

**Towards a Theology of Relational Mission Training -
an Application of the Relational Paradigm**
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Introduction

In the famous "Batman begins" Hollywood film, when asked about his name, Bruce Wayne, the actor who played the Batman character, answered, "It's not who I am underneath [the mask], but what I do that defines me."² This statement succinctly defines the American culture - a function-oriented culture in which people are defined by merely what they do and not who they are. In such a culture, family background does not matter much; Ethical standards are considered a private preference and therefore not an appropriate topic for public discussion. Many people hang on to their jobs even though they are already eligible for retirement with more than enough money to enjoy for the rest of their lives. They continue to work because their job defines who they are. Without it, they are nobody.

Functionalism has quietly crept into the Church, impacting all of its activities, mission training and mission works included. The framework undergirding functionalism is pragmatism. Whatever works must be correct and therefore should be proliferated. In the field of mission

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² <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0372784/quotes>, accessed Feb. 16, 2012.

training, trainees are often overstuffed with result-oriented mission methods which promise to bring about a large number converts in a short period of time. To make the matter worse, they are trained to be professional fundraisers instead of spiritual soldiers for God. Engel and Dyrness grieve over an undeniable fact that, "Today's preoccupation with fundraising has moved far from its biblical foundations."³ In the mean time, church growth strategies are being touted all over the world as best-known methods in the business world. Evangelism has become an international enterprise⁴ with its army of experts and well-tested programs readily to be applied to any people group in any sociocultural and religious context.

Conversion is always at the center of the Western version of evangelism. The number of converts at any evangelistic gathering determines its success. In the communication model, conversion is a paradigm shift. Everything is about the mind. Even though the relational aspect of salvation would never be denied in the functional paradigm, it is not as prominent as it should be. Consequently, missionaries are frequently evaluated based on statistical results such as the number of converts or the number of new churches planted. *But is functionalism the only approach to mission? More critically, is functionalism biblical?* There is an urgent need to go back to Scriptures to rediscover a biblical theology of mission. It is time to be reminded that liberating people from the dominion of darkness to the kingdom of light is ultimately the ministry of the Triune God.⁵ God's servants must be faithful to fulfill their respective calling. They must let God be God and let God do His work through them.

In this paper, a theology for relational mission training is proposed. It is based on an inductive study on the relationship between Apostle Paul and Timothy, his beloved son in faith. The paper seeks to show that relationality is biblically at the heart of Paul-Timothy's relationship.

³ Engel and Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions - Where Have We Gone Wrong*, p. 73.

⁴ Taylor, *Internationalizing Mission Training: A Global Perspective*, p. 39.

⁵ Col. 1:13.

It is through this intimate, genuine, and emotional human relationship that Paul trains up Timothy. The paper then draws timeless guiding theological principles for mission training and illustrates them within the relational paradigm.

Definition of Key Terms

- *Relationship* - the dynamic and interactive connection between personal beings or between God - the Ultimate Being and human beings.⁶ The dynamic aspect of relationship is emphasized in this paper. It implies that relationship is a living organism, which can get worse or better. Therefore, relationship nurturing must be recognized and dealt with.
- *Relationality* - the state or condition of being relational.

A Framework for Design and Development of Theological Training Programs

Theological Background

According to the relational paradigm proposed by Dr. Wan, the relationship with God is the most important relationship to a human being. Apart from God, "Knowledge and human understanding is impossible and imperfect."⁷ Speaking to a Gentile audience, Paul proclaims, "For in Him, we live and move and exist."⁸ He goes on to quote the audience's own literature to show that at a certain level, the audience is actually aware of God as the Supreme Creator of the universe. Epistemologically speaking, Dr. Wan commends, "'I AM' therefore 'i know'."⁹ That is, in order to know oneself, one must first seek to know God. Conversely, if one does not know God, his knowledge of himself and of the world around him will be incomplete.

⁶ Wan, *The Paradigm of "Relational Realism"*, p. 1.

⁷ Wan, *The Paradigm of "Relational Realism"*, p. 1.

⁸ Acts 17:28.

⁹ Wan, *Relational Theology and Relational Missiology*, p. 2.

Theoretical Framework

Dr. Wan proposes five steps in doing an integrative research.¹⁰ A good integrative research must be:

1. Scripturally sound,
2. Theologically supported,
3. Theoretically coherent,
4. Contextually Relevant, and
5. Practically Applicable.

Figure 1 is an application of the proposed model to the design and development of mission training programs. The current paper addresses the first two steps of the process. The subsequent three steps are addressed in other papers.

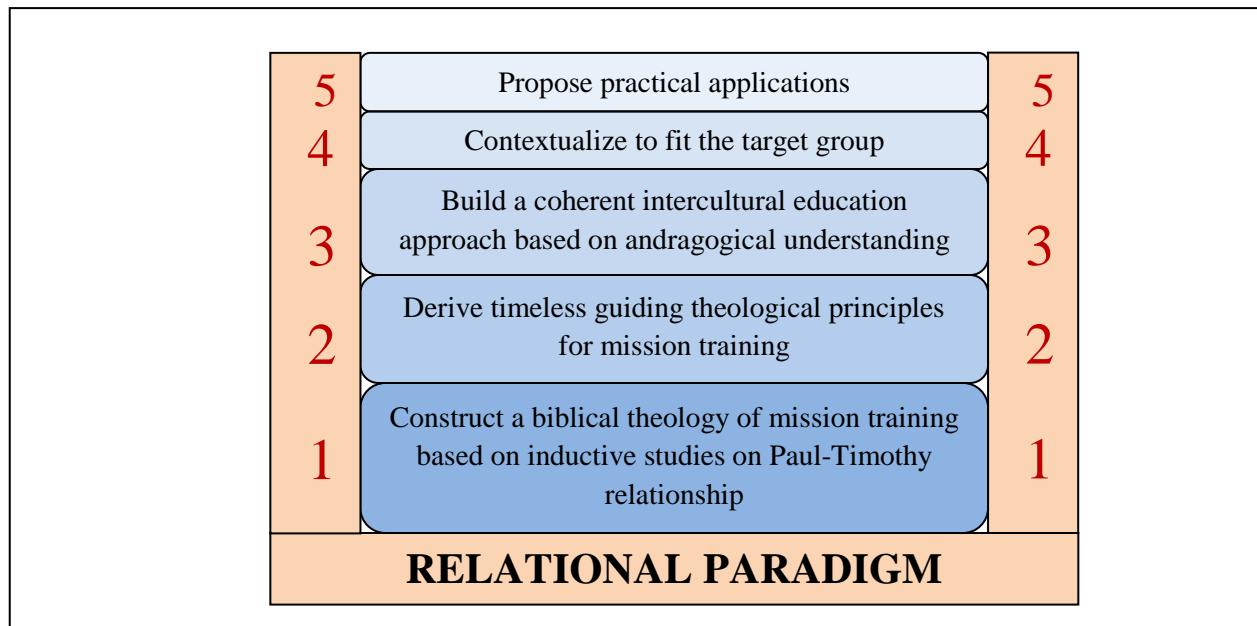


Figure 1: A Theoretical Framework for the Design and Development of Mission Training Programs

¹⁰ Wan, *Core Values of Mission Organization in the Cultural Context of the 21st Century*, p. 6.

Comparison between Traditional Training and Relational Training

Relational training is inherently different from traditional training in terms of purposes, foci, strategies and evaluation methods. Figure 2 provides a comparison between the two training philosophies.

	Traditional	Relational
Training Purpose	Knowledge, skills	Relationship, spiritual maturity, knowledge, skills
Training Focus	Program	People, process
Training Strategy	Systematic transmission of knowledge	Andragogical within a relational context
Success Evaluation	Numerical results: number of converts, number of training sessions, number of local churches planted, etc.	Spiritual qualities: intimate relationship with God and with other people, genuine love, pure heart, good conscience, faith

Figure 2: Comparison between Traditional vs. Relational Training

In the relational paradigm:

- Mission training is no longer a functional apprentice program but a conducive educational environment in which trainees grow spiritually in their relationship with God and at the same time acquire skills to reach out to unbelievers.
- What students do originates from and manifests who they are.
- "The source of human being and understanding is relationship."¹¹

Therefore the goal of a relational training program is to,

- Establish, verify, and develop the connection between the trainee and God, and
- Create an environment conducive to spiritual accountability and mutual development, and

¹¹ Wan, *Relational Theology and Relational Missiology*, p. 1.

- Teach skills in this open, trusting and highly relational environment.

A Study on Paul - Timothy's Relationship

In this section, the relationship between Apostle Paul and Timothy is examined. Timothy was first mentioned in Acts 16:1. His mother was a Jewish believer; his father was a Greek. Timothy was not circumcised at the time of his birth. For him to serve among Hellenistic Jews, he should be conformed to the Mosaic Law to avoid unnecessary questioning. Therefore Paul circumcised Timothy. Since the time Paul selected Timothy to be his mission companion due to his good reputation among fellow believers until Timothy became Paul's ministry partner, their relationship has grown in many aspects.¹²

As partner in ministry, Timothy's name appeared in the greetings of Second Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, First and Second Thessalonians and even in the letter to Philemon. In the first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul mentions that he has dispatched Timothy to the Corinthian believers to remind them of his teaching.¹³ Paul's two personal letters to Timothy are still extant and part of the New Testament canon.

A Genuine Relationship Forms A Solid Foundation For Their Ministry Collaboration

First Timothy and Second Timothy along with Titus are commonly called the pastoral Epistles because they contains many instructions for church governing such as how to select elders and bishops, how to guard against apostasy, and how to take care of widows in the church. Numerous pastoral theologies have been developed based on these Pauline letters. However, viewing these letters only from a pastoral perspective is very functional and therefore incomplete. Doing so critically overlooks the intimate human relationship between Apostle Paul

¹² Acts 16:4ff.

¹³ 1 Cor. 4:17.

and Timothy who have labored together over the years on the mission field. After all, the pastoral Epistles are personal letters and therefore deserved to be read as such. From a relational realism perspective,¹⁴ the pastoral Epistles can be read quite differently while pastoral instructions are still in the focus. In fact, it can be argued that under the new light of relational realism, pastoral instructions in these letters can be now understood much better than from a functional perspective. Relational realism helps to answer the question *why* the instructions are given in addition to the question *what* the instructions are, which can be answered by the functionalist.

In the opening words of First Timothy, Paul calls Timothy his "true child in the faith".¹⁵ In First Corinthians, Paul sent Timothy to the church at Corinth not as a theological expert but as a "beloved and faithful child in the Lord."¹⁶ This is very important in the sociocultural context of the day. Paul's introduction of Timothy is one of the most powerful and worthy references a servant of God can get. As a faithful co-worker of Apostle Paul, Timothy has the necessary credentials to provide theological advice to a congregation faced with so many moral and social issues like the one at Corinth. Paul is highly relational. He works out of his network of people whom he trusts. The church at Corinth would also rest assured that Timothy would be the best theological expert to help them. Paul does not sacrifice other ministry considerations just for the sake of personal, i.e. unprofessional, relationship.

Paul's affection toward Timothy is most illustrated in Second Timothy. Paul says, "I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy."¹⁷ These passionate words demonstrate the fact that

¹⁴ Wan, *Relational Paradigm*, p 1.

¹⁵ 1 Tim. 1:2. Paul also calls Titus with a similar designation (Titus 1:4).

¹⁶ 1 Cor. 4:17.

¹⁷ 2 Tim. 1:3-4

Paul's affection toward Timothy has gone far beyond a typical relationship between a mentor and a mentee. It illustrates the love a father has for his beloved son. Paul does not say things like, "I look forward to receiving your mission reports so I may know how many people you have converted", or "I want to see you to catch up on many things that we did not get done last time you were here." Such statements are very common today not only in the business world but also in the Christian circle. "Tears", "joy", and "longing" are relational terms which are packed with emotions.

Training goals

Paul instructs Timothy that, "the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."¹⁸ This goal is not functional but highly relational and spiritual. How can one numerically measure the love from a pure heart? How can a conscience be evaluated on a discreet scale of functionalism? How can faith be measured mathematically? According to Apostle Paul, the overarching goal of ministry is to build up holistic servants of God whose behaviors are regulated by a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. The only appropriate environment in which three things can be imparted to trainees is an open, trusting and relational environment. In another place, 1 Tim. 4:6, while providing instructions regarding apostasy and false doctrine, Paul explains that his desire is for Timothy to become a *good*, not effective nor fruitful, servant of Christ Jesus.

Experiential and Passionate Teaching

Another argument for the relational paradigm is that Paul's teaching is very experiential and passionate. He does not just provide technical instructions on how to manage local churches. In 1 Tim. 1:13-18, one can feel the sincerity of Paul's heart as he writes these words, "I was formerly

¹⁸ 1 Tim. 1:5.

a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy... I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience... This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son ... you fight the good fight."¹⁹ This is a signature trademark of relational training, which is starkly different from traditional education in which systematic transmission of knowledge is the most important objective. Relational training allows the trainer to share personal anecdotes which may include both successes and failures. It is from personal experiences that the trainer exhorts and teaches. This training model is highly relevant to theological education in general and mission training in particular. It is the author's conviction that the Church must return to relational training approaches which are deeply biblical if it still desires to reach out to people of the contemporary culture.

Learn to teach

Another aspect of relational training that Apostle Paul emphasizes in his letters to Timothy is the need to learn in order to teach. He instructs Timothy, "Prescribe and teach these things,"²⁰ and "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."²¹ In relational training, the content of what being taught is not limited to just head knowledge but also experiences. The exhortation to mimic after him is not an ego statement from Paul but a sincere and humble instruction. Paul explains elsewhere that he is what he is today because of the power of the gospel and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul himself is a living testimony for God's grace and mercy.

¹⁹ 1 Tim. 1:13-18. Again in Second Timothy, Paul continues with a personal and passionate tone of voice when he encourages Timothy to undergo suffering for the sake of the Lord.

²⁰ 1 Tim. 4:11.

²¹ 2 Tim. 2:2.

The Qualifications of Church Leaders

In 1 Tim. 3, Paul describes to Timothy the qualifications of elders and deacons. One can see that the emphasis is placed on spiritual maturity and ethical behavior. Not much is said regarding technical competence except for teaching and household management, which are in fact intimately in the spiritual domain as well. It is noteworthy that Paul concludes 1 Tim. 3 with praise to the spiritual quality of godliness. So, what is the most important qualification for a leader in the church? Paul seems to say rather loudly that is *godliness*. Paul urges Timothy, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness."²² Among fifteen occurrences of the word "godliness" in the New Testament nine of them are from the First and Second Timothy, and 1 from Titus.

Spiritual Training

On the basis of relationality, Paul provides spiritual instructions to Timothy as summarize below:

1. Spending time with God, which includes prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings, is urged as the first and foremost thing to do.²³ Note that it not just petitions but also thanksgivings, which manifest an ongoing relationship with God.
2. A servant of God must be holistically exemplary. Age is not the deciding criterion based on which God's servants are evaluated. Five virtues that Paul urges Timothy to build on are speech, conduct, love, faith and purity.²⁴
3. Exercise the spiritual gifts which have been given by God.²⁵

²² 1 Tim. 4:7b.

²³ 1 Tim. 2:1.

²⁴ 1 Tim. 4:12.

²⁵ 1 Tim. 4:14.

4. Follow examples of those ahead and set examples for those behind. In other places, Paul urges believers, including Timothy, to follow his examples. Learning by examples occurs most effectively within a relationship.
5. Strong in the Word.²⁶ Seek for God's approval and not man's.
6. Practice is very important. Paul urges Timothy to take pain in his spiritual journey, be absorbed in them, and persevere in his spiritual discipline. The goal is that his spiritual fruits are seen by other people. What Paul says at the end of 1 Tim 4 is very important. He encourages Timothy to live out what he believes and teaches. Doing so will ensure salvation for himself and also for others. This is a passionate call to holistic Christian living and should be highlighted in today's theological education.

Timeless Guiding Theological Principles for Mission Training

Based on the study on the relationship between Apostle Paul and Timothy, the following timeless guiding theological principles for mission training are drawn:

1. Relationship is prominent before, during, and after the training process.
2. The goal of training to build up spiritual Christians who possess and display biblical values.
3. Trainers and trainees create a community of faith in which they fellowship, set examples for one another and for the world.
4. Spiritual maturity, the outcome of the vertical relationship between God and the trainer and trainees, is the primary objective of mission training.²⁷ Holiness is the most important qualification of God's servants.
5. Only spiritual trainers can produce spiritual trainees.

²⁶ 2 Tim. 2:15.

²⁷ This divergence from the traditional understanding of mission training is intentional. The author is not confused mission training with Christian discipleship. He strongly believes that mission works can be carried out successfully only by spiritual Christians. It comes from his conviction that mission is not about persuasion and oratory skills but a total submission to the Holy Spirit who can freely use the mission worker to make the gospel known to the hearer.

A Theological Model for Mission Training From a Relational Realism Perspective

Based on the findings on the relationship between Paul and Timothy, from a relational realism perspective, a theological model for mission training is proposed. It is illustrated by Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5.

1. For the trainer, the relationship with the Most Real, the Ultimate Being, God, must be achieved, nurtured and strengthened before entering the training ministry. Only when the relationship with God is secured, can other training components such as knowledge and skills be addressed. Within the vertical relationship between God and the trainer, God changes him from within, which in turn results in change in his allegiance, attitude and behavior. It is important for the trainer to embark on his personal spiritual journey with God before he can train anyone else. This emphasis is prominent in the kind of mission training programs the author is proposing. It differentiates itself from traditional mission training programs which focus on the systematic transmission of knowledge and skills.
2. An authentic relationship between the trainer and the prospective trainee must be built up before any training can take place. Mission training is defined as spiritual and intellectual impartation from the trainer to the trainee.
3. Within the three-way relationship among God, the trainer, and the trainee, mission training takes place. In the process of training, the trainee is to be drawn closer to God and to the trainer. All relationships must be dynamically improved. No training skills and knowledge is allowed to break or damage the relationships between the trainee and God and between the trainee and the trainer.
4. As far as the nature of training is concerned, relational training is experiential and passionate. It is not just an impersonal systematic transmission of knowledge but a passionate impartation of living spiritual. Indeed, it is like passing the baton in the spiritual track and field.

Conclusion

In this paper, a theology for relational mission training is proposed. It is constructed based on an inductive bible study on the relationship between Apostle Paul and Timothy. It is found that between Paul and Timothy there is an intimate and genuine relationship in which Paul nurtures and develops Timothy to be a godly mission partner. This papers draws out timeless guiding theological principles for the design and development of mission training. It is the authors' conviction that mission training must be re-thought in the light of the relational paradigm.

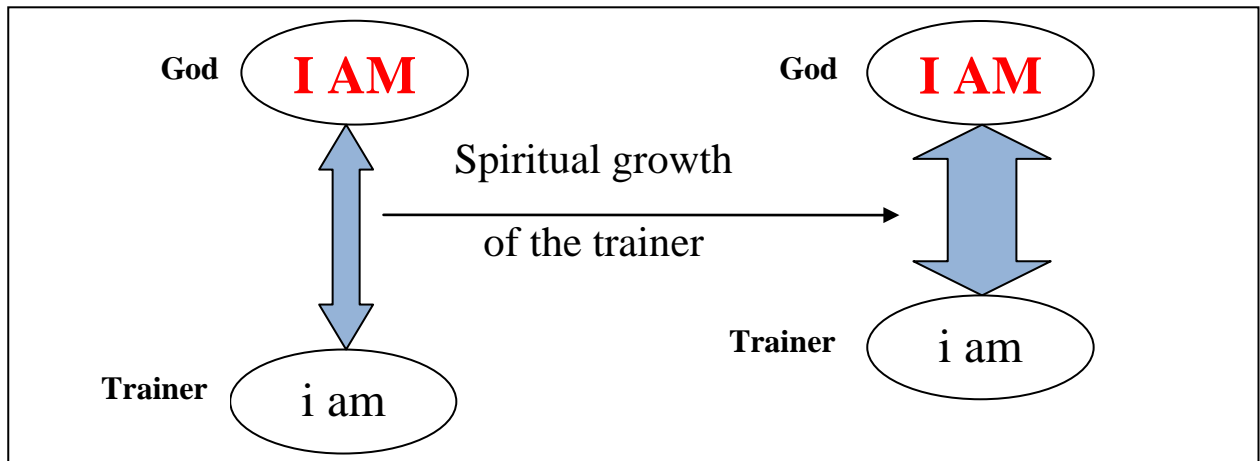


Figure 3: Phase #1 - The Spiritual Growth of a Mission Trainer.

The arrow represents the relationship between the trainer and God. The wider and shorter arrow on the right-hand-side diagram represents an improvement of the relationship.

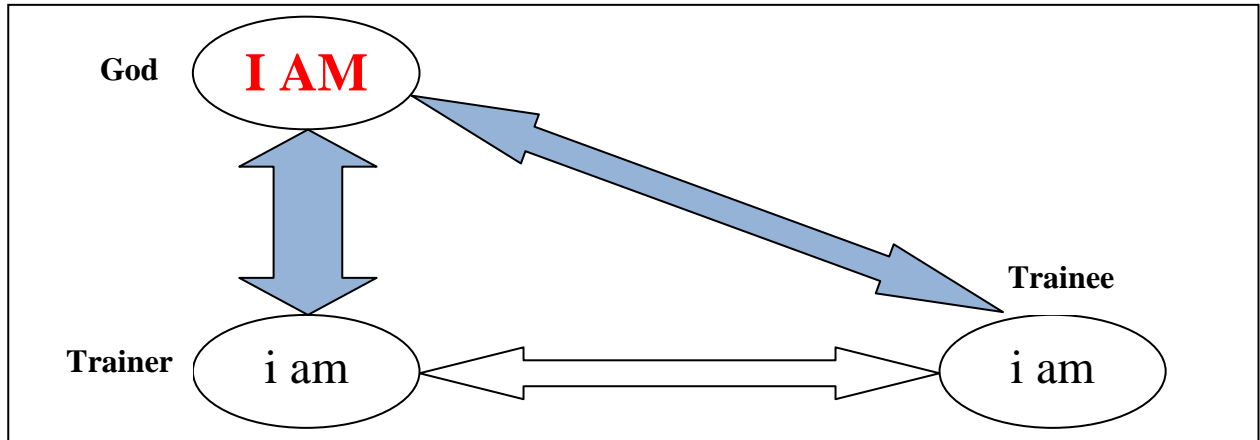


Figure 4: Phase 2 - The Trainer Establishes a Relationship with a Prospective Trainee

Since the trainee is also a Christian coming to the mission training program, he also has an existing relationship with God, depicted by the arrow connecting him with God.

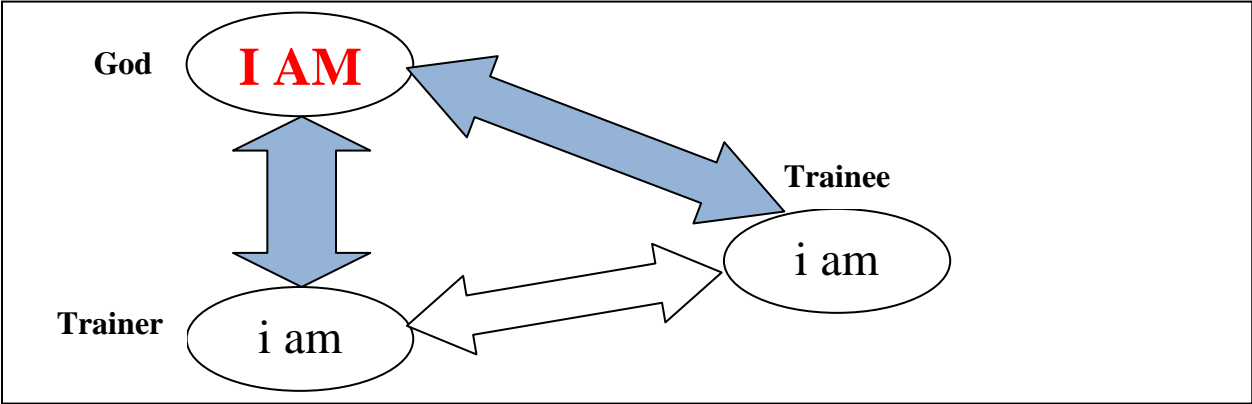


Figure 5: Phase 3 - The Result of Mission Training from a Relational Realism Perspective.

All relationships are dynamically improved.

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