaia/genetics.htm>>, September 1999.

<sup>79</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 113.

study of how humans behave in groups. Sociology tends to focus on how human groups originate, how they are organized, and how they relate to one another.”<sup>80</sup> In our interdisciplinary dance toward a relational hermeneutic we will bring a sociological lens into focus addressing the simple question, “What is relationship?”

I propose every interpersonal relationship is a living *spirit*.<sup>81</sup> This living *spirit* is the bond animating the two persons, and is unique to those relating. The two persons (*I-thou*) both shape and are shaped by their relationship (*us*), thus the *us* or *spirit* is morphing and has a unique will, constitutive of *I* and *thou* while remaining unique. All interpersonal relations are *perichoretic*<sup>82</sup> as seen through the “Theological Lens” of the first section of this chapter. This *perichoretic* understanding of human relationality affirms the uniqueness of the persons in relation (*I-us-thou*) while demonstrating their ongoing need for each other and reflecting the *imago Dei*. *Perichoresis* is not only the hermeneutical key to understanding the inner life of Divine Tri-unity; it is also the hermeneutical key to seeing human relationality. This *perichoretic* understanding of human relationality better enables us to understand the self in communion with others.

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<sup>80</sup> Anthropology Dictionary, “Sociology,” [www.webref.org](http://www.webref.org), <<http://www.webref.org/anthropology/anthropology.htm>>, 28 March 2004.

<sup>81</sup> For the sake of simplicity within this section, I will focus our considerations on ‘two-persons’ in interpersonal relationship.

<sup>82</sup> As we noted in Section 3.1 *perichoresis* in an attempt to articulate the inner-relationship of the Trinity. Throughout Section 3.2 *perichoretic* understandings of persons in relation will be applied to humanity as image bearers of God. It must be noted that while Father, Son, and Holy Spirit interrelate interiorly, human beings, as we currently understand ourselves, relate exteriorly.

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*Person is thus a node of relationships facing all directions.*

*Person is a being of relationships.*<sup>83</sup>

– Leonardo Boff

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## Relationship is Connection

Connection is the basic understanding of relationship.<sup>84</sup> To be connected is to have a relationship; the terms are virtually synonymous. I have a relationship with my father stemming from, but in no way limited to a biological connection; I have a relationship with Capernwray Hall because I spent a year studying at that institution, connected with its faculty, student body, and financial aid department. I have a relationship with the moon because of a mutual connection to the planet earth and regularly experience its gravitational influence. I have a connection to a South American cattle rancher because I once ate a hamburger at a McDonald's<sup>TM</sup> restaurant. I have a relationship with my church because I am connected to a community of people who are connected to each other in this time and space, while mutually interconnected through our common connection to Christ. Connection is relationship.

In his description of relationship as connection Edward Hallowell of Harvard

Medical School offers this sense of connection:

It is a feeling of being part of *something larger than yourself*. That something may be a friendship, a marriage, a team, a school, a company, an activity you

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<sup>83</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 1988, trans. Phillip Berryman, ed. Joan Weber Laflamme (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 50.

<sup>84</sup> Merriam-Webster defines relationship as “the state or character of being related or interrelated : CONNECTION <show the connection between two things>.” Merriam-Webster, *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, ed. Henry Bosley Woolf (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1981), 968.

love, a country, even a set of ideals, like the Bills of Rights, or a belief system, like a religion.<sup>85</sup>

The sense of “being part of something larger than oneself” contributes to the construction of the self. Though no one can be focally aware of all the connections making up their person, each person is dialectically or *perichoretically* shaped and shaping an infinite number of connections.

In spite of all the connections that make up a person, modern individualism<sup>86</sup> has so atomized the human person that many have come to see the *self* separate from others. Yet, there is no *self* apart from others; there is no *I* without *thou*.

Individuals are formed through social processes, their identities sedimented from histories of significant relation. The form which a person’s significant relations have taken is determinative for that person’s identity.

This understanding intimately binds personal identity to the identities of others and to the relations one has with others. But because relations never take place in a social vacuum, only within a determinate social context, personal identity is also bound to the social and societal structures which constitute the larger environment of both persons and smaller-scale personal relations.<sup>87</sup>

As McFadyen suggests, personal identity is bound within social and societal structures, thus, connections are constitutive of persons. Persons are persons because of their connections; it is inconceivable to have a person who is not

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<sup>85</sup> Hallowell, *Connect*, xvi, emphasis mine.

<sup>86</sup> Individualism magnifies individual liberty, as against external authority, and individual activity, as against associated activity. See, Norman S. Care, “Individualism, Moral and Political,” in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 404-5. In this way individualism is a type of social theory. It is “individual” because it places greater emphasis on the significance of the role of the individual within a society of many.

<sup>87</sup> Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 72-3.

connected. “If persons are concrete manifestations of their relations then they cannot be known apart from them. They cannot, then, know themselves *except as they are known in their relations*.”<sup>88</sup>

Relationship is connection and connection is relationship. But connection and relationship do not automatically assume an interpersonal connection.

### **All is Connected**

In understanding relationship as connection we are able to recognize our connection to all that is, to all that has been, and to all that will be. “This makes it possible for us to envision and take seriously the probability that, viewed through the window of ‘quantum weirdness,’ the whole of the universe is everywhere and in all its aspects deeply interconnected.”<sup>89</sup> As social-selves we are not isolated individuals; rather we are interdependent, interconnected and rhizomic; we are shaped by all that has preceded, are simultaneously shaping what is, and we can be sure that we are impacting all that will be, (though *how* we impact all that will be is impossible to predict).

In *Six Degrees*, Duncan Watts sifts through questions being asked within a wide array of disciplines stating; “As different as these questions appear, they are all versions of the same question: *How does individual behavior aggregate to the collective behavior?*”<sup>90</sup> This is a question of connection. After walking through the vital connections within

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 125, emphasis mine.

<sup>89</sup> James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 8.

<sup>90</sup> Duncan J. Watts, *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 24.

chemistry, physics, molecular biology, to the incredible growth of ecology and epidemiology, to sociology and economics he writes: “After hundreds of years of denial, modern science has finally come to terms with this way of seeing the world.”<sup>91</sup> This “way of seeing the world” is interacting organisms; connections. The disciplines which at times appeared to be in competition with each other are increasingly searching out points of connection.

In 1967 when Harvard sociologist, Stanley Milgram randomly sent hundreds of letters to Nebraska residents urging them to forward the correspondence to any acquaintance who might be able to direct the letter to its target recipient, (a specific stockbroker in Boston); few people could have predicted the stir caused by Milgram’s findings. Most of the letters ultimately did arrive at the destination and did so passing through an average of six individual’s hands.<sup>92</sup>

Milgram’s research, though not conclusive, spawned others to tackle the concept. Today this *Small World Theory*, as applied to human relations is colloquially known as *Six Degrees of Separation*.<sup>93</sup> Connection between all things is also a central tenet of *Chaos*

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>92</sup> Albert-Laszlo and Eric Bonabeau Barabasi, “Scale-Free Networks,” *Scientific American* (New York, NY), May 2003, 68.

<sup>93</sup> The phrase “Six Degrees of Separation” is credited to playwright John Guare and was made in to a film in 1993 starring Will Smith and directed by Fred Schepisi. A degree is defined as a relationship that connects one person with another. Zero degrees separate you from your immediate friend, but a friend of a friend would be one degree of separation. The basic theory is that there are only six degrees of separation between you and everyone else in the world. The mathematical equation which supports the idea supports a global population of 31 million people. This has spawned the “Bacon Oracle” which was a popular game a few years back where people tried to figure out the most direct connection from any celebrity to the actor, Kevin Bacon. The University of Virginia has now created the “The Oracle of Bacon at Virginia” which is a massive database that can determine any actor’s BF (Bacon Factor).

*Theory's* "Butterfly Principle."<sup>94</sup> The "Butterfly Principle" proves that the slight air movement caused by the flapping of a butterfly's wings in South America, through a series of connections, could impact weather patterns in such a way so as to cause a tornado in Texas.

In response to a single scenario, the structure of the network could change, but so could the pattern of activity on the network. Furthermore, each kind of decision—each kind of dynamics—helps set the context in which subsequent decisions must be made. Your happiness affects your network, and your network affects your happiness. It's a complex dance.<sup>95</sup>

Recent research into Scale-Free Networks such as the World Wide Web, continues to reinforce just how dynamically everything is linked.<sup>96</sup>

Simply stated, networks are people talking to each other, sharing ideas, information and resources. The point is often made that networking is a verb, not a noun. The important part is not the network, the finished product, but the process of getting there—the communication that creates the linkages between people and clusters of people.<sup>97</sup>

The study of networks highlights the linkages between people and cluster better equipping us to see how every person is related to every other person. Furthermore, this

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<sup>94</sup> The "Butterfly Principle" from MIT meteorologist Edward Lorenz's Chaos theory demonstrates, among other things, all that is, is related or connected to everything else. "Lorenz had proved that complex, dynamical systems show order, but they never repeat. Since our world is classified as a dynamical, complex system, our lives, our weather, and our experiences will never repeat; however, they should form patterns." Source, Manus J. III Donahue, "An Introduction to Chaos Theory and Fractal Geometry," Duke University, <<http://www.duke.edu/~mjd/chaos/chaos.html>>, 1997.

<sup>95</sup> Watts, *Six Degrees*, 55.

<sup>96</sup> Scale-Free Networks are comprised of a variety of complex systems sharing an important property: some nodes have a tremendous number of connections to other nodes, where as most nodes have just a handful. The popular nodes, called hubs, (like Google.com or a celebrity like Tom Hanks) can have hundreds, thousands or even millions of connections or links. The World Wide Web, which contains well over three billion documents, web pages are typically 19 clicks from one another. Section 3.3 will closely examine "Scale Free Networks" theory. See Barabasi, "Scale-Free Networks."

<sup>97</sup> John Naisbitt, *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Lives* (New York, NY: Warner Books, Inc., 1982), 215.



view of human connection emphasizes the potential impact of any person's life and actions on others. For example, when a child is treated with tenderness instead of being neglected, in part because his father became a Christ-follower, through the EPIC<sup>98</sup> presentation of God's grace, at a local church, after the pastor attended a conference where Len Sweet quoted St. Benedict; and St. Benedict's writing was inspired by overhearing a conversation between two unknown monks we see the principles of connection in action. Paul illustrated this relational dynamic, writing:

Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"<sup>99</sup>

This "domino effect" is everywhere and in everything. Can the fertilizer I spread on my lawn impact Native American salmon fishing? Could my aunt's use of hairspray contribute to your great granddaughter's need to wear sun block? Could the word of encouragement a second grade teacher gives to a struggling student play a role in that student receiving a Nobel Price? The answer to these questions is, yes! Edward Hallowell illustrates:

All the connections we make in life are like a garden we are always growing. One plant dies, another grows up, some get weeded out, while now and then we transplant. The garden is constantly changing, but certain parts last from year to year, like the old crab apple tree in the corner or the elm we swung from as

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<sup>98</sup> EPIC is an acronym (Experiential, Participatory, Image-driven, Connected), for the core values of authentic communication within a postmodern culture as developed by Leonard I. Sweet, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 185-240. Later EPIC was expanded into a book of its own. Leonard I. Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000).

<sup>99</sup> Romans 10:13-15.

children. Certain people stay with us always. Even after they die, our connection to them does not break. These are constants in our garden.<sup>100</sup>

Peter Hicks states it this way:

We are not islands. What we are – how we think, what we believe, our human personhood – is shaped from the outside and not from the inside. Just as I am what I eat, I am what I learn from billions of others. But I am what I experience as well.<sup>101</sup>

Although I would challenge Hicks to consider the human person as *perichoretically* shaped from *both* the outside *and* the inside, his emphasis on human connectedness stresses our social construction.<sup>102</sup> These recent observations regarding the connectedness of all come as little surprise to the peoples of the Abrahamic faiths who more-or-less maintain that all that is, is created by God. All that is finds its origin in God the Creator and Sustainer; thus all that is, is in relationship with God. Jürgen Moltmann writes, “God loves his creation. God is bound to every one of his creatures in passionate affirmation. God loves with creative love. That is why he himself dwells empathically in every created being, feeling himself into them by virtue of love.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Hallowell, *Connect*, 53.

<sup>101</sup> Peter Hicks, *Transmission: A Message from Elsewhere* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 25.

<sup>102</sup> Although some Christian theologians voice concern regarding the emergence of social constructivist theories, suggesting these constructivist thoughts diminish the importance of God’s sovereign reign while heightening the importance of the created order, specifically humanity’s ability to self-shape, such criticism reveals what we might term an underdeveloped pneumatology. Throughout the Christian Bible God is seen to work in and through people, societies, governments, traditions, creation, and the entire cosmos to bring about God’s desires in concert with creation. A Christian understanding of social constructive theory heightens the importance of the shaping presence of the Holy Spirit in and through everyone and everything. The Holy Spirit becomes the unifying and shaping presence throughout history.

<sup>103</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, 1991, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 50.

Learning to see the interconnection of everything enables individuals and communities to appreciate afresh the power of our presence. Each person's life makes a difference which is impossible to gauge; in such a connected world one never knows the chain of events which might be set in motion with a single word, glance, touch or deed. Though all is connected, connection or relationship does not automatically imply an interpersonal relationship.<sup>104</sup>

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*The meeting of two personalities  
is like the contact of two chemical substances:  
if there is any reaction, both are transformed.*<sup>105</sup>  
– C. G. Jung

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## **Interpersonal Connection is Spirit**

We now focus our gaze on interpersonal relations, as we seek to understand what transforms a relationship into an interpersonal connection. Describing the power and wonder of interpersonal connection Hallowell wrote:

Most people find that their happiness depends more upon [interpersonal] connection than on anything else. To achieve it, do what seems right for you. Hold hands as you walk with your child, get to know your neighbors, line up to give blood at the Red Cross in a time of disaster, dance at your prom, pray at a funeral, be part of a performing heart surgery or part of a team playing football—however you do it, *connect*. The rest takes care of itself. Like *magic*.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community and Small Groups* (El Cajon, CA: Emergent/YS, 2003), in this text Myers explores four of the spaces of interpersonal connection – public, social, personal and intimate – what we come away with is the great need for different kinds of relationships in our individual existence.

<sup>105</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), 49.

<sup>106</sup> Hallowell, *Connect*, 63.

The *magic* of human connection, of which Hallowell wrote, is best understood as a living spirit which animates the interpersonal relationship. In defining interpersonal connection as spirit Loder and Neidhardt have stated:

We should say at the beginning of this discussion that spirit refers to a quality of relationality, and it as a way to conceptualize the *dynamic interactive unity by which two disparate things are held together without loss of their diversity*.<sup>107</sup>

The constitutive interpersonal relationship of *I-thou*<sup>108</sup> forms an *us* making the relationship, small ‘t’ trinitarian, (Figure 2). The *I* is a unique *I* called into being by the unique *us* perichoretically becoming the *I-us-thou*. Writing of relational dynamic seen in the study of pneumatology Clark Pinnock writes: “In some sense the Spirit, in creating fellowship between two, can be thought of as the ‘we’ of the I-Thou.”<sup>109</sup> An interpersonal personal connection is a living *spirit* inseparably conjoined as two or more persons interrelate, there is never an *us* of an *I-it* relationship. *Spirit* is the interpersonal relationship, but can only be the interpersonal relationship as the *I-thou* relate, simultaneously the *I-thou* cannot relate without the *us*. Thus every interpersonal relationship has three “persons”: person A (*I*), person B (*thou*) and the spirit of A/B (*us*).

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<sup>107</sup> James E. Loder and W. Jim Neidhardt, *The Knight's Move: The Relational Logic of the Spirit in Theology and Science* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1992), 10. Emphasis mine.

<sup>108</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York, NY: Charles Scribners Sons, 1970). In my use of Buber’s language the *spirit* is the *and* in Buber’s *I and thou*; the spirit is the bond between.

<sup>109</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 38.

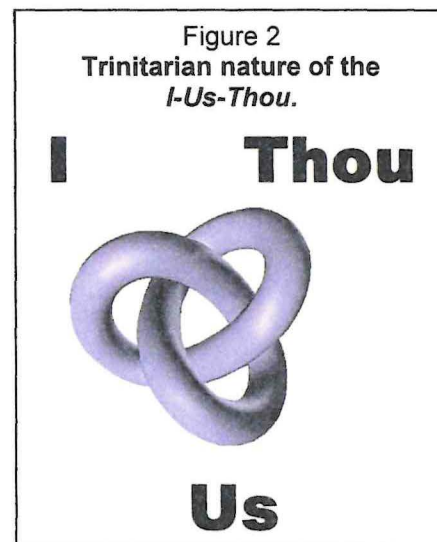
Augustine<sup>110</sup> used this understanding of interpersonal relationships in his construction and articulation of his Trinitarian theology.

And yet that Holy Spirit whom we understand as being not the triad but in the triad, insofar as he is properly or peculiarly called the Holy Spirit, is so called relationship-wise, being referred to both Father and Son, since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son.<sup>111</sup>

Grenz explains:

For Augustine, the Spirit is the mutual and reciprocal love uniting the first and second Trinitarian persons. Throughout all eternity, the Father loves the Son, and the Son reciprocates this love. Hence, the third person is the eternal *Spirit of the relationship*, or the *bond*, between the Father and the Son.<sup>112</sup>

What Augustine observed and applied to the Holy Trinity is an interpersonal reality common to human experience.<sup>113</sup> Though the relational bond of *spirit* is experienced in all relationships the *us* is most clearly seen in passionate (loving or hating) *I-thou* relating. Consider the words to one of the songs in the animated adaptation of E. B. White's classic, *Charlotte's Web*:



<sup>110</sup> Though Augustine is generally credited with the Trinitarian maxim which says, “the Holy Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son,” Stanley Grenz in his forthcoming second volume of *The Matrix of Christian Belief* series to be published by Westminster John Knox in 2005, shows us that this honor belongs to Marius Victorinus (ca. 280-365).

<sup>111</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmond Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York, NY: New City Press, 1990), 197.

<sup>112</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 316.

<sup>113</sup> I seek to apply the relational principle to aid us in better understanding the dynamic nature of all interpersonal relationships.

I used to think the sum of one and one, was two.  
But we add up to more, me and you.

When we are close together,  
It is plain to see,  
Together we are better,  
Than we used to be.

I don't know how to say the things I'm thinking of,  
But the something "more" I'm feeling must be love.

I used to think the sum of one and one, was two.  
But we add up to more, me and you.<sup>114</sup>

In this simple children's ditty which Fern sings to her pet pig Wilbur, she struggles to find language to unravel the mystery of interpersonal relationship. Fern recognizes something common to human experience; when two people relate intimately, (positively or negatively) something greater than the two emerges.

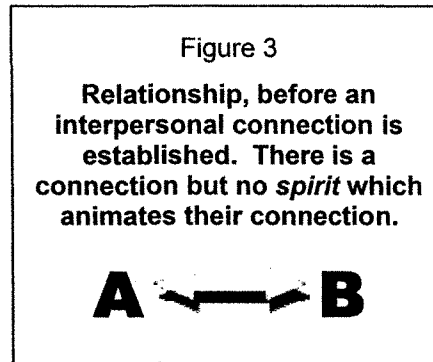
Consider two people who have enjoyed a close interpersonal relationship (theirs is a *spirit* of friendship) but have since experienced a "falling out." There is a tangible sense that "something has come between them." This, "something more" from *Charlotte's Web* and "something between" from the broken relationship are best understood as *spirit*. The spirit is the *us*, dynamically created by the *I-thou* relationship, and the *us* affirms both individuality and mutuality of the *I-thou*. Leonardo Boff states, "Communion arises when the I-Thou are expressed together, when they overcome the I and the Thou and together form a new relationship, the We. To say We is to reveal community."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Charles A. and Iwao Takamoto Nichols, *Charlotte's Web*, Music and lyrics by Richard M. Sherman and Robert B. Sherman (Paramount, 1973), 94 minutes.

<sup>115</sup> Boff, *Holy Trinity*, 50.

We have already seen that all that is, is connected. Therefore, even before a person has interpersonal knowledge of another human being they are already related, (Figure 3). Though person A has no personal knowledge of person B they are related and may impact each other's lives without being aware; what John Macmurry describes as "indirect relations."<sup>116</sup>



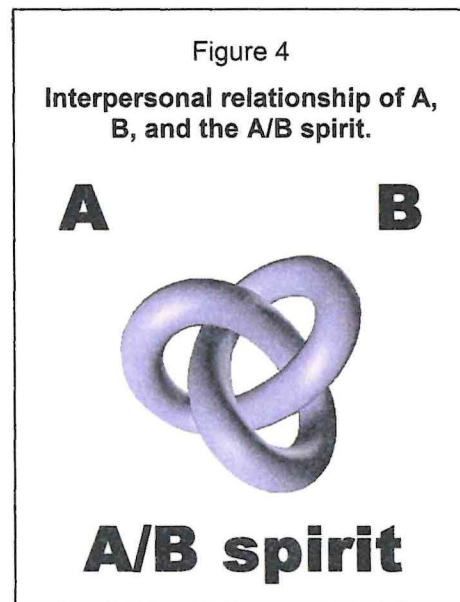
The animating *us* is the distinguishing *spirit* perichoretically transforming an impersonal connection of two beings into a living interpersonal connection. As such, there can be no interpersonal relationship with only two beings, there are always three. There is always person A (one), person B (two) and their interpersonal connection (three). Again, every two person interpersonal relationship is better understood as trinitarian. When two people relate *spirit* is present. Every relationship is greater than the sum of its two parts. "Only in interaction with one another is the spirit of human beings ever revealed; this is the essence of spirit, to be oneself through being in the other."<sup>117</sup> The *us* cannot be reduced to the material world as one can do with A or B, as the *us* is not visible; it is – after all – *spirit*. Even when A and B are physically together, sharing time and space as intimately as humanly possible, the *us* cannot be fully known or seen. *Us* is a mysterious spirit-union, invisible to the eye, but known to the heart.

<sup>116</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), 43.

<sup>117</sup> Othmar Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre (Theory of Society)*, second edition. (Leipzig, 1923), 103ff. as quoted by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, 1930, trans. Reinhard and Nancy Lukens Krauss, ed. Joachim and Clifford J. Green von Soosten, Volume 1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 73.

Consider a romantic relationship<sup>118</sup> between a man and woman. Just as the individual persons are ever growing, developing and changing so their relationship continually grows, develops and changes. For the sake of illustration consider my wife and I. Our relationship is trinitarian: Dwight, Lynette and *us*. *We* is more than Dwight and more than Lynette. The three of us (Dwight, Lynette, *us*) relate *perichoretically*, in that *we* dynamically constitute one another's being. The *us* cannot be *us* without both Dwight and Lynette, while Lynette cannot be Lynette without Dwight and *us*, and Dwight cannot be Dwight without Lynette and *us*. Without an *us* Dwight could have no knowledge or experience of Lynette. Our reciprocating personal knowledge and love dynamically determine the character of our ever developing union.<sup>119</sup>

When people meet me they will often sense something of the Dwight/Lynette *spirit*, as *us* has shaped and is shaping the person I am and am in process of becoming. Our *spirit*, or *us* can be known – in part – by others and can be described – in part – by others; “their marriage is . . .” or “their relationship is . . .” It is important to understand *us* can never be described fully; for the *us*, like any person or *spirit*



<sup>118</sup> I have selected marriage as my primary illustration of interpersonal relations, as marriage is commonly viewed to be a relationship of depth. Marriage serves as a tangible example of all human interpersonal relations. However, this understanding of relationship as the *us* (or *spirit*) of *I-thou* applies to all interpersonal relations not just the marriage relationship.

<sup>119</sup> Though human *perichoresis* cannot be identical to God's relationality, (as human persons are always external to one another as subjects, while God enjoys the mutuality of interior being), the relational dynamic of *perichoresis* provides deep and meaningful insight into the essence of relationality. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 211.



is always in a process of becoming. As such, any description of a person by a human will be a caricature.

In those seasons when I begin to seek myself and my own wants, the *us* suffers. In those moments the *us* of Dwight/Lynette, working in concert with The Holy Spirit convicts me of my sin. I experience a sense of remorse for my selfishness. If I fail to respond to the promptings of the *us* then often the embodied person of Lynette speaks to me on behalf of our *us*<sup>120</sup> with an invitation to repent of my self-focused ways. Her act is more than just self-seeking; it is an act seeking the best for *us* while simultaneously seeking the best for me. As I serve<sup>121</sup> and love my wife our relationship (*us*) becomes increasingly intimate and beautiful.

If however, I fail to repent of my selfish ways and Lynette ceases to allow the *us* to speak through her, choosing instead to seek only what she wants, then a powerful shift begins to take place. Now the *spirit* of Dwight/Lynette is being fed by two persons seeking self. Left developing in this direction the *us* of Dwight/Lynette will become less loving and may ultimately become a type of evil *spirit*; a *spirit* which would encourage separation over against union to all who would come into contact with it.

Human spirit in its entirety is woven into sociality and rests on the basic-relation of I and You. Only in interaction with one another is the spirit of human beings ever revealed; this is the essence of spirit, to be oneself through being in the other. In

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<sup>120</sup> This is similar to other Biblical descriptions of the Holy Spirit speaking God's words through people. Matthew 10:20, "For it won't be you doing the talking – it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

<sup>121</sup> Recognizing that in the truest sense, human service and love cannot be selfless. To love another is to love oneself and to serve another is to serve oneself. Inherent to an understanding of *perichoresis* is that all expending of self is in part for self, this is part of the beauty and wonder of *perichoresis*, that as we love others we love ourselves, as we do violence to others we hurt ourselves. See Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 191-220.

infinite closeness, in mutual penetration, I and You are joined together, inseparable from one another forever, resting in one another, intimately participating in one another, empathizing, sharing experiences, bearing together the general stream of interactions of spirit. Here is where the openness of personal being becomes evident.<sup>122</sup>

Developmentalist Robert Kegan has observed the fundamentally *perichoretic* pattern as normative for interpersonal relations:

Reciprocity now becomes a matter of at once mutually preserving the other's distinctiveness while interdependently fashioning a bigger context in which these separate identities interpenetrate, by which the separate identities are co-regulated and to which persons invest in affective supervening their separate identities.<sup>123</sup>

Catherine Mowry LaCugna writes, “*Perichoresis* expresses the idea that the three persons mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another, ‘are’ what they are by relation to one another. *Perichoresis* means being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion.”<sup>124</sup> “No life can be understood from its own standpoint alone. As long as it lives, it exists in *living relationships* to others’ lives, and therefore in contexts of time and with perspectives of hope.”<sup>125</sup> The “living relationships” of which Jürgen Moltmann writes are the *us* or the *spirit*.

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<sup>122</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 73.

<sup>123</sup> Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press, 1982), 253-4.

<sup>124</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity & Christian Life* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishing, 1992), 270-1. LaCugna wrote this as she unpacked the eighth century Greek theologian, John Damascene’s use of the word *perichoresis* to describe divine Trinitarian relationality.

<sup>125</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis, MN: 1st Fortress Press, 1993), 133, emphasis mine.

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*Life is not a thing or a fluid any more than heat is.  
What we observe are some unusual sets of objects separated from the rest of the world  
by certain peculiar properties such as  
growth, reproduction, and special ways of handling energy.  
These objects we elect to call 'living things.'*<sup>126</sup>  
— Robert Morison, Physicist

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### ***Living Spirit***

The *spirit* of the *I-thou* is living. We are not dealing with an impersonal force, or a neutral conductor facilitating connection, or static objective being, rather we are dealing with a living spirit of unique character, conduct and motives. The character of *spirit* while distinguishable from A and B is constitutive of A and B. *Spirit* is neither dead nor immobile but alive and dynamic, exhibiting development over time. Its will is separate from, yet *perichoretically* interrelated to the wills of both A and B.<sup>127</sup>

The biblical words for *spirit* invoke images of “breath” or “wind.” The image of “breath” often signifies life, *spirit* also refers to the life principle in all living beings, but particularly in humans.<sup>128</sup> The Scripture writers consistently acknowledge that God, who is Spirit,<sup>129</sup> is the source of life in each human person. Genesis chapter two states: “And the

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<sup>126</sup> Margulis and Sagan, *What is Life?* 12.

<sup>127</sup> Christ often demonstrated the *perichoretic* oneness of the Divine will as in John 5:30, “But I do nothing without consulting the Father. I judge as I am told. And my judgment is absolutely just, because it is according to the will of God who sent me; it is not merely my own.”

<sup>128</sup> Grenz, *Created for Community*, 52-60.

<sup>129</sup> John 4:24, “For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”

LORD God formed a man's body from the dust of the ground and breathed into it the breath of life. And the man became a living person."<sup>130</sup> Loder and Neidhardt wrote:

As 'dust,' human existence, like the rest of creation, is dependent on God, but by the inbreathing of the Spirit of God, human existence takes on a life of its own which makes relationship with God essential to its nature. Dust and breath are not two separate aspects of human existence, but they constitute a dual unity in which one or the other may exercise marginal control.<sup>131</sup>

God breathing God's own breath/spirit into the first man animated him. *I* (Creator) breathed/*us* (Spirit) into *Thou* (man). The intended *us* of the God/human interpersonal relationship changed when the human – exercising marginal control in the direction of dust – chose self over other; self over God, self over *us*. Theologically speaking to have God's breath is to have spirit, to have spirit is to have life, to have life is to be living. If *us* is *spirit*, *us* is living.

When questions regarding the nature of life come up, enlightened minds tend to first turn to the life sciences; including biology, botany, and zoology, all of which are concerned with the study of living organisms. For us to see interpersonal relationships as living is to transcend material understandings of life.

Historian Hilaire Belloc once quipped, "The man behind the microscope has this advice for you: never ask what something *Is*, just ask, what does it *Do*?"<sup>132</sup> And so we ask, what does life do?

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<sup>130</sup> Genesis 2:7.

<sup>131</sup> Loder and Neidhardt, *Knight's Move*, 48.

<sup>132</sup> Franklin M. Harold, *The Way of the Cell: Molecules, Organisms and the Order of Life* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9.

Rather than focusing on how the ‘life sciences’<sup>133</sup> might respond to this question, we turn to the new physics and the study of complex systems which present the necessary paradigmatic shift supporting the claim that interpersonal relations are living. Stuart Kauffman writes of the new physics:

Life, in this view, is an emergent phenomenon arising as the molecular diversity of a prebiotic chemical system increases beyond a threshold of complexity. If true, then life is not located in the property of any single molecule – in the details – but is a collective property of systems of interacting molecules. Life, in this view, emerged whole and has always remained whole. Life, in this view, is not to be located in its parts, but in the collective emergent properties of the whole they create.<sup>134</sup>

Kauffman is saying that the new physics suggests life must be understood more broadly than the life sciences have typically defined it. Lynn Margulis of the University of Massachusetts biology department, suggests life be better understood as a verb.<sup>135</sup> “‘What is life?’ is thus a linguistic trap. To answer according to the rules of grammar, we must supply a noun, a thing. But life on Earth is more like a verb. It repairs, maintains, recreates, and outdoes itself.”<sup>136</sup> Science of complex systems is even clearer in arguing that relationships are living:

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<sup>133</sup> Philosophers of biology say, “you can define something as alive if you can meet these three conditions. First of all, it’s self contained... Second, it has self maintenance... And then finally, to have life you need reproduction.” Nancey Murphy, “Defining ‘Life’,” in *Ethics, Values and Personhood in the 21st Century*, Presented at Seattle Pacific University, Counter Balance, <<http://www.counterbalance.net/evp-mind/index-topics.html>>, January 2000.

<sup>134</sup> Stuart Kauffman, *At Home in the Universe: The Search for the Laws of Self-Organization and Complexity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 24.

<sup>135</sup> Margulis and Sagan, *What is Life?* 20-23.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

In addition to being purposeful, social organizations are living systems; therefore, like all living systems, they are neg-entropic<sup>137</sup> and capable of self-organization. They create order out of chaos. Biological systems primarily self-organize through genetic codes, and social systems self-organize through cultural codes. The DNA of social systems is their culture.<sup>138</sup>

The thought that life transcends the material world comes as no surprise to the Christ-follower. Orthodox Christian belief has always argued that life finds its origin in God. The *spirit* the *us* of *I* and *thou* animates and orders the connection of the two beings. The animated connection is interpersonal relationship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

The person is willed by God, in concrete vitality, wholeness, and uniqueness as an ultimate unity. Social relations must be understood, then, as purely interpersonal and building on the uniqueness and separateness of persons. The person cannot be overcome by apersonal spirit; no 'unity'; can negate the plurality of persons. The social basic category is the I-You relation. The You of the other person is the divine You. Thus the way to the other person's You is the same as the way to the divine You, either through acknowledgment or rejection. The individual becomes a person ever and again through the other, in the 'moment'. The other person presents us with the same challenge to our knowing as does God. My real relationship to another person is oriented to my relationship to God.<sup>139</sup>

The *spirit* of A and B reveals the truth of A and B. The *us*, together with the Holy Spirit convicts of sin<sup>140</sup> and as A and B submit to the leadings of their *spirit* they will be

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<sup>137</sup> *Neg-entropic* is negative entropy or resistance to natural entropic forces. It is the organization of the matter and energy in the universe to an ultimate state of meaningful and functional rationality. It is a relational move from chaos to order.

<sup>138</sup> Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture* (Boston, MA: Butterworth Heinemann, 1999), 16.

<sup>139</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 55-6.

<sup>140</sup> Sin being that which separates; a breach of relationship and rebellion; or that which seeks self over connection. Volf defines sin not as breaking moral code but as the exclusion of the 'other.' See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996).

drawn together. Their *spirit* can be resisted.<sup>141</sup> The *us* engages in activities such as teaching,<sup>142</sup> leading,<sup>143</sup> guiding,<sup>144</sup> revealing,<sup>145</sup> empowering,<sup>146</sup> etc. The *us* even strengthens when A and B are weak. The *us* of a relationship is also a gift to others, for instance the *spirit* of Lynette and I is one of the primary gifts (or curses) we give to our son.<sup>147</sup> Our son is filled with *us* and is shaped by our relationship. The more A and B love and serve one another the more beautiful their *us* is, thus all who encounter their *spirit* are blessed. Once created, the *spirit* does not cease to exist. So if the *us* becomes evil then all who encounter it, sense its darkness, this is part of the reason God hates divorce.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> In footnotes 141-148 I am showing Biblical references to the living “person” and work of the Holy Spirit as an example of the living nature of the *spirit* of interpersonal relations. Acts 7:51, “You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? But your ancestors did, and so do you!”

<sup>142</sup> John 14:26, “But when the Father sends the Counselor as my representative – and by the Counselor I mean the Holy Spirit – he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I myself have told you.”

<sup>143</sup> John 14:17, “He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world at large cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for him and doesn't recognize him. But you do, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.”

<sup>144</sup> John 16:13, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not be presenting his own ideas; he will be telling you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.”

<sup>145</sup> John 16:15, “All that the Father has is mine; this is what I mean when I say that the Spirit will reveal to you whatever he receives from me.”

<sup>146</sup> Acts 1:8, “But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

<sup>147</sup> Luke 11:13, “If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”

<sup>148</sup> Malachi 2:16, “‘For I hate divorce!’ says the LORD, the God of Israel. ‘It is as cruel as putting on a victim's bloodstained coat,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘So guard yourself; always remain loyal to your wife.’” Divorce is a powerful break of relationship; and since we reveal God's image in relationship, divorce symbolizes a significant break.

Divorce symbolizes the image of God being unraveled.<sup>149</sup> God who is perfect love, perfect relationship created us for the same.

### ***Morphing Spirit***

To be living is to change and morph over time.<sup>150</sup> From conception through death we are in a constant state of developing; human beings and their social structures are not static. This foundational reality impacts every interaction humans have from asking a friend “what’s new?” to watching a child grow. Everything changes; the existence of the discipline of History signals that life now is not as it was. Book titles like, *After Modernity ...What?*<sup>151</sup> and Grant Osborne’s *Hermeneutical Spiral*<sup>152</sup> signal the developmental nature of our understanding of theology and our study of Scripture.

If rather than seeing “gospel” and “culture” as preexisting realities, we realize that both our understanding of the gospel and the meaning structures through which people in our society make sense of their lives are dynamic, the conversation between them ought to enrich our theological construction.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Influenced here by Zizioulas’ articulation of God’s being as communion. John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

<sup>150</sup> The developmental nature of the interpersonal spirit within finite human relations differs from Divine relationality. It cannot be said that the personage of God changes in the same way that human beings and relational spirit change. God “is in Person identical with his Word, and his Word is itself his Act.” Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1996), 236. See Torrance’s final chapter, “The Unchangeableness of God” for a detailed treatment.

<sup>151</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernity, What? Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990).

<sup>152</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991).

<sup>153</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 160.



From the developmental nature of culture and theology, to the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Erickson, to Fowler's stages of faith,<sup>154</sup> or Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's stages of death and dying,<sup>155</sup> or to social learning theories presented by Skinner or Bandura, or to information processing theories by Chomsky or Atkinson and Shiffrin, or from ethnological theories by Lorenz and Bowlby to Gibson's *Perceptual-Developmental Theory* or even to Thomas Kuhn's paradigm shifts<sup>156</sup> one thing is constant, change. Developmental theories attempt to describe changes over time.<sup>157</sup> All things are morphing and developing over time and this is most clearly evidenced in observing living beings.<sup>158</sup> Even religion changes:

Christianity is a progressive enterprise. Our vastly enlarged perspectives of knowledge should open up fresh vistas of religious faith. The Bible, and Pauline doctrine in particular, may be still pregnant with unsuspected lessons; and the greater precision and more conscious flexibility of modern thought, shown by the new physics and the logico-philosophic movements of our age, may presently engender conceptual reforms which will renew and clarify, on the grounds of modern extra-religious experience, man's relationship to God. An era of great religious discoveries may lie before us.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1981).

<sup>155</sup> Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York, NY: Scribner Classics, 1969).

<sup>156</sup> A paradigm is more than a theory; it is both an intellectual framework and a sociological phenomenon; I include Kuhn to illustrate the pervasiveness of change and development. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962, Second Edition, Enlarged (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>157</sup> Patricia H. Miller, *Theories of Developmental Psychology* (San Francisco, CA: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1983), 2-27.

<sup>158</sup> I am in no way suggesting that all of these theories have the same foundational principles. Some are more organismic while others are more mechanistic, some are more qualitative than quantitative, some emphasize nature more than nurture. I cite the theories because the sheer abundance of theories support something every human knows instinctively: We are in process of becoming. Our physical bodies develop and change over time. Our epistemological capacities develop our relationships, etc.

<sup>159</sup> Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 285.

All this to say interpersonal relationships, as with all else, morph and grow over time. “Us” is developing and ever changing.

Again, consider my marriage. At one point, *we* did not exist. *We* came into being when Lynette and I were young children. *We* began as acquaintances, in our teen years *we* became friends, in college *we* developed into a dating couple, during our senior year of college *we* were an engaged couple, then *we* were married, and now we are parents. The developing nature of our relationship continues. Our relationship today is unlike anything either Lynette or I could have imagined *we* might be. Our *spirit* will continue to change and develop for good and ill. The *us* changes as the *I* and *thou* are in constant motion. All finite human relations are bound by time and space thus inherently developmental. The *us* must change because *I* change. Even a slight change in one party to the relationship *perichoretically* impacts the whole of the *I-us-thou*.

At the beginning of this section I quoted Len Sweet as saying: “Relationship issues stand at the heart of postmodern culture.”<sup>160</sup> Postmodern culture is almost obsessed with connection; from coffee shops to blogging; from naturalism to the internet; from cell phones, to world travel and the whole morphing world of the telecommunications industry. Connection issues – relationship issues stand at the heart of the human condition; the basic human desire to belong hints at the relational image of God stamped on the heart of all humanity. Relationally created as co-bearers<sup>161</sup> of the image of God, we have been in

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<sup>160</sup> Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, 113.

<sup>161</sup> I say “co-bearers” of the image of God because the *imago Dei* is not the possession of the individual but a communal reality. God who is relational in himself, creates an ontologically social humanity in his image, “we” bear his image; see Grenz, *Social God*.

relational crisis since we ate of the fruit in the Garden.<sup>162</sup> Our longing is and always has been to find the *Us* that satisfies.

When the longing for that intimacy is satisfied by the Spiritual Presence of Christ, the Face of God, then the answers to our basic questions may dawn on us. A lifetime is an unfinished act of God's love; it is intended that we complete that act by returning ourselves to God, directly and through others, in love. In this recognition, we discover that the fundamental data about us are not merely that we are alive and developing, incredible products of a vast expanding universe. Rather, as each life unfolds, gets torn open, stripped of its survival techniques and its passing pleasures, and discovers itself as spirit, then it appears from under the surface that we have been created for nothing less than the pure love of God, whose universe is our home.<sup>163</sup>

In the first section of this chapter we saw that God is relational, thus for humanity to be created *imago Dei* is to be relational; and that *perichoretic* relationality provides the best framework for understanding and experience connection. This section enabled us to better see that relationship is connection, and that interpersonal relations are living *spirits*. When interpersonal relations are seen as living *spirit* all human interpersonal relations can be understood as *perichoretically* trinitarian.

Like a piano student learning individual notes before learning chords, we turn our attention to a scientific/network lens; but we do so in concert with our theological and sociological lenses.

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*Since life's origin, all living beings,  
directly or circuitously, have been connected, as their bodies and populations have grown.*<sup>164</sup>  
— Lynn Margulis

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<sup>162</sup> Genesis 3.

<sup>163</sup> Loder, *Logic of the Spirit*, 341-2.

<sup>164</sup> Margulis and Sagan, *What is Life?* 22.



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### Section 3.3

## Scientific Lens: Scale-Free Networks as a Structural Hermeneutic Toward Relational Ecclesiology

*What is the Kingdom of God like? How can I illustrate it?  
It is like a tiny mustard seed planted in a garden;  
it grows and becomes a tree, and the birds come and  
find shelter among its branches.*<sup>166</sup>  
— Jesus

Having focused theological and sociological lenses, we now turn our attention to the scientific lens.

In *Liquid Modernity*,<sup>167</sup> Zygmunt Bauman cogently contrasts “solid modernity” with “liquid modernity,” describing solids as having clear spatial dimensions that downgrade the significance of time. As such, *solids* appear to be set firm or cast for all time – they appear almost unchanging. This was the ‘solid’ nature of modernity, as it dealt

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<sup>165</sup> “Human Web,” unknown artist.

<sup>166</sup> Luke 13:18-19.

<sup>167</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000).

with objective rationality and clear propositional truths. Modernity created the impression that its findings were unyielding, heavy and immovable.

By contrast liquid modernity is marked by constant movement, change and flow; nothing is seen as firm or solid. What was absolute is now understood as relative, what was “*assume-d*” now makes an “*ass-of-u-and-me*,” and what was orthodox is now understood as opinion. Liquid modernity holds change as the only constant. We understand liquids to travel easily; “They ‘flow’, ‘run out’, ‘splash’, ‘pour over’, ‘leak’, ‘flood’, ‘spray’, ‘drip’, ‘seep’; unlike solids they are not easily stopped – they pass around some obstacles, dissolve some others and bore or soak their way through others still.”<sup>168</sup> Bauman likens our current Western culture to a kind of fluidity which strips away modern certainties, much the way water erodes the banks of a river; culture is constant movement and reshaping of all modern thought, making today’s boulder tomorrow’s sand.

This metaphor of fluidity<sup>169</sup> demands that we rethink our ‘solid’ understandings of philosophy, theology, and social networks. Increasingly strength is understood not as “resisting the flow” or “taking a stand,” but actively participating in the flow with integrity. A semiotic look at Process, Liberation, Openness, Narrative, Relational theologies, and the rebirth of Orthodoxy, along with other emerging fluid articulations of theology, signal to us

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>169</sup> Some ecclesial implications of this metaphor have already been explored by Ashley Barker and John Hayes, *Sub-Merge: Living Deep in a Shallow World* (Springvale, Australia: The GO Alliance, 2002), Leonard I. Sweet, *Aqua Church: Essential Leadership Arts for Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1999), and Pete Ward, *Liquid Church: A Bold Vision of How to Be God's People in Worship and Mission - a Flexible, Fluid Way of Being Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002).

that the “Christianity” we once thought of as “rock solid” may be even stronger if envisioned as running water.

As John Fuellenbach concluded in *Church: Community for the Kingdom*:

We cannot predict the future, but we have to invent it, based on some insights of linear thinking and on our understanding of the present paradigm shift.

This requires two things of us: (1) to recognize that we are no longer involved in a linear change; and (2) a tremendous belief in God, trusting the message we have to offer is God’s saving plan for all God’s kingdom. The new situation places us almost on the same level at which the early church found itself. The early Christians could not rely on the past, nor did they have clear instructions from the Lord for the future. Reading the signs of the times and trusting in the presence of the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit, they proclaimed their way of action: “we and the Holy Spirit have agreed” (Acts 15:28).<sup>170</sup>

It is both in and for this liquid context that I propose churches be seen as Christ-clusters within God’s scale-free kingdom. To make sense of this statement we will look at churches through the lens of discoveries in the study of complexity. Within mathematics’ study of complex systems – which includes ideas and techniques from chaos theory, artificial life, evolutionary computation and genetic algorithms – is also the study of networks. Network theory is the scientific study of relationships. Recent network findings are already proving to be useful in social sciences,<sup>171</sup> biology<sup>172</sup> and technology.<sup>173</sup> Though

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<sup>170</sup> John Fuellenbach, *Church: Community for the Kingdom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 221.

<sup>171</sup> Network theories are playing a vital role in the war against terrorism. Réka Albert, Hawoong Jeong, and Albert-László Barabási, “Error and Attack Tolerance of Complex Networks,” *Nature* 406 (27/07 2000): 378-82.

<sup>172</sup> They are vital in the search for practical ways to stop the spread of AIDs Zoltán Dezső and Albert-László Barabási, “Halting Viruses in Scale-Free Networks: Can We Stop the AIDS Epidemic?” *Physcial Review E*, no. 65 (21/05 2002): 0151031-4.

still developing, our understanding of networks has moved beyond theory, as Michael Schrage asserts, “People can’t break these laws of networks any more than they can violate Newton’s laws of motion.”<sup>174</sup>

### **Toward an Understanding of “Scale-Free Networks”**

In 1998, physicist Albert-László Barabási and his colleagues at Norte Dame set out to create a map of the World-Wide-Web. Their working assumption was that a map of the World-Wide-Web would form a type of random network. Much to their surprise, they instead found a type of dynamic, self-determining, relational order with an uneven distribution of links. They christened their network discovery a “scale-free network.”<sup>175</sup>

### ***Networks***

The 300 year old study of networks<sup>176</sup> is a study of relationships, as networks are systems of interconnected components. “Any collection of interacting parts – from atoms and molecules to bacteria, pedestrians, traders on a stock market floor, and even nations- represents a kind of substance.”<sup>177</sup> Networks (Figure 5) are made of two primary elements: nodes (the dots) and links (or relationships), and as such they map points of connection.

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<sup>173</sup> And are proving to be invaluable in helping to develop a more stable World-Wide-Web, which is resistant to crashing and to viruses. Réka Albert, et al., “Power-Law Distribution of the World Wide Web,” *Science* 287 (24/03 2000): 2115a.

<sup>174</sup> Michael Schrage, “Networks: Network Theory’s New Math,” *Strategy+Business* 29 (Fourth Quarter 2002), <[http://www.nd.edu/~networks/linked/best\\_book.pdf](http://www.nd.edu/~networks/linked/best_book.pdf)>.

<sup>175</sup> Albert-László Barabási, *Linked: How Everything is Connected to Everything Else and What It Means for Business, Science, and Everyday Life* (New York, NY: A Plume Book, 2003), 66-69.

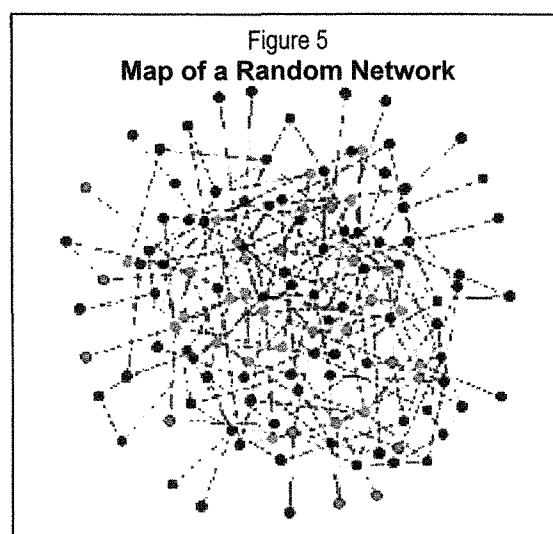
<sup>176</sup> Swiss born, Russian mathematician Leonhard Euler (1707–1783) is credited as being the founder of graph theory or network theory. Barabási, *Linked*, 9-24.

<sup>177</sup> Mark Buchanan, *Nexus: Small Worlds and the Groundbreaking Science of Networks* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 18.

Understanding liquidity as highlighted by Zygmunt Bauman, is vital to appreciating the significance of networks. All social, biological and technological networks are constantly changing. New nodes are being added while old nodes disappear, new links are formed while old links dissolve, and the importance of a link is relative to the time/space of its participating nodes. A printout of almost any network map will be obsolete even before the printer has finished its work. Because relational networks are living systems and constantly morphing any network map must be understood as an outdated snapshot rather than an accurate organization-type chart.

### ***Random Networks***

From the end of the 1950's until Barabási and his team's discovery of scale-free networks, all networks were thought to be



random. One of the distinguishing features of random networks is that they are marked by a relatively even distribution of connectivity. In 1959 the prolific mathematician, Paul Erdős and his collaborator Alfréd Rényi made it their goal to describe the networks present in communications and life sciences. Their research led them to suggest that “such systems could be effectively modeled by connecting their nodes with randomly placed links.”<sup>178</sup> Their theory described random networks as deeply democratic, with most nodes having approximately the same number of links. For this reason, random networks are sometimes referred to as ‘exponential networks’ because as the network grows larger, the nodes

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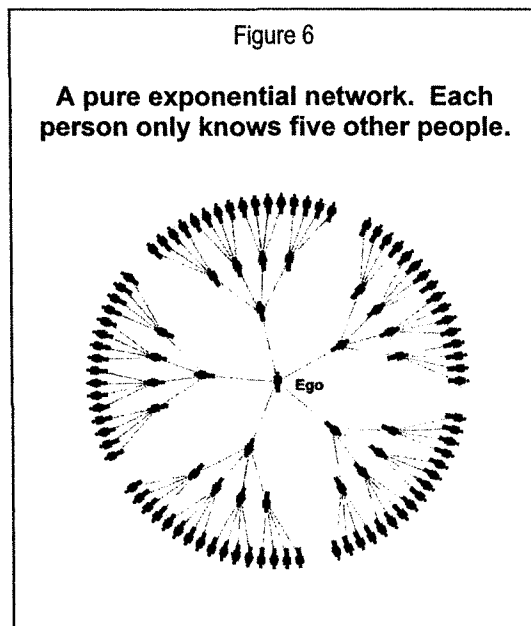
<sup>178</sup> Albert-László Barabási and Eric Bonabeau, “Scale-Free Networks,” *Scientific American* (New York, NY), May 2003, 52.



experience a corresponding decrease in connection to the network. For instance, in figure 6, *Ego* is linked to five nodes, and if the network didn't grow beyond that, *Ego* would be connected to 100% of the nodes. However as pictured *Ego* is directly linked to only 4.7% of the networked nodes; the larger the network the less connected *Ego* will be.

Breck™ shampoo ran a television commercial in the mid 1990's; a spokesperson smiled into the camera and told viewers how she told two friends how Breck™ gave her thick, long, shiny hair. Then those two friends told two friends, those two told two more, "and so on, and so on . . ."

Breck's™ advertisement is an

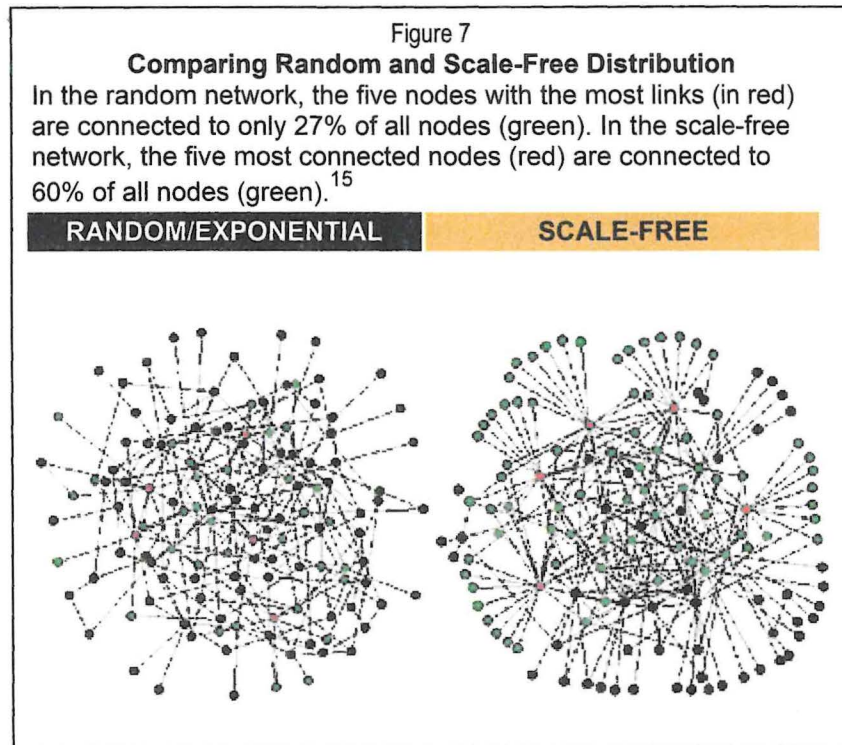


example of a random network – purely exponential, even distribution of relationships, with decreasing direct connection for individual nodes corresponding with the growth of the network. Though random networks do have some real world applications – like a highway system – their failure to account for overlapping relational connections often renders them little more than an interesting mathematical abstraction. The assumption that all networks were random may account for the relative lack of ecclesial network theory research . . . that was, until now.

## Scale-Free Networks

As Barabási and his colleagues began mapping the World-Wide-Web it became increasingly clear that individual nodes were not evenly connected (Figure 7). Some nodes seemed to be very popular, while others nodes had very few connections.

They dubbed their network discovery “scale-free” to signal an important difference



between it and random networks. Whereas random networks experienced a corresponding decrease in connectivity with their growth, scale-free networks did not display uniform limits of scale. In fact some nodes were significantly more connected than other nodes. Scale-free networks are complex network systems, or systems of relationship, which share an important property, some nodes have a vast number of relational connections to other nodes, while most nodes, by comparison, have just a handful of links. The popular nodes, usually called “hubs,” can have hundreds, thousands, even millions of links.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Sociologists estimate that most humans have interpersonal relationships with between 200 and 5,000 people by name. Barabási, *Linked*, 18.

Though almost every node serves a hubbing function for at least one other node, these well-connected nodes function as relationship facilitators, matchmakers for a disproportionate number of nodes. When a node connects to a well-connected “hub,” the hub’s connections are now one degree away from the<sup>180</sup> newly connected node. This can open new worlds of connection for the node. “The small-world mystery is indeed more than a mere curiosity. It reveals an underlying dynamic of interconnectedness that expresses itself indelibly in who we are, how we think, and how we behave.”<sup>181</sup>

As social beings, we belong to neighborhoods, companies, schools, villages, and professions. Through work, I know colleagues, and they know not only me but each other as well. Playing bingo, Mabel will have met a number of friends, who will also be friends among themselves. The point is that people are decidedly not wired up at random all over the world. And this simple fact, what we might call the “clustering” of social connections, destroys the calculations we made for the random graph, which now appear as little more than a sterile exercise.<sup>182</sup>

Clusters of nodes often develop around hubs. A “cluster” or “functional-module” is a grouping of nodes that are responsible for discrete cellular functions.<sup>183</sup> Clusters become possible through the hubbing action of some very popular nodes. The capacity for clustering is what makes scale-free networks of vital importance for social theory and, in this discussion, for the kingdom of God and churches.

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<sup>180</sup> Jan Matlis, “Scale-Free Networks,” *ComputerWorld* 04/11 2002, <<http://www.computerworld.com/networkingtopics/networking/story/0,10801,75539,00.html>>.

<sup>181</sup> Buchanan, *Nexus*, 33.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>183</sup> Leland H. Hartwell, et al., “From Molecular to Modular Cell Biology,” *Nature* 402, Supplement (1999): 402.

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*Liquid church will form a number of different networked connections. These will not only shape its activities but also help us to express the social organization of a liquid church.*<sup>184</sup>  
— Pete Ward

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## Kingdom of God as a Scale-Free Network

Scale-free network theory can help us better see the relational dynamic of the kingdom of God.<sup>185</sup> Jesus described God's pervasive reign this way; "The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast used by a woman making bread. Even though she used a large amount of flour, the yeast permeated every part of the dough."<sup>186</sup> Even Christ's parabolic descriptions of God's reign suggest this dynamic relational theory may hold important insight to understanding and experiencing the unstoppable expansion and rhizomic interconnected reality of God's kingdom.

Buchanan suggests that "some of the deepest truths of our world may turn out to be truths about organization, rather than about what kinds of things make up the world and how those things behave as individuals."<sup>187</sup> The "truths about organization" he mentions are relational connections: How do the individual parts work together to produce the

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<sup>184</sup> Ward, *Liquid Church*, 41.

<sup>185</sup> From the working understanding of the kingdom of God as God's relational reign or his affective rule, I place all the created order within God's kingdom. I do not only place the redeemed within the kingdom of God. Since nothing is outside God's person or his affective reign I place all under his rule; reconciled and estranged.

<sup>186</sup> Matthew 13:33.

<sup>187</sup> Buchanan, *Nexus*, 19.

whole? A serious look at the connections of the cosmos takes seriously the notion that *the whole is greater than the sum of its parts*.<sup>188</sup> As complexity theories are equipping humanity to appreciate the interconnectedness of all creation, those in theistic traditions uniquely appreciate the source of these vast shaping mosaics. Jürgen Moltmann writes, “If all things are created by God, then their protean variety is preceded by an immanent unity. It is through Wisdom that God forms the community of created beings, who exist with one another and for one another.”<sup>189</sup>

### ***Nodes and Links in God’s Scale-Free Kingdom***

In a thorough map of God’s scale-free kingdom nodes would represent all aspects of creation, while links would illustrate their relationships. Nodes are not just the living humans that we interact with regularly. Nodes can be the saints of old, families of origin, geographical shapers, political influences, books, ideas, movements, organizations, weather patterns, mountain ranges, automobiles we drive, roads we drive on, blogs we read, all manner of events, etc. All shaping forces must be understood to be present within such a map; the complexity of such a map is virtually unfathomable. However, for the sake of simplicity here, we will primarily use nodes to represent human beings. Networks are alive with activity and constantly changing: new nodes enter while others leave; new links develop while other links dissolve. God’s scale-free kingdom is never static. The kingdom

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<sup>188</sup> This common statement from Gestalt psychology has even been expanded to better explain relationality. “It has been said: The whole is more than the sum of its parts. It is more correct to say that the whole is something else than the sum of its parts, because summing up is a meaningless procedure, whereas the whole-part relationship is meaningful.” Kurt Koffka, *Principles of Gestalt Psychology* (New York, NY: Harcourt-Brace, 1935), 176.

<sup>189</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, “The Destruction and Healing of the Earth: Ecology and Theology,” in *God and Globalization: The Spirit and the Modern Authorities, Volume 2*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse and Don S. Browning (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 177.

we experience today is different than the one experienced by Jesus two thousand years ago. It is still God who reigns relationally over *all*; but the *all* is not the same.

Links between nodes are not all created equally. All living things develop and change over time, so it is with links. For instance, the link I had to Stan Lundy was, for a season, quite strong; Mr. Lundy was my fifth grade teacher. While I was his student I would have listed him among the most influential persons in my life, even though I still enjoy the occasional game of chess thanks to his tutelage, the nature of our connection has morphed over time. Mr. Lundy served a hubbing function for me. He linked me to the sixth grade, to the world of chess, to books and ideas that shaped me in a multitude of ways. But our link has changed. All links are occasional; death is the ultimate testimony to this reality, yet even in death a link is not severed. Mr. Lundy's legacy still lives on in me.

Some links are strong and comparatively binding while others are weak and transient. From a network perspective, the relative strength or weakness of a link is less important to the network than the sheer number of links. The more links, the stronger the network.

### ***Christ-Clusters: the Soul of the Church***

Within the scale-free kingdom paradigm,<sup>190</sup> the soul of the church is best understood as node clusters centered in the Lord Jesus Christ. A "Christ-cluster" is a relational grouping of people who are responsible for discrete, Holy Spirit guided/cluster-

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<sup>190</sup> I am using paradigm to signify a "tradition-shattering" as opposed to "tradition-preserving" perspective as Thomas Kuhn popularized with his use of "paradigm shifts." Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962, Second Edition, Enlarged (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

determined cellular functions. Traditionally, the ‘solid’ church viewed its cellular functions as the offices, and sacraments of “the church.”<sup>191</sup> A scale-free paradigm views cellular functions as any form of communication<sup>192</sup> linking or bridging toward Christ; as such these Christ-clusters are socially constructed realities.<sup>193</sup> Yet, in declaring Christ-clusters to be social constructs, it is vital that we recognize that they are more than mere *human* social constructs. For God is the center and participating shaper of these social constructs. As we are in Christ and Christ is in us, our dialectical social interactions legitimate our clusters as Christian or, more explicitly, Christ-like. These dynamic communities incarnate the *perichoretic* relationship of *I-us-Christ*.

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<sup>191</sup> “Uttering ‘the church’ as an abstract concept tells us little about the church we inhabit – even if we intone the words in a properly modulated ecclesiastical voice.” Michael Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Post-Modern Context* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 79. Thus the use of the word “church” with a single catholic meaning will continue to be problematic for the diverse people of God. Such heavy definitions of “the church” which subtly assume a catholicity of form, structure or dogma, suppress (often inadvertently), the unique movement of God within given Christ-clusters. These fluid, Christ-centered clusters are indigenous, incarnations of Christ’s body in and for a specific time and place. As such we do ourselves a disservice to continue to speak of “the Church”; if in so doing we assume a singleness of system and belief that is not our human experience. Even a cursory survey of comparative ecclesiology reveals great diversity. The scale-free Kingdom paradigm allows for this diversity in a way that the “Solid” paradigm does not.

<sup>192</sup> I use the idea of “communication” to signify the process of exchanging information, usually via a common system of symbols. It takes a wide variety of forms, from face-to-face conversation, hand signals, messages sent over global telecommunication networks, etc. The process of communication is what allows us to interact with other people; without it, we would be unable to share knowledge or experiences with anything outside of ourselves. Common forms of communication include speaking, writing, gestures, and broadcasting. The Latin root word of “communication” is *comunicare*, “to make common.” See, Wikipedia.org, “Communication” [Path: [http://en2.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication#Defining\\_communication](http://en2.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication#Defining_communication)], 11/12 2003.

<sup>193</sup> Socially constructed reality forms a concept within the sociology of knowledge and within the social constructionist strand of postmodernism, stressing the on-going mass-building of worldviews by individuals in dialectical interaction with society at any time. The numerous realities so formed comprise, according to this view, the imagined worlds of human social existence and activity, gradually crystallized by habit into institutions propped up by language conventions, given ongoing legitimation by mythology, religion and philosophy, maintained by therapies and socialization, and subjectively internalized by upbringing and education to become part of the identity of social citizens Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989).

To understand churches as Christ-clusters is to be immersed in a radical fluidity. Churches can no longer be seen as “once for all”<sup>194</sup> organizational structures to which people come, attend or join in any formal sense. Craig Van Gelder echos this, saying, “The church is not static; it is a living dynamic social and spiritual reality.”<sup>195</sup> In this new paradigm, churches become co-created relational networks centered in Jesus Christ; as such, these specific Christ-clusters come and go over time and are indigenous to the participating their nodes.

Consider a woman who works at a law firm with a couple of other Christ-followers. The three have lunch once a week for encouragement and fellowship, to spur one another on toward “love and good deeds,”<sup>196</sup> to nudge each other Christ-ward. She is reading a book by Thomas Merton, volunteers at a nearby Baptist church’s midweek kids’ program, and she usually attends an Assembly of God service Sunday mornings, though every once in a while she opts for Russian Orthodox worship; her official church membership is still at her parents’ Lutheran church. Looking at her life through a lens of solid modernity, her “church” experience appears to be fragmented; however from a scale-free kingdom perspective, she is embodying a oneness in Christ that crosses theological and organizational boundaries. She is clustering with those in her affective community centered in the person of Christ. She has multiple links knitting her firmly in a kingdom network. In this paradigm the question of her “actual” church membership is blurred. Her

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<sup>194</sup> Naisbitt, *Megatrends*, 211-30.

<sup>195</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 158.

<sup>196</sup> Hebrews 10:24.



church becomes a socially constructed Christ-cluster. From an institutional or ‘solid’ church perspective she may appear wayward, or at the least uncommitted, but from a scale-free perspective she is interlaced to Christ and to a meaning-giving cluster of other Christ-followers.

### ***Weak Links***

One of the surprising discoveries of complexity theory came from Mark Granovetter of Johns Hopkins University. He proved that a strong network is made up of many weak links. In fact, a network comprised of many weak links is stronger and more enduring than a network made up of few strong links.

If a person begins to follow Christ and is discipled by one close friend – with no other support, no other resources, no organizational structures – when tragedy strikes, severing that link, what is likely to happen to the new disciple? Similarly, a network of highways on an island with one large bridge connecting to the mainland is weaker than a network with multiple smaller bridges connecting it to the mainland. One, multi-car multi-lane automobile accident could shut down a bridge; if the island only has one bridge, it would then be cut off from the mainland.

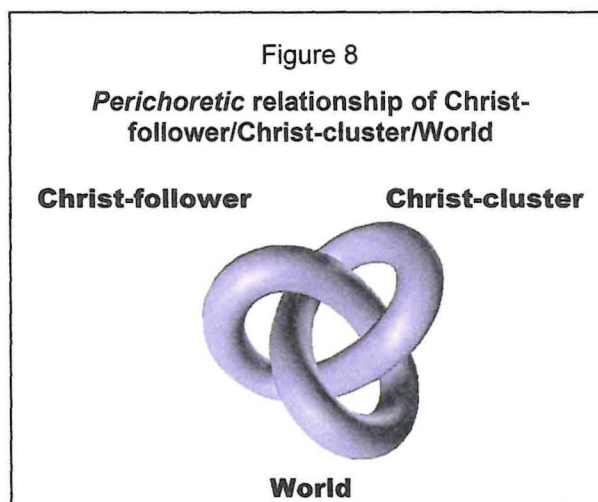
Later in Granovetter’s article, *The Strength of Weak Ties*,<sup>197</sup> he went on to show that the weak links between people serve as social “bridges.” A bridge facilitates connection to otherwise isolated units. It may have to span a deep chasm or a small brook, but any bridge

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<sup>197</sup> Mark Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1973): 1360-80.

is better than none.<sup>198</sup> In this sense, the strength of a link is relatively meaningless; link is a link. Strong or weak any link connects two otherwise unconnected entities.

“Notice that bridging links of this sort do not merely connect you to one other person. They are bridges into distant and otherwise quite alien social worlds.”<sup>199</sup> These bridges simultaneously intertwine the Christ-follower with the Christ-cluster, and the Christ-follower



with the world, and the world with the Christ-cluster (Figure 8).<sup>200</sup> The Christ-follower who is inseparably linked to Christ-clusters is the yeast that is kneaded through dough in Christ’s parable; the “I’m in Christ/Christ in me” living, incarnational relationship is the gospel that spreads through the myriad of links that make up human existence.

### ***Hubbing Leadership***

As the next chapter will bring leadership within a Christ-Cluster into clear view we will only briefly contrast leadership in the solid and liquid paradigms. Whereas leadership within the solid institutional church relied in part, on titles, positions and hierarchy to maintain its authority, the more liquid, scale-free kingdom self-organizes around hubs who

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<sup>198</sup> Though outside the scope of this essay, the strength of weak links and their social bridging could have far reaching implications for missions, and could benefit from further exploration.

<sup>199</sup> Buchanan, *Nexus*, 44.

<sup>200</sup> Howard A. Snyder, *Kingdom, Church, and World: Biblical Themes for Today* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1985).

give away their authority. Christ-clusters are formed around hubs who provide nodes with the connections they crave.

Consider the World-Wide-Web. Google, the search engine, is a hub that millions of nodes connect with every day. Nodes do not connect to Google simply for the sake of Google nor because Google has any ontological authority. Rather, nodes connect to Google for the purpose of making the meaning-giving connections the nodes seek, and because Google's authority is itself a social construct, coming from its continued service to its users.

Leadership in a scale-free kingdom paradigm functions as a hub, or as a matchmaker. Hubs are facilitators of relational connection. Hubs help to link nodes to people, to ideas, to resources, to nature, to God, to x. This is a democratic process, democratic in the sense that the nodes decide when and for how long they will connect to any given hub. When a hub, for whatever reasons, no longer connects nodes in ways perceived to be valuable to the nodes, the nodes will seek connection elsewhere. The person serving a hubbing function may do so for a season or for their entire life. In this paradigm, the hub opens up every link that may be useful to a node; this is a type of *kenosis*. The hub holds back nothing. There is no advantage to the hub in hoarding any links.<sup>201</sup> After all, if the hub were to hoard some of the most desirable links, then the node would begin to seek a different hub to link through. "If Google can't help me connect to

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<sup>201</sup> This has been termed the, "Matthew Effect in Science." Taken from Jesus' statement, "To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who are unfaithful, even what little they have will be taken away." (Matthew 25:29) Robert K. Merton, "The Matthew Effect in Science: The Reward and Communication Systems of Science Considered," *Science* 159, no. 3810 (05/01 1968): 56-63.

what I'm looking for then maybe AltaVista can." Of course, in interpersonal-relational contexts hubbing is more than an "information-pass-through."

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*. . . the basic problem with the new species of global institution is that they have not yet become aware of themselves as living.*<sup>202</sup>

– Peter Senge

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### **What might this mean for the “solid” church?**

Coupled with the increasingly fluid character of contemporary culture is a corresponding erosion of the stability of “heavy” or institutional church. It is in this context that the organized, institutional church<sup>203</sup> finds itself floundering, if not eroding. As Len Sweet stated at the beginning of a chapter titled “Get Dechurched,” “Organized religion now stands at the bottom of the information food chain.”<sup>204</sup> Ecclesial institutions desperately clinging to their inherited “solid” structures struggle to demonstrate their relevance in today’s more obvious fluid world.

The institutional church<sup>205</sup> will continue to play an important, though conceptually different, role in the scale-free kingdom paradigm, and “only by letting go of our grasp on

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<sup>202</sup> Peter Senge, et al., *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future* (Cambridge, MA: Society for Organizational Learning, Inc., 2004), 7.

<sup>203</sup> According to Peter Berger, “Institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors.” Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 54.

<sup>204</sup> Sweet, *SoulTsunami*, 146.

<sup>205</sup> I am using the term “institutional church” broadly. It includes all organizational systems, from Papal hierarchy, to Free Church structures, and from high church to house church. As Peter Berger’s statement in footnote 193 makes clear, institutionalization occurs naturally through the habitualized actions of actors. Thus it takes very little to solidify any social ecological organism. Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*.

institutional survival can we possibly recover our vocation.”<sup>206</sup> Whereas the heavy structure of the institutional church was once thought to be the constant of the faith and perceived to be the one holy catholic and apostolic church; in this age of liquid modernity this creedal statement of the first ecumenical Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 must be increasingly understood to have never belonged to the organization *per se* but to the living Christ-clusters.

In speaking of the church as “institution,” G. C. Berkouwer wrote, “The Church’s true being is experienced elsewhere as a new reality.”<sup>207</sup> Roman Catholic theologian Edward Hahnenberg recently acknowledged, “The tendency to reduce the mystery of the church to its structural skeleton, to confuse church with clergy, and to limit active ministry to the ordained leads to increased disillusionment with the model of church as institution.”<sup>208</sup> In *Resident Aliens*, Hauerwas and Willimon state, “The church doesn’t have a social strategy, the church *is* a social strategy.”<sup>209</sup> It is this ontological social strategy that places the living Christ-clusters in ongoing tension with the institutional church. Throughout the history of the people of God, prophetic voices, reformers, mystics and

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<sup>206</sup> Jenkins, *Church Faces Death*, 14.

<sup>207</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *The Church*, trans. James E. Davison (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 418.

<sup>208</sup> Edward P. Hahnenberg, *Ministries: A Relational Approach* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 103.

<sup>209</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 43-48, Emphasis in original.

theologians have challenged the human propensity toward faux structures of authority and strength, calling God's people to incarnate a Holy Spirit communion.<sup>210</sup>

Undoubtedly, the institutional church has been a "solid rock" for the Christ-follower. But just as water is ultimately stronger than rock and as the rapid flow of modern life turns the boulders of yesterday into the sand of tomorrow, so the solid institutional church structures are showing the erosive signs of Christ's ever flowing clusters.

### ***Christ-Commons: the Body of the Church***

Institutional churches are best understood as Christ-commons. A Christ-commons is a visible structure, institution, denomination, building, worship service, small group, etc. which creates space for dynamic Holy Spirit led Christ-clustering.<sup>211</sup> Having already demonstrated Christ-Clusters as the "soul of the church," we now consider Christ-commons as the "body of the church." Christ-commons primarily exist to provide elaborate systems of support which promote nodal clustering. These heavy church structures serve to create space like a village square, a plaza, a forum, or a meeting place which can encourage Christ-clustering.

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<sup>210</sup> Consider the many ways God has worked in human history to critique reliance on social structures: when God said through the prophet Samuel, that he desires obedience more than sacrifice; or when Jesus said that one day God's people would worship in spirit and in truth, or the Great schism of the East and West and the desire for a centralized church structure; or the Protestant Reformation was, in part, an attempt to remove the authority of "the church" replacing it with the Scripture. I also think of Kierkegaard and his harsh criticisms of the church or Bonhoeffer's "religionless Christianity" may be seen as prophetic voices. See Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, 1954, Second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 203-07. Even Postmodernity is being presented as reformational "voice" for the evangelicals; see, Carl A. Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

<sup>211</sup> Christ-commons or institutions begin as dynamic Christ-clusters. When clusters which dynamically connect around a hub decide to intentionally gather, establishing a regular pattern to their collective existence the cluster begins the social process of group reification. This group process forms the basis to develop a Christ-commons and over time to develop its own traditions.

### ***Christ-Commons as Support Structures***

These corporate organizations or Christ-commons provide much-needed religious goods and services to nodes and their corresponding Christ-clusters. Christ-commons provide religious ideologies, theologies, books, resources, liturgy, education, music, art, and so on, but the most important support these structures offer is the creation of space which encourages clustering in Christ to flourish. Christ-commons and Christ-clusters are reciprocal, even synergistic. Thus the Christ-commons may be best understood as a support structure for living Christ-clusters, but ought not to be mistaken for “the church” itself; both body and soul are necessary.

### ***Support Structures and Hubbing Leadership***

Leading a Christ-commons (what is typically thought of as a “pastor”) with the intent of creating space for Christ-clustering to occur is not necessarily the same as serving a hubbing function. Within this scale-free-kingdom paradigm, leaders of Christ-commons curate connective space. Their primary concern is to craft an environment of accessible linking, where hindrances to Christ-connections are mitigated. Leaders of Christ-commons would be less concerned for assimilating people into their instruction and more concerned with helping nodes find the meaningful connections they were seeking. Those people responding to the Holy Spirit prompting through the communal ethos of a Christ-cluster to function as a hub may never hold a title or a position of formal leadership within a solid church structure.

### ***Hubs Blur the Clergy and Laity Distinction***

The cellular functions of Christ-clusters such as pastoring, teaching, preaching, equipping, discipling, and any other ministries or “offices,” have never been limited to clergy at any point in human history. Though institutional churches have historically limited these functions to certain individuals based primarily on orthodoxy, ordination, gender and education, it has only imposed limits in abstraction. From conversations between friends, to a mother with her child, to “non-Christian” friends unwittingly serving as Christ’s emissaries, the institutionally-designated leaders and teachers have never cornered the market on authority, service or leadership. Functionally, anytime Christ-followers cluster, these “offices” are informally engaged.

In this emerging paradigm marked by fluidity titles and positional authority carry different meaning than they carried in solid era. Today’s important leadership questions deal with leaders “hubbing” service to their nodes of connection. Simply put, “do those who connect to me find what they need?”

Recent scale-free network findings offer many useful constructs to better understand the relationship between the kingdom of God, God’s churches, and all of creation. The implications and applications of scale-free network theory for the institutional commons demand much more study and attentive reflection.<sup>212</sup> For all who love Christ and long for the fullness of God’s kingdom to be realized must engage thoughtfully and carefully with the great legacy lovingly offered to us from the saints of

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<sup>212</sup> Throughout my research I have found only one essay using scale-free network theory to further our understanding of religious study. See Paul Ormerod and Andrew P. Roach, “The Medieval Inquisition: Scale-Free Networks and the Suppression of Heresy,” Cornell University and arXiv.org, <<http://arxiv.org/abs/cond-mat/0306031>>, May 2003.



old, while simultaneously understanding that “God is in the business of inventively and creatively calling forth communities to think and rethink our doctrines of the church.”<sup>213</sup>

Gases are simple: Molecules fly in empty space, taking notice of each other only when they bounce into one another. Crystals are the opposite but relatively simple, too: Molecules hold hands tightly to create a perfectly rigid lattice. Liquids, however, strike a delicate balance between these two extremes. The attractive forces that keep the water molecules together are not strong enough to coerce them into a rigid order. Trapped between order and chaos, water molecules participate in a majestic dance in which some molecules come together, form small and somewhat ordered groups, move together, and in no time break apart to join other molecules forming yet other groups.<sup>214</sup>

Through a description of the molecular structure of H<sub>2</sub>O, Barabási beautifully describes the incarnational reality that is the kingdom of God; God’s Holy Spirit and God’s people gather in a majestic, fluid dance, forming somewhat ordered groups that move together and then break apart, only to form yet other groups.

### **Three Lenses, One Relational Hermeneutic**

We come to the end of one long chapter formed of three distinct yet *perichoretically* related lenses. Working together the lenses form a relational hermeneutic. The theological/biblical lens helps us to see God as relational. The sociological/ontological lens helps us to see human interpersonal relationships as living spirits. While the scientific/network lens helps us to see the interconnectedness of all creation. Forming relational ways of seeing the lenses are the relational hermeneutic in action; God (*I* – Lens 1) creates all that is (*Thou* – Lens 3) and God breathes God’s own spirit into creation (*us* –

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<sup>213</sup> Jenkins, *Church Faces Death*, 102.

<sup>214</sup> Barabási, *Linked*, 73.

Lens 2) animating the God/creation (I/thou) relationship thus human beings (*us*) uniquely bear God's image as the living *us* (*I-us-thou*).

This relational hermeneutic is too exciting and full of promise to leave in the realm of abstraction; its time for a "vision test." The next chapter will put our interpretive lens to work in the real world as we further explore "hubbing" leadership and its rich implications in and for dynamic, relational Christ-clusters.

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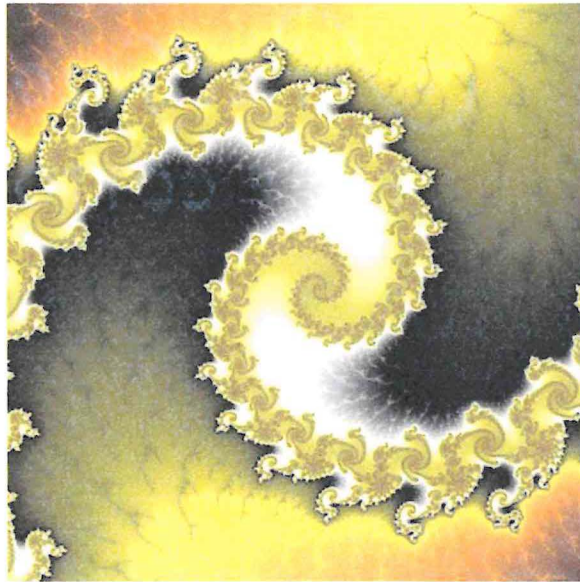
*There is a higher ecological awareness emerging,  
a coming into personal awareness of our interdependence with other life  
and our mutual responsibility.<sup>215</sup>*

– Peter Senge

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<sup>215</sup> Senge, et al., *Presence*, 66.



## CHAPTER 4

### RELATIONAL HERMENEUTIC APPLIED: THE 'ACT' AND 'BEING' OF RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP

*... Relationships are not just interesting;  
to many physicists, they are all there is to reality.<sup>2</sup>*  
– Margaret J. Wheatley

*Leadership is more tribal than scientific,  
more a weaving of relationship than an amassing of information . . .<sup>3</sup>*  
– Max DePree

Drawing the three lenses of the previous chapter together we now possess the beginnings of a relational hermeneutic, and are better equipped to see and think connectively, thus embody the relational *imago Dei* and the reconciliatory work of the

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<sup>1</sup> “The Yellow Yin Yang” by Gerhard Wesp, (mathematician, software engineer and mandelbrot or fractal image artist). <<http://www.cosy.sbg.ac.at/~gwesp/fractals/>>

<sup>2</sup> Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order is a Chaotic World* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), 34.

<sup>3</sup> DePree, *Leadership is an Art* (New York, NY: Dell Publishing, 1989), 3.

*missio Dei*. In this chapter we will begin to apply our relational hermeneutic to ecclesial structure(s) and leadership.

The commercial success of NBC's reality show *The Apprentice*, is serving as a catalyst for thinking and talking about leadership. Donald Trump the billionaire real estate titan, TV impresario, and bestselling author made the phrase, "You're Fired!" one of the most anticipated phrases of recent television history. The program's contestants get the most airtime but Trump is the star. He travels in a helicopter with "Trump" emblazoned on the side in big letters, is often braggadocios with an ego even bigger than his hair.

The basic premise of *The Apprentice* is to turn the corporate search for a new CEO for one of Trump's many companies into a reality series, with twelve contestants competing for one job. Toward the end of its first season-finale contestant Bill Rancic became the first contest to hear the words, "You're Hired!" NBC's website quoted Trump's newest employee saying, "I'm a trained killer - in business." When asked for his definition of success Rancic replied, "If I can lead a happy life, touch the lives of others in a positive way, win the respect of those that I care about... and make a few million [dollars] along the way then I have been successful." He went on to say that he could relate to *Roadrunner*; the cartoon character. "[The *Roadrunner*] would see an opportunity and act upon it, always staying ahead of the competition. The fake detour sign, the falling anvil and the TNT never got to him because of his speed and perceptiveness... Beep, Beep."<sup>4</sup>

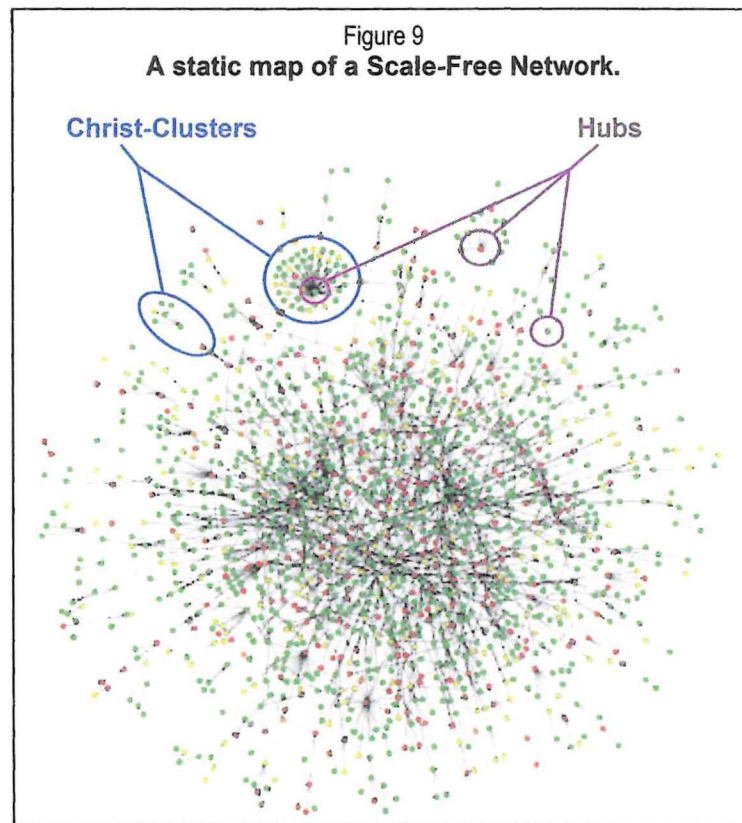
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<sup>4</sup> "Bill Rancic," in *The Apprentice*, NBC.com, <[http://www.nbc.com/nbc/The\\_Apprentice/contestants/about\\_bill.shtml](http://www.nbc.com/nbc/The_Apprentice/contestants/about_bill.shtml)>, 24 April 2004.

Though it may be a glossy caricature of leadership, *The Apprentice* seems to both connect with and reflect something of the American leadership ideal. Commonly held contemporary theories of leadership have often assumed a leader to be an individualized, autonomous self, and ontologically created yet self-made as leader with their

leadership to be the exercise of this selfhood. I suggest that the way of Christ is other.

I claim the application of a relational hermeneutic helps us to see that leadership within a Christ-cluster is a socially constructed ethos uniquely created and called forth by each Christ-cluster. From the interanimating findings of this dissertation we now see institutional churches are best understood as Christ-commons. Christ-commons are the meeting places that encourage clustering around Christ. Christ-commons are to Christ-clusters, what hardware is to the World-Wide-Web.<sup>5</sup> Christ-clusters are the communities of the Spirit indigenous to its shaping nodes: particular, dynamic and self-determining. We



<sup>5</sup> Metaphorically speaking, Christ-commons (institutional church structures) are to Christ-clusters what Computer hardware is to the World-Wide-Web. Hardware such as computers, servers, fiber optics, telephone lines, routers, etc. are essential to the existence of the World-Wide-Web. At the same time hardware is not the Web. Hardware facilitates and dynamically participates creating the links but has no transformational content in itself. A node in the World-Wide-Web is a single web page. A web cluster is a website (with many internal links and often with links outside of itself). The Hub (or leader) of a website is its 'home page,' as it is the central place for making connections within a given cluster. 'Hardware administration' or 'network administration' is a leadership function that supports the dynamic linking of the Web. The hardware and the World-Wide-Web are fully interdependent. Most contemporary Western institutional churches have elevated 'network administration' leadership as the primary leadership model.

will apply the relational hermeneutic to the substance and function of leadership within living complex adaptive systems; within relational networks.

We will address two primary questions. First, we will look at the question, “who is a leader?” Secondly we will explore “what is the work of a leader?”

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*For even I, the Son of Man,  
came here not to be served but to serve others,  
and to give my life as a ransom for many.<sup>6</sup>*  
— Jesus

*Are you seeking great things for yourself?  
Don't do it! But don't be discouraged.<sup>7</sup>*  
— Jeremiah, speaking for God

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### **Who is a Leader?**

Who is a leader? Ontologically speaking no one is a leader, while socially speaking everyone leads. The most common understanding of leadership is influence.<sup>8</sup> J. Oswald Sanders in the modern classic *Spiritual Leadership* states, “leadership is influence, the ability of one person to influence others.”<sup>9</sup> Everyone has relative influence, therefore everyone leads. The socially designated title of ‘leader’ reflects the relative scale of one’s social influence. “We are called into being as persons by the expectations others have of

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 20:28.

<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah 45:5a.

<sup>8</sup> For further treatment of leadership as influence see; Gary A. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 3; Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, *Management of Organizational Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1988), 5; John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 1; Howard Gardner, *Leading Minds* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1996), 8-9; and Walter C. Wright, *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Leadership Service* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Publishing, 2000), 23-62.

<sup>9</sup> J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 1967, revised edition (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 35.

us. These are framed and mediated to us through their form of address – the way in which they intended us in their communication.”<sup>10</sup> The question, ‘who is a leader?’ is the same question as asking ‘who is a person?’<sup>11</sup>

Leaders are not born, they are summoned into being.<sup>12</sup> All calling forth to leadership service is occasional. Or to put it another way, leaders are not summoned in such a way that having responded to the ethos-invitation to lead they remain as leaders indefinitely. As a Christ-cluster ethos morphs, so does its ethos-invitation for leadership. The Christ-cluster ethos does not stand apart from the “leader” and call out to the person. Rather the persons themselves shape and are shaped by the communal ethos which woos them to lead.

The communal-ethos is the distinctive *spirit*<sup>13</sup> of a specific Christ-cluster. This *spirit* serves to unify the cluster’s members, shaping their beliefs, and culture thus dynamically contributing to the cluster’s unique character. This ethos is dynamically shaped by each participant and each participant is dynamically shaped by the ethos, we see the Trinitarian *imago Dei* reflected. It is this living *perichoretic* ethos which summons

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<sup>10</sup> McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 116.

<sup>11</sup> Much has been written about the, ‘postmodern loss of self.’ This essay could be understood as a postmodern loss of leaders. The ‘loss’ is a ‘moving beyond’ a Newtonian/Cartesian view of an autonomous individual. I am deeply indebted to the work of: George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self, & Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, Works of George Herbert Mead, ed. Charles W. Morris, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press, 1982); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Leonard I. Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> This *spirit*, is a communal application of the *I-us-thou* findings of section 3.2 of the pervious chapter. Just as the living *spirit (us)* interanimates the *I-thou* interpersonal relationship so is a collective spirit unifies nature of a group.



people(s) to service. The ethos is dynamic as it changes with, and brings change to bear on the people shaped by and shaping it. Each ethos is itself constituent of the ethoi of many prior communities which contribute to its social construction. It is important to note that the ethos or *spirit* of the cluster is not to be understood as the Holy Spirit of God. While the Holy Spirit is working in and through each node and in and through each Christ-cluster to bring the clusters to oneness with God through Christ, the Holy Spirit is simultaneously one with the community's spirit and distinct from the communities spirit.

We do ourselves and our churches a disservice when labeling people as 'leaders.' We create a false dichotomy between leader and follower. This dichotomy lends itself to abuse by the person socially labeled as 'leader,' while encouraging a type of disengagement from person(s) socially labeled as 'followers.' Peter Senge of MIT challenges our fixed understandings of leadership:

Our traditional views of leaders – as special people who set the direction, make the key decisions, and energize the troops – are deeply rooted in an individualistic and nonsystemic worldview . . . At the heart, the traditional view of leadership is based on people's powerlessness, their lack of personal vision and inability to master the forces of change, deficits which can be remedied only by a few great leaders.<sup>14</sup>

As we are exploring cluster leadership within a framework of Christian theology we must look first at God, in whose social image humanity is created. The Apostle Paul encouraged the Christ-commons in Corinth to look at Christ when they wanted to understand God. When Paul wrote, "...Christ, who is the exact likeness of God,"<sup>15</sup> he was saying that to see Christ, is to see God.

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990), 340.

<sup>15</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4.



We see the Lord Jesus Christ baptized by John despite the Baptizer's protests that it ought to be the other way around. We see Jesus ask a lot of questions and give by contrast few clear answers.<sup>16</sup> We see Christ challenging the religious establishment more than the Roman occupation. We see a Christ who is at times lonely and scared. We see Christ scandalously engage with women, gentiles, lepers, Jewish sellouts to the Romans, and unlearned people. When opportunities seem to present themselves for Jesus' fame to increase he asks people to keep things hush, hush. Early on in his teaching career he has large crowds eating out of the palm of his hand when by the end of his life just a handful of close friends are left, and even they scatter when it gets tough, not to mention that one of his closest associates sold him out. In death he is nailed to a gentile cross on Jerusalem's garbage heap to die alongside common criminals. And we best not forget that he was born out of wedlock, in a stable, and placed in a feed trough by a teenage girl who claimed to be a virgin.

"... Christ, who is the exact likeness of God." God is the kind of leader whose power is in powerlessness.<sup>17</sup> God is a leader whose authority comes not from title or position but from *being*. A God who cares not for the power of God, but joyfully emptying such Divine rights or privileges for those loved and those led. And this emptying is not some kind of humble gesture; it is in fact essential to what it means for God to be love. God's oneness or God's ethos calls forth the action of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in *kenotic* service. This Divine ethos is eternally coming into being as the Trinitarian persons relate *perichoretically*. In God's 'leadership' we see a radical departure from commonly

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<sup>16</sup> Conrad Gempf, *Jesus Asked: What He Wanted to Know* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Power of the Powerless: The Word of Liberation for Today*, 1981, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1983).

held notions of top down leadership. In our social God we see a servant leader<sup>18</sup> holding nothing for Godself, rather freely, lovingly, and lavishly offering ‘self’ to ‘other.’ John – Christ’s beloved disciple – declares, “Even in this world we are as he is.”<sup>19</sup> Our Holy Spirit guided self-emptying use of power may be one of the great witnesses of our oneness with Christ.

Who is a leader? Leaders are people, who tacitly know themselves in relation with others; who live present to those relationships, emptying ‘self’ for the fulfillment of ‘other.’ Leaders do not exist in an ontological sense. ‘Acts of leading’ are summoned by a communal-ethos to serve a socially determined set of functions which the community itself determines and invites a person to fulfill.

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*God’s being is in becoming.*<sup>20</sup>  
– Eberhard Jüngel

*Because each existence is in constant change,  
there is no abiding self.*<sup>21</sup>  
– Shunryu Suzuki

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## **A Leader is a Social Being**

By defining leaders as people who tacitly<sup>22</sup> know themselves in relationship with others we are emphasizing a social self. *Ubuntu* is the Zulu word for ‘people’ is expressed,

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<sup>18</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey Into the Nature of Legitimate Power & Greatness*, 1977, 25th anniversary edition (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> I John 4:17.

<sup>20</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *God’s Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 1986, trans. John Webster (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* (New York, NY: Weatherhill, 1973), 102.

“We are, therefore I am.”<sup>23</sup> This understanding of self-in-community is the foundation for another Zulu saying, “It is through others that one attains selfhood.” Persons are a type of social construct; uniquely ‘selves’ as more than the sum of their relationships. Kenneth Gergen states it this way:

In this era the self is redefined as no longer an essence in itself, but relational. In the postmodern world, selves may become manifestations of relationship, thus placing relationships in the central position occupied by the individual self for the last several hundred years of Western history.<sup>24</sup>

Miroslav Volf, writing from a Trinitarian perspective of a social self says, “Every human self is conditioned in an essential fashion by relationship with other human beings, and by societal structures and institutions.”<sup>25</sup> This essential relationality is true of human beings because humans are created in the image of God whose ‘being’ is in becoming.

In Jüngel’s examination of Barth’s theology of the Trinitarian being of God he states:

The being of God was conceived of in the unity of three modes of being differentiated from one another. God’s being is thus *self-regulated* being. As being it is relationally structured. But this relational ordering of God’s being does not structure God’s being as an impersonal structure over again this being; rather, the modes of God’s being which are differentiated from each other are related to each other in such a way that each mode of God’s being *becomes* what it is only *with* the two other modes of being. The relational structuring in God’s being

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<sup>22</sup> I am drawing from Michael Polanyi’s use of ‘tacit.’ He used ‘tacit’ or ‘personal knowledge’ to describe knowledge being understood without being expressed directly or taught directly. For instance, when a person says, “I just knew I was going to marry him,” or the way a master craftsperson picks up two pieces of wood and after examining them knows that one piece would make a great violin while the other piece would not. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

<sup>23</sup> Randy Frazee, *Making Room for Life: Trading Chaotic Lifestyles for Connected Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 29.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth J. Gergen, *Saturated Self*, 146-47.

<sup>25</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, *Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern Age*, ed. Alan G. Padgett (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 183.

expresses different 'relations of origin' and 'processions' in God's being. As the being of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God's being is thus a *being in becoming*.<sup>26</sup>

As we have seen, this vital understanding of God as a social being whose being is in becoming or whose being is in relationship forms the theological grounding for our understanding of human relational self. Human beings exist in and through relationship because God is in and through relationship. Jean-Luc Marion in *God Without Being*, takes this concept of a social God further and challenges the fundamental premise of both metaphysics and neo-Thomist theology placing God within the realm of agape love.<sup>27</sup> Margaret Wheatley places this social understanding of self within a leadership framework.

All living beings create themselves and then use that 'self' to filter new information and co-create their worlds. We refer to this self to determine what's important for us to notice. Through the self, we bring form and meaning to the infinite cacophony of data that always surrounds us. Yet it is very important to note that in all life, the self is not a selfish individual. 'Self' includes awareness of those others it must relate to as part of its system. Even among simple cells, there is an unerring recognition that they are in a system; there is a profound relationship between individual activity and the whole.<sup>28</sup>

Theologian Catherine Keller, of Drew University writes:

To see connections, we must see connectively. That is, we see connections in and by making them. Inspired and angered and energized by the relations we feel, we weave the web further by making the connection conscious. Thinking relationally about relatedness embroiders new designs into the tapestry of relation.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 1986, trans. John Webster (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 77, emphasis in original.

<sup>27</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, 1982, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 167.

<sup>29</sup> Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1986), 159.

Leadership is facilitating the embroidering of unique cluster-designs within God's Scale-free kingdom. The function of leading within a Christ-cluster links other nodes, fosters interpersonal relationship and facilitates connection, and then is open to getting out of the way, encouraging the new relationship to develop as those in relationship self-determine.

Leadership within a self-organized social construct is dynamic and is called into existence by the community itself. The leader does not stand apart from the community with a vision that is wholly other. The person responding to the specific ethos invitation to serve a momentary leadership function is both shaping and shaped by the vision that the community<sup>30</sup> is calling forth. Thus all leadership is respondent to the ethos invitation of the Christ-cluster. A follower of Christ responding to the communal ethos inviting them to a function of leadership service will embody kenosis. Who is a leader? A leader is one who's being is emptying for the sake of the other, or for sake of *us*.

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*Christianity is not about flourishing;  
it is about taking up one's cross.<sup>31</sup>*  
— Anders Nygren

*Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone;  
but if it dies, it bears much fruit.<sup>32</sup>*  
— Jesus

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<sup>30</sup> Throughout this section the use of "Community" or "Communal Ethos" is presupposing the active personal involvement of God by the Holy Spirit in the life and shape of the community. In this way the Holy Spirit is an ethos-shaping member of every Christ-cluster.

<sup>31</sup> Brett P. Webb-Mitchell, *Christly Gestures: Learning to Be Members of the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 84.

<sup>32</sup> John 12:24.

## A Leader is Kenotic

Because a 'self' is best seen socially, the make-up of one's social relationships is central to the 'essence' of self. The perfect love of the Divine persons in Tri-unity, so seek the fulfillment of the 'other' that self-fulfillment as a goal is nonexistent. The absence of the goal of self-fulfillment in Divine irony leads to the exaltation of the Divineself, effecting further self-emptying, hence greater love. Greater love in service is the exaltation of the Divineself. This is the *kenotic* process of *perichoretic* love. Thomas F. Torrance says it this way:

The love of God revealed in Jesus Christ is his total unconditional self-giving to mankind, love in which he does not withhold himself from loving to the utmost or cut short its full movement, and it is upon that love that our hope of redemption and resurrection is grounded. It is the love of the eternally self-affirming and self-giving God, and so the love he pours out freely upon us through the Holy Spirit is love that affirms itself as love against all that is not love or resists his love . . . He does not hold back his love from the sinner, for he cannot cease to be the God who loves and loves unreservedly and unconditionally.<sup>33</sup>

Or as Denis Edwards writes, "The Trinitarian vision of creation is one which involves the kenosis of love, love which willingly allows itself to become vulnerable to human freedom and to the natural processes of the universe."<sup>34</sup> While Moltmann describes the God's self-emptying love this way,

On the cross of Christ this love is there for the others, for the sinner – the recalcitrant – enemies. The reciprocal self-surrender to one another within the Trinity is manifested in Christ's self-surrender in a world which is in contradiction

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<sup>33</sup> Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, 246.

<sup>34</sup> Denis Edwards, "The Discovery of Chaos and the Retrieval of the Trinity," in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy and Arthur R. Peacock (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 2000), 174.

to God; and this self-giving draws all those who believe in him into the eternal life of the divine love.<sup>35</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, states:

God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us . . . The Bible directs us to God's powerlessness and suffering; only the suffering God can help.<sup>36</sup>

These theologians serve to underscore the rich testimony of Holy Scripture:

- “Since God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won’t God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else?”<sup>37</sup>
- “For God so loved the world that he gave...”<sup>38</sup>
- “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”<sup>39</sup>
- “We know what real love is because Christ gave up his life for us.”<sup>40</sup>
- “But among you, those who are the greatest should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. Normally the master sits at the table and is served by his servants. But not here! For I am your servant.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, 1991, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 137.

<sup>36</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, trans. E. Bethge (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1971), 359-61.

<sup>37</sup> Romans 8:32.

<sup>38</sup> John 3:16a.

<sup>39</sup> John 10:11.

<sup>40</sup> 1 John 3:16a.

<sup>41</sup> Luke 22:26-27.

This Scriptural sampling offers a snapshot of God's self-giving person. To see God is to see perfected leadership. Christ-followers open themselves up to the Holy Spirit-through-community-deconstruction of themselves. This path of *kenosis* is the way of the cross; the death that is life; the emptying that is filling. This form of leadership reflects the very person of God in the losing of oneself to find oneself. God's sovereignty is that God empties Godself of sovereignty. God's power is that God makes Godself powerless. Finding oneself in the giving of oneself is the very life of Christ. It is only when we understand God as social, that God can be understood to be love. Divine love is self-emptying.

*Kenosis* is leadership within the Christ-cluster, it is self-voiding of power. It is God who is self-emptying and invites us to share in God's own life. Self-emptying demands openness more than orthodoxy. Who is a leader? A leader is one who lives into the reality of 'self' in community responding to the ethos' invitation to empty self in the loving service of other(s). We now move to our second question.

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*But among you it should be quite different.  
Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant.*<sup>42</sup>  
– Jesus

*In life, the issue is not control,  
but dynamic connectedness.*<sup>43</sup>  
– Erich Jantsch

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<sup>42</sup> Mark 10:43.

<sup>43</sup> Erich Jantsch, *The Self-Organizing Universe* (Oxford, UK: Pergamon, 1980), 196.



## What Does a Leader Do?

Most general leadership research conducted over the last three decades has focused on the question to which we now turn our attention. What does a leader within a Christ-cluster do? Rather than fane an attempt at an exhaustive response to this question, we will allow the uniqueness of leadership within Christ-clusters to call forth a few key features which set it apart. We will explore leaders engaged in the service of hubbing connections, linking missionally, and introducing chaos.

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*A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in 'seeing connexions.'*<sup>44</sup>

– Ludwig Wittgenstein

*Very life making.*

*I can't think of a better term for the power of connection.*<sup>45</sup>

– Edward M. Hallowell

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## Hubbing

For those people summoned to serve as hubs within God's Scale-Free Kingdom, relationships are everything. Nodes cluster around hubs not just for the personality, or charisma of the hubbing node but also for uniquely embroidered relational mosaic that is the hub and thus the possibility of linking to other nodes through that hub, (other people,

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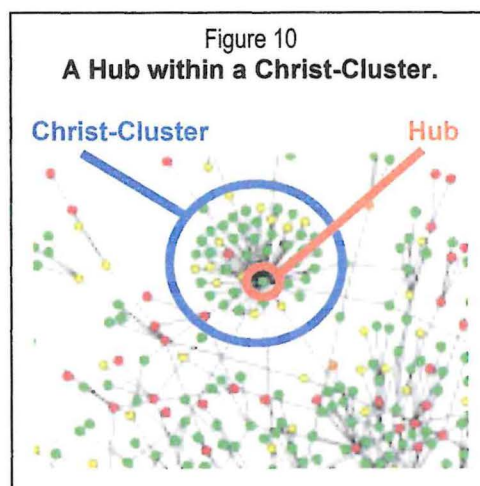
<sup>44</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Third edition, German text, with a revised English translation (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Inc., 2001), 42e/122.

<sup>45</sup> Edward M. Hallowell, *Connect: 12 Vital Ties That Open Your Heart, Lengthen Your Life and Deepen Your Soul* (New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1999), 111.

ideas, institutions, attitudes, resources, etc).<sup>46</sup> Max DePree has challenged us to

“Understand that relationships count more than structure.”<sup>47</sup>

The cross of Christ is the ultimate act of hubbing leadership. It is an act of humble self-emptying service to which Christ is summoned by His affective community. Christ’s love for the other two persons of the Godhead and his love for humanity compelled him to serve as a hub. His hubbing action on the cross is self-emptying for



the sake of relationship. Christ the hub, relationally bridges God to humanity in the ultimate act of redemption and reconciliation while simultaneously bridging human to human.<sup>48</sup> The Apostle Paul puts it this way, “In Christ there is no Jew or Gentile . . .”<sup>49</sup> suggesting that Christ’s hubbing can serve to link nodes which had seen no connection prior to Christ. Christ serves as the incarnational bridge. Christ holds onto nothing for himself even sacrificing his relationship with his Father and in so doing finds everything.

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<sup>46</sup> It is important to highlight the risk of hubbing in human relationships. Some nodes will attach themselves to a hub solely for the links available through the hub. Because our understanding of the social self when any node seeks self and self’s fulfillment the health of the entire ethos is jeopardized. This is why it is essential for every node to own their relative hubbing role, and their inescapable influence in shaping the communal ethos. When nodes seek self, the ethos of the cluster becomes increasingly self-seeking; conversely, when nodes seek the fulfillment of the other, the ethos becomes increasingly marked by love. “Networking” or “working the room” is using relationships for selfish gain.

<sup>47</sup> Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art* (New York, NY: Dell Publishing, 1989), 28.

<sup>48</sup> Christ’s hypostatic union even finds visible expression in the physicality of the cross; with one vertical beam (God to humanity) and one horizontal beam (human to human). The fact that Christ bridges between one repent thief and one unrepentant thief may further bear witness to the bridging of Christ, as the mission of God.

<sup>49</sup> Galatians 3:28.

Those responding to a leadership ethos invitation to hub seek out opportunities to be influenced by others. They do this because the strength or health of a Christ-cluster requires multiple links – even weak links – bridging outside of the immediate cluster. The multiplicity of links bridging beyond an immediate community is what knits the members of a Christ-cluster into the larger fabric of the scale-free kingdom. When Christ-clusters live into the links beyond their immediate community<sup>50</sup> they find a type of intrinsic accountability stemming from an infinitely larger network giving meaning and definition to the localized Christ-cluster. Without connections beyond itself the rogue Christ-cluster can assume a type of totalitarianism, heresy, cultish tone or any manner of idiosyncrasies, which further reinforce its isolation from the rest of the network.<sup>51</sup>

Any thoughtful node serving a hubbing function for a Christ-cluster will seek to link its participants with other nodes within their cluster and will not stop there. Hubs will aid each connecting node in weaving a web which safely and uniquely cradles that node. As David Bjork writes,

They understand the need to integrate the converts into the Christian community, which they see as a networking of mentoring and accountability relationships with are distinguishable from ecclesiastical structures and which transcend denominational distinctives.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> These links can be to the other concurrent clusters which share similar characteristics or the links could be to denominations, or learning institutions, or great cloud of witnesses – past and present – through their writings, websites, other forms of media, etc.

<sup>51</sup> Rogue Clusters left to themselves turn into viruses within the network as a whole. The nodes making up these rogue clusters, continue to live and relate and their influence spreads throughout their nodal networks. And the longer those groups are left without healthy interaction with nodes from outside the rogue cluster the more pervasive the ethos of the rogue community becomes. The growth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints could be an example of this phenomenon. Of course we can only speculate, but if church leaders had connected with Joseph Smith and drew him in to closer relationship, linking him to theological training and Biblical exegesis, rather than cut ties with him, we can only wonder whether Mormonism would be the same today.

<sup>52</sup> David E. Bjork, *Unfamiliar Paths: The Challenge of Recognizing the Work of Christ in Strange Clothing* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1997), 65.

Thus, one of the primary ‘acts’ of a hubbing node is to facilitate the linking of its nodes beyond the hub’s person.

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*Weak links are often of greater importance than strong links because they act as the crucial ties that sew the social network together.*<sup>53</sup>

– Mark Buchanan

*For there is only one God and  
one Mediator who can reconcile God and people.  
He is the man Christ Jesus.*<sup>54</sup>

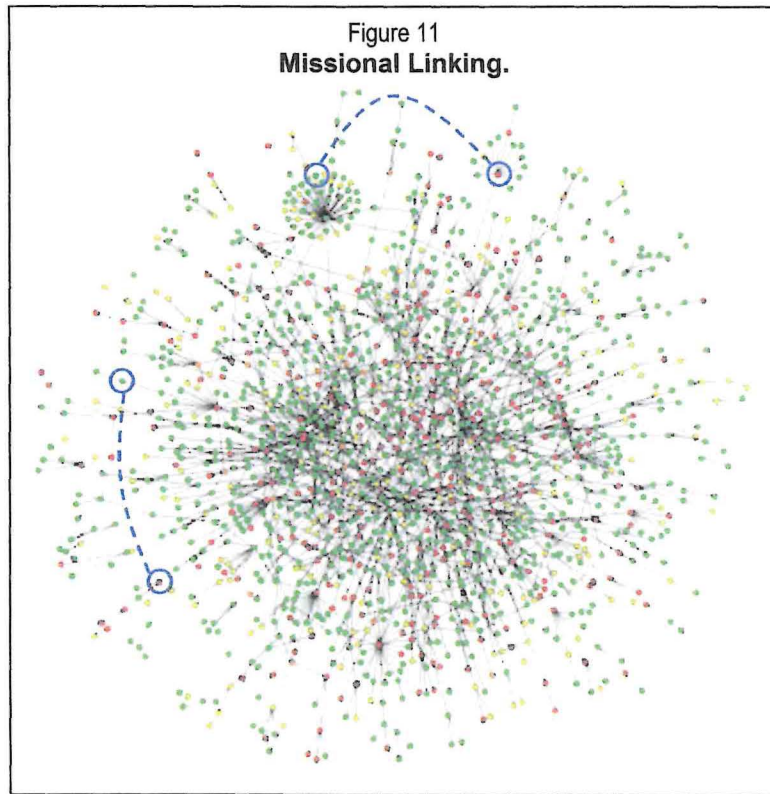
– Paul, the Apostle

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## Missional Linking

Hubs engage in missional linking. Missional linking is what it means for a hubbing node to seek connection beyond its natural affective community. In *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, David Weinberger describes missional linking using the term ‘hyperlinks.’ Weinberger writes:

Figure 11  
Missional Linking.



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<sup>53</sup> Buchanan, *Nexus*, 43.

<sup>54</sup> 1 Timothy 2:5.

[Hyperlinking] throws everyone into immediate connection with everyone else without the safety net of defined roles and authorities . . . Conversations subvert hierarchy. Hyperlinks subvert hierarchy. Being a human being among others subverts hierarchy.<sup>55</sup>

Having written extensively on missional linking, Darrell Guder of Princeton Theological Seminary says, “connectional structures are missiologically essential to the apostolicity, catholicity, holiness and unity of the church.”<sup>56</sup> He further stresses that, “the movement toward missional connectedness should be centrifugal, starting from particular communities and expanding to the global dimensions of the church.”<sup>57</sup> Hubs engage in missional centrifugal linking, moving beyond their affective Christ-clusters to other nodes and clusters. This process of missional linking impacts the very being of the hub. As noted earlier, hubs, like all nodes, are socially constructed thus missional-linking with any ‘other’ node or cluster will also contribute ongoing ‘becoming’ of the hub.<sup>58</sup>

The Apostle Paul’s words to the Christ-commons in Corinth may be more than a “missional strategy.” His words may reflect the truth that Paul’s ‘being’ was literally being constructed by the nodes and clusters with whom he was linking.

When I am with the Jews, I become one of them so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with those who follow the Jewish laws, I do the same, even though I am not subject to the law, so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with the Gentiles who do not have the Jewish law, I fit in with them as much as I

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<sup>55</sup> Rick Levine, et al., *The Cluetrain Manifesto: The End of Business as Usual* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2000), 122-23.

<sup>56</sup> Darrell L. Guder, ed, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 264.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>58</sup> Any node engaged in missionally linking will be changed. It is this process of being shaped in and through missional relationships that could offer fresh understandings of syncretism, contextualization, and incarnational ministry. “If it is possible for personal identities to be transformed by their incorporation into new relationships and patterns of co-intention, then past relations cannot be determinative of identity in a complete, absolute and mechanistic sense.” McFadyen, *Call to Personhood*, 115.

can. In this way, I gain their confidence and bring them to Christ. But I do not discard the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. When I am with those who are oppressed, I share their oppression so that I might bring them to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ. I do all this to spread the Good News, and in doing so I enjoy its blessings.<sup>59</sup>

Nodes responding to an invitation from a Christ-cluster's communal-ethos to serve as a hub will position themselves in such a way that the safety of their own social construct is jeopardized, for the sake of establishing links where none existed prior. God perfected missional linking in Christ; God incarnate.

Missional-linking facilitates change in the very person of the hub. This transformation within the hub inevitably introduces chaos to the hub's affective cluster(s).

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*You need chaos within,  
to give birth to a dancing star.*<sup>60</sup>  
– Friedrich Nietzsche

*The edge of chaos is the precondition  
for transformation to take place.*<sup>61</sup>  
– Richard Pascale

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## Introducing Chaos

The introduction of chaos disrupts cluster order. On first hearing this we might think that the disruption of order would be undesirable. “Chaos demonstrates, however, that a system can have complicated behavior that emerges as a consequence of simple,

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<sup>59</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:20-23.

<sup>60</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1977), 129.

<sup>61</sup> Richard T. Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos: The Laws of Nature and the New Laws of Business* (New York, NY: Crown Business, 2000), 66.

nonlinear interaction of only a few components.”<sup>62</sup> Chaos “is that unlikely occurrence in which patterns cannot be found nor interrelationships understood.”<sup>63</sup> Within living organisms chaos is a necessary prerequisite for change, innovation and creation. This is the heart of transformational discipleship.

When a complex adaptive system is moved toward the edge of chaos – when hurricanes and typhoons roil the deep seas, or fires rage through forests or prairies – the potential for generativity is maximized. Hurricanes recharge the oceans with oxygen and nutrients, and replenish carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Fires . . . cleanse the forest and make room for new life . . . The edge of chaos is the precondition for transformation to take place.<sup>64</sup>

Without chaos there is no learning, no change, and no transformation. Chaos can be understood as a type of worldview deconstruction. “There is order in chaos: randomness has an underlying geometric form. Chaos imposes fundamental limits on prediction, but it also suggests causal relationships where none were previously suspected.”<sup>65</sup>

In the Creation account of Genesis chapter one, we see the Spirit of God hovering over chaos birthing Divine order. The story of God’s people is peppered with the introduction of chaos. From Abram’s invitation to leave the security of his homeland for destinations unknown; to the forming of national identity through the chaos of Egyptian slavery; to the cycle of sin, judgment, and redemption seen throughout the prophets; to the introduction of a Savior who is a national disappointment yet a global redeemer; to the countless personal crises of belief recorded for us in Scripture. Throughout history we

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<sup>62</sup> James P. Crutchfield, et al., “Chaos,” in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, eds. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy and Arthur R. Peacock (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 2000), 35.

<sup>63</sup> Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos*, 6.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>65</sup> Crutchfield, et al., “Chaos,” 35.

have witnessed that out of seasons of political, social, and religious chaos a new ordering emerges. In fact, argues Wheatley, “Chaos is necessary to new creative ordering.”<sup>66</sup>

When the equilibrium of relationally organized clusters is thrown into chaos, the Christ-clusters do what all living organisms try to do when thrown off balance, they try to stabilize. Relational stability becomes a goal and the cluster and the individual nodes will link and re-link with other nodes seeking to reestablish equilibrium. This drive to forge new relationships further knits the node(s) of that Christ-cluster within the Scale-Free Kingdom even though it may demand a radical reorganization of the Christ-cluster. In the cluster’s self-reorganization the hubbing functions may move from one node to another node; the cluster determines which node it will gather around.

In the solid church paradigm the group dispersement and an altering of a node’s hubbing significance would usually be seen as failure, however, within the Scale-Free paradigm dispersement serves as a type of cross pollination which actually strengthens God’s Scale-Free kingdom as a whole. “Complex adaptive systems become more vulnerable as they become more homogeneous.”<sup>67</sup> So when a Baptist converts to the Church of Rome, or a Methodist becomes a Mennonite, or a pagan joins the Orthodox Church the Network is strengthened. Amazingly, even when a long time member of a Christ-cluster walks away from church they too extend the network, as they cannot help but bring something of the Christ-cluster ethos along with them. As such, they can serve as an unintended missional weak link<sup>68</sup> bridging the unchurched world to the church world.

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<sup>66</sup> Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 13.

<sup>67</sup> Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos*, 28.

<sup>68</sup> See my treatment of the strength of “weak links” in chapter 3.3 and Mark Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1973): 1360-80.



Equilibrium in living organisms is a death sentence. The moment a cluster settles comfortably into its presumed static existence it runs the risk of becoming a cancer or a parasite of sorts. “Disorder becomes a critical player, an ally that can provoke a system to self-organize into new forms of being.”<sup>69</sup> A hubbing node will be tuned to the relative sense of equilibrium experienced by its connected nodes, and will seek to introduce *kairos* moments, moments of crisis for individual nodes as well as for the cluster.

It is important to stress that the service of introducing chaos is not the same as wreaking havoc.<sup>70</sup> The introduction of chaos is not an end in itself, but is a nudge out of a false security of preceded equilibrium, for though we often long for equilibrium we stagnate in it. Chaos is antithesis to one’s thesis. Like a mother eagle nudging her eaglets out of her nest introducing chaos is an act of love. A type of bold love<sup>71</sup> which says, “I love you enough to let you not like me,” or “I love us enough to let this cluster dissolve.”<sup>72</sup>

Self-emptying results in chaos, and chaos is the seed of creation and creation is an act of love.<sup>73</sup> Chaos, though never easy, is an invitation to rely on others. It is God’s incubator for trust; a difficult place to be but a glorious vantage point to wait with bated breath to see what God is doing.

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<sup>69</sup> Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science*, 12-13.

<sup>70</sup> Its not that a hub is going from node to node stirring up trouble for the sake of trouble, rather as an attendant to the divine drama at work in and around a node or a whole cluster the person serving the hubbing function is uniquely positioned to link the node or the cluster with another node or cluster which can encourage active trust in God. Knowing one’s cluster and the individual nodes and listening attentively is essential is key.

<sup>71</sup> Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman, III, *Bold Love* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992).

<sup>72</sup> This is largely the role of discipleship; it is learning, it is a chaos producing journey. From Christ saying, “You’ve heard it said... But I say to you...” cognitively this is a deconstructive and reconstructive process of becoming. Christ’s interaction with the “Rich Young Ruler” in Matthew 19:16-22 is an example.

<sup>73</sup> John C. Polkinghorne, ed., *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001); and Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London, UK: Routledge, 2003), 1-25.

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*Leadership is not a series of acts. It is a process.  
Good leaders show followers the way by how they live their lives.*<sup>74</sup>  
– Carlton J. Snow

*The ‘mask’, or the role, of leader emerges in the interaction and  
those participating are continuously creating and recreating the meaning of the  
leadership themes in the local interaction which they are involved.*<sup>75</sup>  
– Douglas Griffin

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While exploring the “being” and “act” of a hubbing node within a Christ-cluster it is essential we see them as two sides of the same coin.<sup>76</sup> My intention is not to separate a hub’s “person” from a hub’s “work,” but to highlight hubbing service within a Christ-cluster to aid the reader in seeing the uniqueness of hubbing in contrast with traditional hierarchical leadership forms. Though specific functions of a hub will vary with the ethos of each Christ-cluster, hubs are socially constructed beings whose hubbing services are called forth from the ethos of the Christ-cluster and *kenotically* engaging the nodes and other clusters connecting to them.

Hubbing leaders ask different questions than hierarchal leaders ask. Hierarchal leaders ask: Who is following me? Who is different? Who is my enemy? How can I show my superiority? Who will support me?

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<sup>74</sup> Carlton J. Snow, “Rebuilding Trust in the Fractured Workplace,” in *Faith in Leadership: How Leaders Live Out Their Faith in Their Work and Why It Matters*, ed. Robert J. Banks and Kimberly Powell (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 44.

<sup>75</sup> Douglas Griffin, *The Emergence of Leadership: Linking Self-Organization and Ethics, Complexity and Emergence in Organizations*, ed. Ralph D. Stacey, Douglas Griffin and Patricia Shaw (London, UK: Routledge, 2002), 217.

<sup>76</sup> Colin Gunton’s final book before his death last year powerfully drew together the ‘Act’ and ‘Being’ of God. A relentless critique of the way theological separation of God’s being from God’s action distorts the very doctrine of God. God’s being is God’s action, is God’s word, is God’s motive, is God’s love. Colin E. Gunton, *Act & Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

Hubbing leaders ask: Where is our common ground? How can we aid one another? What are our hopes and dreams – any intersection? How can we introduce chaos so that we become more deeply knit into the network of God’s Scale-Free Kingdom? How can we make more room around the table? How can we bridge the gulf that has separated us?

Lipman-Blumen of Oxford University, in her book, *Connective Leadership* writes:

[Connective leaders] focus on common ground, the connections among people, not on the contrasts and chasms that separate them. Of course, connective leaders recognize the differences, but they welcome them as a source of multithreaded strength. By loosening the bonds of individualism, they use diversity to brace interdependence, to stimulate innovation, and to serve the needs of all. For these reasons, if for no other, connective leaders are our best hope for achieving renewal through interdependence.<sup>77</sup>

The Scale-Free Kingdom paradigm liberates Christ-followers to relationally organize themselves in meaningful Clusters centered in Christ. The ethos of these Christ-clusters invites people to empty themselves in hubbing servant leadership. Those people responding to the ethos invitation to serve a hubbing role will missionally link beyond the safety of their natural community as they bridge to other nodes and clusters. Hubs will so engage with those nodes linked to them so as to introduce life educating chaos into the organism. The relational reign of God is the ultimate reality that draws creation forward. Transformational churches are socially constructed, occasional and indigenous Christ-clusters making visible the relational reign of God in God’s Scale-free kingdom. Hubs respond to the ethos invitation of Christ-clusters in kenotic love, relationally offering themselves to be whatever Christ and the local Christ-cluster require. This is the glorious hope of Christian service.

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<sup>77</sup> Jean Lipman-Blumen, *Connective Leadership: Managing in a Changing World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996), 339.

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*The shape of our life together is determined by the character of the triune God.  
This is the inescapable fact of an adequate doctrine of God,  
as a reflection on the One whose life is divine communion,  
in the image of whom we are created.<sup>78</sup>*

– Micheal Jenkins

*We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus,  
on whom our faith depends from start to finish.  
He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross  
because of the joy he knew would be his afterward.  
Now he is seated in the place of highest honor  
beside God's throne in heaven.<sup>79</sup>*

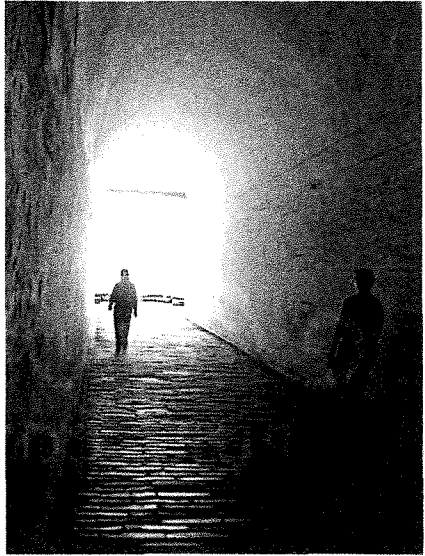
– Author of the letter to the Hebrews

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Jenkins, *Invitation to Theology: A Guide to Study, Conversation & Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 245.

<sup>79</sup> Hebrews 12:2.



## CHAPTER 5

### DÉNOUEMENT: EPILOGUE FORWARD

*Faith is the daring of the soul  
to go farther than it can see.<sup>2</sup>*  
– William Newton Clarke

At the onset of the project Doug, together with Renee and a cluster of friends found themselves with a crisis of perception. The very things which they had thought to be solid, they had come to know to be liquid; the ecclesial machine which they thought they could simply ‘tune-up’ occasionally, turned out have a life of its own. Although their initial response to the crisis appeared as though they were abandoning their vocational ministerial calling, through their chaotic season their eyes were open to seeing connectively.

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<sup>1</sup> “Light at the End” photograph by Eric Jaakkola < <http://www.net-express.com/photography/Light%20at%20the%20End.jpg> >

<sup>2</sup> William Newton Clarke, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 467, as quoted by Leonard I. Sweet, *Summoned to Lead* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2004), 11.

This dissertation drew together three separate and overlapping lenses toward the construction of a relational hermeneutic, enabling Christ-followers to see and interpret through a lens of interconnection. The theological/biblical lens focused our vision on the social God who created humanity to uniquely bear God's relational image. The sociological/ontological lens focused our vision on the living, dynamic, and constitutive nature of individuals and society. And the scientific/network lens focused our vision on the interconnection of all creation. These three lenses interanimate one another in the formation of a relational hermeneutic.

The application of the relational hermeneutic to ecclesial structure and church leadership brought the institutions and structures of church into a *perichoretic* relationship with the living spirit community described as Christ-clusters, these Christ-clusters are the living soul of the church. Christ-commons are the body of the church and they exist to make space for clustering in Christ to flourish. The act and being of hubbing-leaders within this paradigm is dynamically called forth by the *spirit* or ethos of the faith community. Leading within Christ-clusters reflects the self-emptying, loving service seen in the study of the inner life of the Holy Trinity. The 'act' and 'being' of hubs summoned by and for their affective communities will seek to serve by incarnating the service(s) the community calls forth.

It is hoped that the relational hermeneutic proposed through these pages will generate more questions than it answers. It was not the intent of this dissertation to provide *solid answers* as much as the goal has been to craft a corrective lens addressing the Western churches' crisis of perception; to serve as a catalyst for conversation and to construct a bridge linking or reconciling all in God. It is the hope and prayer of the author

that this work will serve to further the thoughtful engagement of God's people in living into the relational *image Dei* thus embodying the *missio Dei* as seen in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, teach us to see, as you see; and live as you live. Amen.

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*Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village.  
Then, spitting on the man's eyes, he laid his hands on him and asked,  
"Can you see anything now?"*

*The man looked around. "Yes," he said, "I see people, but  
I can't see them very clearly. They look like trees walking around."  
Then Jesus placed his hands over the man's eyes again.*

– Mark 8:23-24

*For I hope to see you soon, and then we will talk face to face.*

– 3 John 14

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## **APPENDIX**

### **DOUG'S LETTER TO A COLLEAGUE IN MINISTRY**

Dear Sarah,

As painful as it was, I appreciated our phone conversation the other day; it was so good connect again. Thanks for sharing of some of the leadership struggles you've been experiencing at church; I will keep you and the church in my prayers. Since our conversation I haven't stopped thinking about the journey Renee and I have been on since we left First Church. Because our conversation inspired my thinking, I decided to write in an effort to put words this journey.

You may recall when we left First Church and moved back to Renee's hometown we were confused about vocational ministry and our "calling." We left feeling hurt and misunderstood, while knowing all too well that we had hurt and misunderstood many people; if only a "mulligan" could work in life as well as it does in golf.

As we settled into Springfield we had a difficult time finding a new home church so we stopped attending for a while. We slept in on Sunday mornings, got reacquainted with old friends, met new ones for coffee and spent a lot of time on the driving range, (what kind of pastor goes to the driving range on Sunday mornings?) To our surprise, it seemed that everywhere we turned we met people-of-faith who weren't involved with a local church.

On Thanksgiving we invited a few of our friends over to join in our Turkey-day celebrations, and as we were eating our pumpkin pie it dawned on me that, in a way, I was



pastoring this little group of friends. I couldn't believe it; maybe I wasn't walking away from my calling? Renee and I had created space around our table for people to connect with one another and with God. As we ate and talked, the community seemed to draw forth my pastoral heart and I found myself "reversing" the way I saw my pastoral calling. By "reversing" I mean I wasn't "the pastor" leading the group, rather I was part of a community and community summoned forth my pastoral service. Acts of service were not only summoned from me but each of us was shaping our little cluster by living into the needs of the community at different times and different ways. I can give lots of examples, but the examples don't do the reality justice. If I were to offer the example of Melanie, you might think that because Melanie saw a need for us to just hang out and so she threw a couple of parties, one might think that her gift to the community is being a social organizer. Or if I were to cite an example of Kareem you might think his gift was "worship" because he led us in a beautiful time of confession which nudged us toward God. But Melanie and Kareem's actions seemed to have less to do with exercising a certain skill-set or gift and more to do with living into an opportunity to be present in a moment, in community. Had I met Melanie or Kareem while pastoring First Church I would have invited her to serve on the "festivals committee" or invited him to serve on the "worship team" in an effort to formalize their way of being in community. In so doing the community would have begun to reinforce that "Kareem leads worship;" before long he would have been set apart from the rest of the community, relegated to an institutionalized existence within community where his act and being within the community would have been almost predetermined: "Kareem is a worship leader." The same would be true for Melanie. My request for them to formalize their intuitive service would have separated them from the community in order for them to serve it. By contrast, today I find myself creating space for people within my

affective community to respond to the invitations to serve the community which the Holy Spirit prompts.

As our little cluster began to meet more often we regularly talked about our church experiences, deconstructing with a self-conscious flare for the cynical. This was a lot of fun and for a while we had a hard time seeing anything good about the church, but the gracious Spirit of God was at work in us. One evening as a few of us were criticizing church structures one of the women in our group asked tearfully; “What if all of this deconstruction is God’s way of inviting us to begin seeing church differently?” Her simple and prophetic question began a transforming work in our hearts. We began to wonder about relationality and whether connecting could be an organizing principle for church structures. Since that evening my hope and vision of the church has been changing; it feels like I’ve just put on a new pair of glasses with a fresh prescription.

Throughout the Gospels Christ proclaimed the Kingdom of God; he didn’t proclaim the church; this simple fact is helping put the church in a Kingdom of God context. Christ’s announcement of the relational reign of God was brought to life by his way of life; Christ relationally linked to others and especially those with limited connections; the marginalized, the poor, the “sinners,” these were the people to whom Christ linked. Christ emptied himself of power and authority in his movement toward reconciling people with God, with one another, and even with creation.

We’ve heard it said that the church is a living organism. As I think of the church as a living organism, I have started to see the church has both a body and soul. The body of the church is its visible structures, systems, buildings, traditions, politics, and forms; while

the soul of the church is invisible. The soul is comprised of invisible, yet community altering links with God, one another and all creation. Just as human beings, both are and are more than their bodies, so churches both are and are more than their visible structures. I must confess that I did not see this during my time at First Church. I was grudgingly engaging with visible structures as I wished I could spend more time caring for the interpersonal relationships. I look back and see that I was pastoring the church in a dualistic manner as I had separated body from soul. I didn't see how the care for the body could care for the soul.

I am beginning to see the primary purpose of visible church structures as being the creation of connective space; connections with God, with others, and with creation. The worship services, programs and offerings of the church exist as a "commons" or as a place where connections are more likely to happen than not happen. The structures don't create the relations rather the visible structures facilitate relations. Thus the body serves the soul and the soul serves the body; the two are inseparably linked. I've even started calling churches "Christ-commons" to underscore that church structures exist to encourage connections in and through Christ.

It seems there are at least two kinds of human leadership within Christ's body; first, there is the named leadership of Christ-commons such as the clergy, pastors, board members, staff, small group leaders and volunteers; this is the kind of church leadership most people default to in their thinking. Second, there are people who serve as hubs around whom people might cluster even if only for a brief season. It is in this dynamic clustering around hubs that we best see the "soul" of Christ's body. Generally the hub responds to God's invitation through a cluster to serve a connecting function with people in

his or her sphere of influence. In some cases hubs may not even be aware they are providing a connecting service within the body, nonetheless they facilitate a connection between two or more otherwise unconnected persons. For instance, a friend of mine was recently in a severe accident. As he was unconscious in the hospital he became a hub around whom a cluster of people dynamically linked. Those people gathering around him found new connections with one another and with God. He didn't intend to serve a hubbing function and there was not a formalized leader within the cluster around him, yet that little cluster self-mobilized to meet some very tangible needs. The bottom line is that every person serves as a hub for someone else at some time, knowingly or unknowingly.

Those people serving hubbing functions may simultaneously hold positions of responsibility within a visible structure but titles and positions are not necessary for their hubbing functions. Anytime God uses a person to connect another to a community, to a resource, to an individual, or to Godself the "connector" serves a hubbing function.

If I could go back and redo my time at First Church I would engage my clergy role with the Christ-Commons in mind. I now see the primary role of professional pastor is to curate a church's structure in such a way that Christ-oriented relations are more likely to happen than not. I could see this paradigm changing the nature of my sermons to be less about convincing and more about creating wonder in dialogue. I could see this paradigm change the way I relate other churches within the city; bridging together to form a Kingdom of God tapestry while being freed from hording links to myself. I would make more introductions, share more resources, and offer more connections; basically I would create space for sharing resources and connections.

God is opening my eyes to see relationally. God is relational and has created humanity in God's own relational image. The *Three-and-One* move towards creation reconciling all unto Godself, and so my/our mission is an extension of God's reconciling mission; and not a mission to reconcile all to the church but to God's relational reign through Christ in the power of the Spirit. When people who are in the process of being reconciled gather around a hub we see a Christ-cluster. When a Christ-cluster formalizes with a visible structure it becomes a Christ-commons, and the hub takes on the responsibility of curating space so that life-giving connections can flourish.

Sarah, I hope this gives you a sense of how my perspective on church and my pastoral calling is changing. I will continue to keep you in my prayers.

In Christ,

Doug

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