Narratives of Exclusion: Toward a Pastoral Theology of Community

by

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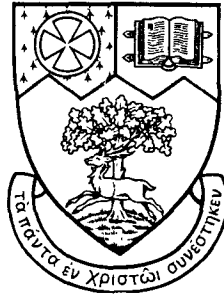Hamilton, Ontario

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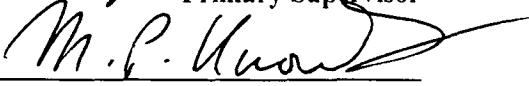
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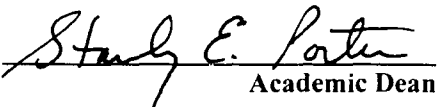is hereby accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Narratives of Exclusion: Toward a Pastoral theology of Community

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This thesis investigates the perception of 'difference' which results in the stratification of people within the North American evangelical church. In order to develop this understanding, the experiences of excluded persons are explored carefully by attending to narratives of the elderly, those living with disability, the divorced, widows, the homeless, and others who have endured the pain of rejection. Such persons are made to feel as if they have no voice. By articulating the felt experience of the excluded this thesis gives voice to the hidden dimensions of alienation which occur even in the church. Alienation is explored as a core theological motif with the aim of developing a pastoral theology of community which enables a reorientation of ministry to the excluded. In the course of argument the thesis explores a theology of alienation. This provides the theological context for the narratives of exclusion which illuminate the reality of loneliness—a core dimension of exclusion. Employing the revised critical correlation method the thesis concludes by offering a pastoral theology of community which calls for effective approaches to the ministry of inclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

Exclusion is a common practise in many of today's churches even though an idyllic portrait of authentic community is often presented. 'Authentic community' promises to be capable of transcending all limits imposed by family, class or culture because, in Christ, God has destroyed all barriers that divide the human race. Recognized as a 'sociological impossibility,' it does not seek 'like kind' but constitutes only love, compassion, inclusion, and acceptance.[1] It sounds incredible and is sought after by many Christian groups, but it represents an ideal that is confronted constantly with human imperfection and cannot be experienced fully in this life.

Preoccupation with this idyllic mindset causes Christians to underestimate the problems of control within congregations. This is evident when realizing a consequence of the idealization—the exclusion of those who are 'different.' Christians recognize their need to belong in community and alienating others may be unintentional, but loneliness abounds, because 'difference' has become a greater power than life together in the community of Christ.

This 'difference' may be discerned because of age, health, disability, wealth, race, class or gender and often leads to the exclusion of others. John D. Zizioulas contends that individualism, filled with its independence and self reliance, is often to blame.[2] Miroslav

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[1] Bosch, "The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16–20," 239.
[2] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 1.

Volf agrees but ventures a bolder description of exclusion describing it as "...barbarity within civilization, evil among the good, crime against the other, right within the walls of the self."[3] He recognizes that it is "an attempt to redesign the co-dependent pattern of the universe seeking to assimilate or eject the 'abnormal' other."[4]

This exclusionary evil reigns within the mechanisms constructing the culture and eventually becomes normalized. This means that the North American evangelical church is part of the rule and not the exception because, according to Michel Foucault, exclusion is practiced in all institutions that are associated with inclusionary civilization.[5] Richard Niebuhr epitomizes the evil by describing exclusion as the underside of pride, and its indispensable parallel in a world in which an individual is challenged relentlessly by the accomplishments of others.[6]

Exclusion affects everyone, and Henri Nouwen understood this personally. He realized that those who seek to exclude others have engaged in competition rather than compassion, destroying any sense of community for those left on the margins.[7] Denial by the North American evangelical church is common, though, because Christians are doing their best to uphold an idealized perception of community. Consequently, the church is reluctant to admit that anyone in its congregations could possibly feel excluded. Small groups and a wide variety of programs are believed to meet the need to belong and it is assumed too easily that this ensures the welcome and acceptance of all.[8] Marion Leach Jacobsen relates that any complaints concerning the lack of social acceptance in the

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[3] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 60.
[4] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 62.
[5] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 308.
[6] Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2:211.
[7] Nouwen et al, *Compassion*, 19.
[8] The need to belong is described as, "The dispositional tendency to seek out and join with other humans." See, Forsyth. *Group Dynamics*, 59.

church are often seen as self-centered, carnal, worldly, or unscriptural. Further, any discussion concerning the reality of exclusion is believed by congregants to reflect poorly on the church and her Lord.[9] Jacobsen recognizes that Christians often attempt to protect Christianity by "denying, ignoring, or concealing these defects in Christian fellowship."[10] Exclusion in the church, however, is a harsh, yet hidden reality.

This is more than evident in recent data published by Crossroads Television Services Inc. This ministry offers a twenty-four hour toll-free prayer line over the North American continent. In 2008 records revealed that almost two million Christians had called the ministry center needing prayer for emotional needs. The prayer partners working there estimated that over two thirds of those callers had expressed problems with feelings of alienation and loneliness.[11]

One would think that being lonely would encourage people to become warmer, eager for connection, and more accepting of others. However, the opposite is true. Loneliness is often the product of failing to break into already formed social groups. John Cacioppo and William Patrick, contend that loneliness "sets us apart by making us more fragile, negative, and self-critical."[12] They continue saying, "When people feel lonely they are actually far less accepting of potential new friends than when they are socially contented."[13]

A possible reason for excluding those who are different may be that people find a niche of community at church and, as a result, stop looking around to welcome others

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[9] Jacobsen, *Crowded Pews and Lonely People*, 20, 21.
[10] Jacobsen, *Crowded Pews and Lonely People*, 20, 21.
[11] Stowell ed., *Crossroads Compass Magazine*, 7.
[12] Cacioppo and Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, 174.
[13] Cacioppo and Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, 180.

into their circle. Cliques form and people are hesitant to welcome and include others

fearing that their personal comfort zone of intimacy and relationship may change.

Though efforts are made in many churches to include others, the exclusion of

those who are understood to be 'different' often represents an accepted norm. This causes

those who feel left out to suffer in silence. For this reason, the evangelical church in

North America is currently experiencing a 'community crisis.' The church needs a

pastoral theological understanding of the nature of exclusion and a theology of

community in order to appreciate a greater fullness of life together in the 'community of

Christ.'

This thesis seeks to expose the reality of exclusion in the North American

evangelical church using 'teaching narratives' and will argue that the development of a

pastoral theology of community is critical for addressing the problem of exclusion. A

pastoral theology of community provides a new approach concerning the fragmentation

of present community and ministry to people experiencing alienation. This is critical for

the inclusion of all Christians.

The progression of this thesis will follow a particular format. In chapter one, a

theoretical framework of exclusion will be developed and the chosen methodology

explained. The research conducted when developing the theoretical framework in chapter

one will reveal that the practices of exclusion and the experiences of alienation, which

have been reinforced in the church, require insight from both Bible and culture to

promote deeper understanding. It will be realized that exclusion is practiced for a variety

of reasons and that alienation is the common experience of the excluded.

A brief summary of pastoral theology will follow the construction of the

theoretical framework utilizing narrative theory as its foundation. The methodology

which has been chosen for the research will then be described in detail. The revised

critical correlation method of practical theology has been selected to enable a structured

argument, as it is capable of addressing the experiences of alienation in light of both

experience and theology.

Alienation cannot be treated solely for its symptoms, therefore, it is realized that

the root cause of exclusion needs to be investigated. Hence, chapter two is an exploration

of a theology of alienation which informs a biblical orientation to the experience of

alienation in the church. The root cause of exclusion will be explored through a

theological exploration of alienation. This core theological motif assists with the task of

understanding the human tendency to exclude others and the implications of this for the

faith community. It will be realized that the present church has been affected gravely by

the culture; even though scripture reveals Christ as redeemer and reconciler, and that the

root cause of excluding others is actually an alienation from true self.

This warrants the employ of 'teaching narratives' in chapter three of those

suffering alienation. This will help identify the complexity and depth of exclusion and

will reveal just how difficult it is to comprehend barriers to authentic community. These

narratives will open up the reality of exclusion while teaching the church about its often

hidden practice of excluding others. An attempt to frame these narratives will be

developed in a working typology which is meant to be more descriptive than prescriptive

and it will become apparent that the barriers to authentic community are often

constructed in the personal experiences of loneliness—the deepest element of alienation.

This requires a deeper spiritual understanding of the core experience of loneliness

resident in both the lives of the excluded and those who exclude.

Chapter four addresses this by examining Henri Nouwen's conceptualization of the first and second loneliness. It is realized that alienation cannot be treated simply for its symptoms but must be treated at its root—alienation from true self, as discovered in chapter two. It is understood that the false self is the deepest cause of exclusion and must be dealt with both theologically and practically.

This thesis will conclude with the construction of a pastoral theology of community which will close the gap between what 'is' and what 'ought to be.' It will be understood that it has the ability to draw from the experience of alienation and pastoral theology to encourage a conception of community that is not idealized—offering a way forward filled with hope for greater inclusion in the church. This final chapter will also bring into focus a working pastoral theology of community by describing practices which will encourage its formation. These practices recover the expertise of formation, not by constituting the notion of rapidity, but by encouraging the formation of different priorities in the church. The journey from the first loneliness to the second loneliness that Nouwen spoke about involves a depth of spiritual formation which will represent the foundational development of a pastoral theology of community. Recognizing the need for this journey will encourage the implementation of practices along the way which will help ease the burden of alienation and loneliness. This work will begin with the development of a theoretical framework and a description of the chosen methodology for this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The North American evangelical church in the twenty-first century stands at a crossroads between Bible and culture. The concept of 'crossroads' may serve as a heuristic device for studying fragmentation in community. It is realized at these crossroads that Christianity, identity, and culture are entangled inextricably. It is recognized that the church as an ecclesial form comprises a particular place in a cultural setting. Within the nexus of Christianity and culture crucial questions of identity are either sustained or contested. With this in mind it is necessary to understand how to live for Christ at this crossroads. Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew contend,

> If we believe that Jesus is Lord, then we must witness to Christ's lordship in every area of human life and culture. If we believe that salvation is truly comprehensive, then we must embody Christ's salvation in every area of human life and culture. To follow the Lord Jesus and witness to his salvation is to serve him in all things, confessing Christ's rule over the whole of society and culture, taking a stand against all the evil that thwarts that rule.[14]

Exclusion is an evil that thwarts that rule and, while attempts are made to live out a scriptural portrait of community, communal life in the North American evangelical church has been influenced by the culture and needs to be confronted. This does not imply that the culture is evil or insignificant. The church cannot 'be the church' without the culture, as this is where the church is called to minister. Equally significant is the fact that the experience of alienation, which often comes as a direct result of being excluded, cannot simply be viewed and dealt with theologically. A great deal of insight concerning

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[14] Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 127.

exclusion is available from sociology and social psychology which can be of great benefit to the church. With this in mind, this chapter will investigate different aspects of exclusion and the affects that these aspects have on both social identity formation and identity in Christ. The findings gleaned from sociology and social psychology will juxtapose normative identity for the Christian throughout to demonstrate just how difficult it can become for Christians categorized as 'different' to possess a healthy understanding of identity in both society and church.

This will have a direct effect on the church community and its influence in the social world. If Christian community seeks only 'like kind' and habitually excludes Christians who are 'different,' it will continue to be identified by society, as much by its tendency to exclude others, as by its representation of the Body of Christ on earth. Doing so will only weaken its gospel witness to the world. A pastoral theology of community is needed if greater inclusion is to become reality. The following theoretical framework, ensued by the chosen methodology, will attempt to ground this argument and set the stage for further development. A description of a theoretical framework of exclusion will follow.

A Theoretical Framework of Exclusion

A theoretical framework may be recognized as a collection of interrelated concepts which are meant to guide the research. Developing a framework, therefore, determines what will be considered or discarded, and often reveals what has actually been missed. It is realistic to assume that preconceived notions and bias are not absent from this research. This is because fundamental beliefs that this researcher may hold about human nature may provide an innate implicit theoretical framework affecting perception

and evaluation when following a line of investigation. It is possible to be unaware of being guided by an implicit theoretical framework in this way so it is critical to develop an explicit theoretical framework.

Developing an explicit theoretical framework also allows for the consideration of other possible constructs which may contribute to the enhancement of meaning in this regard. To begin, therefore, it is essential to determine whose perspective will be used and to ask the appropriate questions. For the purpose of this study, it is clear that the perspectives of both the source of the exclusion (its perpetrator) and the victim (the excluded) are crucial; however, while it is important to ask questions concerning a perpetrator's possible motive or intent, it is of greater significance that this research exposes the suffering experienced by the victim in instances of exclusion. It is hoped that the perspective of the victim may in turn influence the perspective of the perpetrator. To aid in the exposing of suffering caused by exclusion it is now necessary to disclose the undergirding theory for this research and analyze exclusion itself.

Narrative Theory: The Undergirding Theory for this Research

Narrative theory according, according to Theodore R. Sarbin, recognizes the concept of narrative being able to interpret and explain the human condition.[15] Narrative theory forms the foundational basis for an understanding of identity. Each person's story is unique and offers insight concerning the perception of the world around it. Whether concerning social identity or Christian identity, Andrew Lester comments, "Narrative theory provides an alternative way of comprehending how selfhood and personal identity are formed, including the idea that this process does not occur in isolation but in

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[15] Sarbin, "The Narrative as a Root Metaphor for Psychology," 4.

relationship with our world and with others."[16] John Navone agrees with Lester, stating, "The story of a self cannot be told without the story of other selves."[17] Narrative theory, therefore, recognizes that narratives are essential to the assessment of relational meanings. Ruthellen Josselson states, "Relationships require narrative to evoke the empathy and multilayered attention necessary for one person to have some sense of the nature of someone else's relational experience."[18] Without personal narrative, no meaning could be given to the suffering of the excluded or to the fragmentation of community. Even in non–verbal situations, personal experiences of alienation need to be examined for the sake of understanding the loneliness that is often experienced.

Analyzing Exclusion

The forthcoming analysis of exclusion will have elements of theological, psychological and sociological input. Disciplines other than theology can be extremely helpful in leading congregants to understand the depths of alienation experienced because of exclusion being practiced. Specialists from the field of social psychology have researched many aspects of exclusion, determining its classification, antecedents, moderators, threatened personal needs, and reactions. Attempting to understand the complexity of exclusion, and its relation to growth and maturity in Christian spiritual formation, will not only benefit the church, but also the future and advancement of pastoral theology.

For this reason the theoretical framework for this research concerning personal narrative and the practices of exclusion will involve insight gained from sociologist

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[16] Lester, *The Angry Christian*, 95.
[17] Navone, *Toward a Theology of Story*, 78.
[18] Josselson et al., "Introduction," 4.

Alfred Schütz and his concept of the life-world. Additionally, research conducted by social psychologists' Kipling D. Williams and Lisa Zadro will prove beneficial. Schütz enables an understanding of the possible damage that can take place within an individual's innermost being when exclusion takes place, while research in the field of ostracism, conducted by Williams and Zadro, contributes greatly toward understanding some of the complexities of exclusion.[19]

At this juncture, pastoral theologian Richard Osmer is also appreciated for his skill in helping Christians realize their role in the descriptive-empirical task of priestly listening to those in need. He says, "We fail to even notice—much less stop and help—those individuals and groups who are suffering and in need... Too often we walk on by because attending to their plight is inconvenient or too threatening to our own way of life."[20] Attending to the suffering of others and allowing their voice to be heard is necessary in the development of a pastoral theology of community. Thus, insight is sought from sociology, theology, social-psychology, experience, and pastoral reflection to provide the constructs of informed attendance. This is necessary because exclusion is a harsh yet hidden reality in the church.

Exclusion is a Harsh yet Hidden Reality

Exclusion is a difficult reality for the church to acknowledge. However, this is an important topic for the North American evangelical church to address in constructive ways. It is hoped that both extensive research and a spirit of compassion will aid construction of a theoretical framework for this research. Before this can take place, however, a basic question must be asked and the alienation experienced because of

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[19] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: On Being Ignored, Excluded and Rejected," 21–53.
[20] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 34.

exclusion within the church must be given careful consideration. Contemplating why exclusion is practiced is an appropriate beginning.

Why do People Exclude Others?

Why does a person feel justified in excluding another? Paul Ricoeur argues that "the selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other."[21] Cornelius Plantinga adds to this emphasizing that this is God's design and that no one is to put asunder what God has joined or unite what God has put asunder.[22] People in North America, however, are immersed in all forms of competition, seeking an ideal of perfection which is not attainable. For this reason, a person continues to exclude people who are 'different,' in the hope of making progress toward an ideal that has been influenced conventionally by a "particular vision of the good."[23] Thomas E. Reynolds adds,

> Strangeness creates a dissonance that threatens to spoil the fabric of a community's mutually reinforcing sense of the good. The social order is jeopardized. The predictable world is thrown into relief. Because of this, communities develop protective strategies through what I call the "cult of normalcy."[24]

Exclusion can happen, therefore, either intentionally or unintentionally within a church community, as much as in any other community and many people are excluded by other believers, through no apparent fault of their own.[25]

The Tendency to Exclude Lies Within the Human Heart

When there is fragmentation in community it is common to try to blame those

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[21] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 3.

[22] Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, 30.

[23] Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 55.

[24] Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 55.

[25] There are places in the New Testament where exclusion is advised but this is to be understood as a disciplinary action. A couple of examples of this can be found in 2 Thess 3:14, 15 and Titus 3:10, 11.

who are feeling alienated but the problem of exclusion is seldom with the abnormal

'other,' the one who is different, or the one who leaves the church because of the lack of

community. According to Volf, it lies within the human heart.[26] The tendencies to

exclude reside within—where assessments are pondered, opinions are formed, judgments

drawn, and choices made. This exposes a problem for the Christian because Jesus Christ,

the promised redeemer of Gen 3:15, has embraced difference.[27] Gal 3:28 adds, "There is

no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and

female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Col 3:11 expounds on this further, stating,

"Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave

or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

It would seem from these quotes of the Apostle Paul, that difference should no

longer be an issue which divides Christians. Scripture, in fact, shows a movement from

the personal to the communal where 'unity in Christ' is the operative phrase. Dietrich

Bonhoeffer, however, argues that in order to comprehend being, 'in Christ,' it is essential

to realize that this happened only because Christ, who comprises the fullness of the

Godhead, was willing to become flesh for human beings. He asserts that when God's Son

took on flesh, he took on human nature, and so all believers are in him. Wherever Jesus

is, he is bearing human flesh, and is, therefore, bearing all who are in him. And where

Jesus is, believers are there too—in the incarnation, on the cross, and in his resurrection.

All who believe in him belong to him and belong to one another for eternity.[28] This

implies that fragmented community may be the direct result of inadequate spiritual

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[26] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 60.
[27] The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible will be used throughout this thesis.
[28] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 32.

formation. John Zizioulas says, "By turning difference into division through the rejection

of the other, we die. Hell, eternal death, is nothing but isolation from the other, as the

desert Fathers put it. We cannot solve this problem though ethics. We need a new birth.

This leads to ecclesiology."[29]

The church is meant to be a source of reconciliation and inclusion. The confession

of the church is that Jesus is Lord and the head over all things (Eph 1:20–23). The church

represents the beginnings of a new creation and a new humanity—the New Jerusalem.

The church has been given the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of the coming

reconciliation and renewal, which is inevitable for the whole of creation (Col 1:20).

Consequently, the call of the church is to serve that goal—to be a source of reconciliation

and inclusion, by loving God and others (John 13:34). Jesus affirms that the summary of

the Law is, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,

and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke

10: 27).[30]

Therefore, if the North American evangelical church moves away from idealism

and moves toward repentance and consecration, it seems reasonable that the power of the

gospel message might be recognized as an authoritative contradiction to the dominant

forces in the culture. Distorted ideologies of oppression in society, though, have

succeeded in paving the way for practices of exclusion in the church, meaning that

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[29] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 3.

[30] Rahner, *The Trinity*, 39. Others have made similar comments concerning the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity. See, Van Beeck, "Trinitarian Theology as Participation," 317. Unity in wholeness is modeled perfectly in the Holy Trinity. John Zizioulas contends that in the Trinity otherness comprises unity and not its consequence; otherness is never a threat. Zizioulas asserts that otherness in the Trinity is ontological. Even the names, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, signify relationship and this implies that no person can be different unless that person is related. Otherness in the Trinity is actually "inconceivable apart from relationship." See Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 5.

human actions meant to be guided by gospel-based ethics are often discarded.

The Tendency toward Emotional Community

The tendency seems to be more toward emotional community rather than spiritual community. However, continuing to establish self-fulfilling, emotional community, which seldom notices that others are excluded, will only prevent the realization of the richness and beauty discovered by participating in the fullness of divine love. Without consistent participation in that love there is little to be gained. The Apostle Paul stated, "Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; ... But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more" (1 Thess 4:9, 10). Having experienced the love, grace, and mercy of God, all Christians are equipped to extend love and compassion to others. Bonhoeffer contends, however, that when little human love is shown, this implies a life that is not being lived by God's mercy and love.[31] He asserts that thankfulness for forgiveness and new life that has been received by Christ has a significant effect on community and the way that God enables it to grow. Bonhoeffer states,

> Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize; but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our community is in Jesus Christ alone, the more calmly we will think about our community and pray and hope for it.[32]

Community—A Careful Balance between the Spiritual and Emotional?

Churches try to create belonging and to make it flourish but the fundamental nature of spiritual community is fellowship 'in the light.' 1 John 1:7 states, "...if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another." This is in

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[31] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* 33.
[32] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* 38.

stark contrast to the emotional community which results from portraying an idealized

community which can never be lived. Bonhoeffer delineates the difference between

spiritual and emotional community and it is best illustrated in the following chart:

Bonhoeffer's View of Communal Disjunction

Spiritual Community:	Emotional Community:
Called By Christ	Religious
Agape Love	Self-centered
Submission	Subjection
No immediate relationships	Covets relationships
Converted by Holy Spirit	Emotional conversion
Loves others for Christ	Loves others for self's sake
Community is genuine	Community is false
Willingness to serve	Need to be served
Spiritual love for others	Emotional love for others
Serves Christ alone	Serves self
Adheres to Word of God	Truth is relative
Source is God	Source is self
Freedom to belong to Christ	Judges other persons
Offers the Word	Offers the self
Governed by truth	Governed by desire

Figure 1 Bonhoeffer's Distinctions between Spiritual Community and Emotional Community[33]

Bonhoeffer demonstrates that there is a distinct difference between the portrait of

an ideal and allowing the Spirit of God to form community in the midst of imperfection.

The fact that many have been excluded demonstrates that ideals of perfection are often

portrayed in the church. Bonhoeffer, warns of the seriousness of exclusion when he says,

"The exclusion of the weak and insignificant, the seemingly useless people, from

everyday Christian life in community may actually mean the exclusion of Christ; for in

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[33] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together,* 39–45.

the poor sister or brother, Christ is knocking at the door."[34]

Exclusion in the North American evangelical church is a reality not just because of perceived weak, insignificant, and seemingly useless people. It is operating because of problems with age, race, gender, color, opinion, grief, illness, poverty, beauty, education, intelligence, or wealth. Christians who are victims of exclusion by other Christians have a propensity to react to exclusion personally and it has a significant effect on an understanding of identity. It is difficult to realize identity in Christ when Christians exclude one another. Feelings of alienation and loneliness cause people to feel less secure and different from others and identity becomes blurred when Christians are placed on the margins by other Christians.

Excluded Christians often feel guilt and shame concerning their situation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, however, speaks into this situation with a word of encouragement. He says, "Believers need not feel any shame when yearning for the physical presence of other Christians, as if one were still living too much in the flesh."[35] Their yearning reveals that they know something core is missing concerning community and that inclusion is possible. Somehow, it is realized that balance is needed with regard to community. It needs to comprise both the spiritual and emotional if ministry is to encourage the inclusion of all Christians. Pastoral theology, therefore, needs to appreciate the present reality of exclusion and its complexity. This will become apparent in a study concerning the concept of life-world envisioned by sociologist Alfred Schütz.

The Life-World Concept Reveals how Exclusion Affects Personal Identity

Further insight from a sociological perspective concerning how a person's

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[34] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 45, 46.
[35] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 29.

perception of identity becomes damaged may be possible by examining the concept of 'life-world.' This concept is important for appreciating the personal effects of exclusion on an individual. Though viewed from a sociological perspective, this concept is informative concerning the effect that exclusion has on identity even when the person is a Christian.

The Life-World

Alfred Schütz (1899–1959) was a sociologist and philosopher who envisioned the life-world, or place of existence for the individual, as a social world. He understood that the concept of community, used in sociology, is not limited by geography or neighborhood, but is actually defined in reference to the life-world. Helmut R. Wagner said, "Speaking of the realm of everyday life, Schütz argued that any specific interest, leading to the establishment of a problem, brings about a sorting-out of an individual's given knowledge into various zones or regions of decreasing relevance."[36]

Schütz's conceptualization of the life-world may become clearer if it is viewed as a series of concentric circles, describing the circles in the life-world as zones of relevance. The innermost circle, therefore, represents a typical day where contacts and routines are predictable, repetitive, and taken for granted. This does not necessarily mean that it is a place of safety and rest and may actually represent a place that is cold and unforgiving. The level of intimacy is not considered relevant, however. The repetition of contacts and the meaning that is attached to those contacts were understood by Schütz to be of the greatest significance.[37]

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[36] Schütz, *Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 23.
[37] Schütz, *Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 23–24.

God can be a welcomed presence within the inner zone of relevance, if a person is open to his all-embracing love and acceptance. This, of course, is of great importance to the life-world experience. Any interpretation of God's presence or intervention in the life of the individual can make all of the difference when a person is feeling the loneliness which is experienced because of exclusion. God inhabits the central circle and all persons or events outside of this inner-most circle tend to pale in comparison to the perceived reality that is central. The following diagram may serve to clarify the concept of the life-world.

The Life-World

MOST
RELEVANT

LESS
RELEVANT

SOMEWHAT
IRRELEVANT

ABSOLUTELY
IRRELEVANT
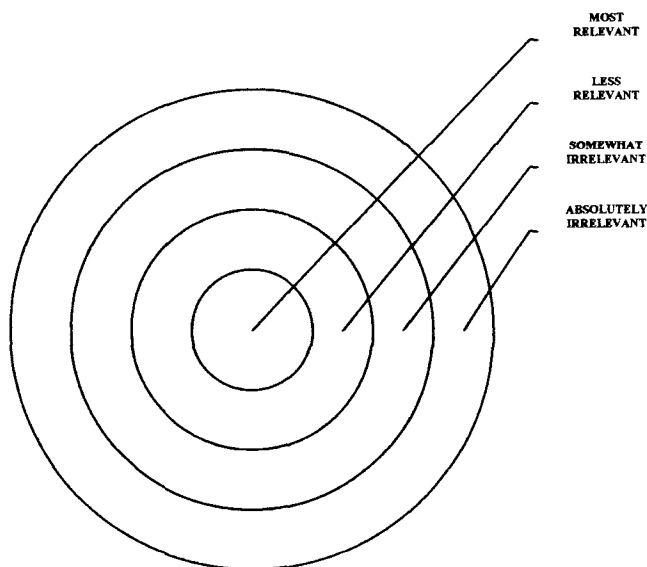
Figure 2   The Life-World Model

Developing a conceptual means of understanding personal experience and community in both society and church can be greatly enhanced through the concept of the life-world, as this concept not only helps illuminate different aspects of personal experience, but also aids in the understanding of relationships, as people in the social

world interact with others. The life-world reveals the way people relate with one another through narrative in community and demonstrates what takes place when a person or group dominates the relationship with another.[38] This domination over someone perceived as 'different,' for whatever reason, is responsible for turning a healthy narrative of identity into an unhealthy one, therefore being responsible for untold suffering. This is especially difficult for Christians, as their normative view of identity should involve inclusion and participation within divine community. Consequently, it is safe to conclude that suffering initiated by practices of exclusion warrants further investigation in the social world and in the life of the church. In the following section the tension regarding the maintenance of normative Christian view of narrative identity when alienation is experienced will be examined.

Normative Christian View of Narrative Identity

A sociological perspective of the life-world concept is helpful when seeking to understand how a person may suffer a damaged identity from being excluded by others, but it also reveals difference in the way scripture defines narrative identity for the Christian. Community is not defined for the Christian in relation to the life-world because it is not solely dependent on reactions from others. Eph 2:19 addresses the end of alienation stating, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household..." Being of God's household connotes citizenship in heaven, adoption, belonging, and acceptance. Eph 1:5 says, "He

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[38] Schütz' life-world concept sheds light on personal identity and the reality of community in society. This enables an understanding of the manner in which people may feel linked to and separated from the community they inhabit. It clarifies whether the community has a healthy response toward the identity of the individual or a negative one as evaluated through the way the community responds to the individual.

destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will…"

Revisiting the data from Crossroads Television Services Inc., it is safe to assess that exclusion is being practiced in the North American evangelical church. This reveals the level of influence society has had on the church and that the church is in need of a pastoral theology of community to encourage the inclusion of all Christians. As this investigation continues, some of the limits and fallibilities that are ever-present in human nature will be revealed. Continuing practices of exclusion will only betray the costly sacrifice that Christ made for humanity on the cross. The effects of exclusion can only be detrimental to a fuller understanding of identity in Christ, relationships with others, health, well-being, and the experience of authentic community. Exclusion affects Christians very seriously and perpetuates the fragmentation of community. This next section will clarify this further.

Exclusion Limits the Possibility for Authentic Community

The problem that Christians create in practices of exclusion is that any possibility for realizing authentic community is limited. To continue the building of a theoretical framework it is essential, therefore, for Christians to 'hear' from those who have studied exclusion and its effects within the field of social psychology. Social psychology has dealt with the social complexities of exclusion and pastoral theology stands to benefit from the research of social psychology as it attends to those who have been excluded. As a discipline, pastoral theology attempts to listen to deeper associations of exclusion from all disciplines.

Research conducted in the field of social psychology reveals traits of humanity

which are common to all. Understanding exclusion from this perspective will provide

additional insight regarding the tendency amongst people to exclude others or

themselves. Some interesting assessments derived from the research of Williams and

Zadro will prove informative and some critical points from their research follow.

Critical Points from the Research of Zadro and Williams

Exclusion is not always experienced in isolation

Zadro and Williams classify exclusion by recognizing that many people

experience its effects by being physically separated from others. However, they have also

found that many people feel socially excluded while continuing to remain in the presence

of others. What may often occur is that a perpetrator or source perceives that the target or

victim is invisible.[39]

Exclusion occurs everywhere but is not always intentional

Exclusion of others can occur in the workplace, on the internet, at school, home,

or church but concerning motive, it is possible that a perpetrator or source may have

either intentional or unintentional habits of excluding others. Intentional acts of exclusion

refer to acts intended as a form of punishment. A clear message is received that the target

or victim is not permitted to belong. An unintentional act, however, would imply

unconscious bias with no direct intent to harm.[40]

There are many varieties of exclusion:

Role-Prescribed Exclusion

In the case of role-prescribed exclusion, there is variation across cultures.

Behaviors may appear to be exclusionary but may in fact be culturally acceptable. An

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[39] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 24.
[40] For further information read, Somner et al. "When silence speaks louder than words," 225–43.

example would be a waiter in a restaurant who is filling water glasses. He may be excluded from conversation and ignored by others but that is perfectly acceptable in certain cultures.[41] Also, in many cultures, when a person marries and dwells in a home, others are excluded automatically. There is a sense of occupied space for the purpose of familial growth and privacy.

Defensive Exclusion

Exclusion can also be viewed as defensive. People may exclude those who appear to be too radical or detrimental to their emotional well-being. Others may be excluded because self-protection or job-protection must be sought. An example of self-protection could involve a care-giver excluding a suffering loved one from thoughts and emotions. The caregiver is attempting to self-protect in the situation with a certain level of detachment.

Similarly, in the case of job-protection, an employee may exclude another employee believed to be jeopardizing the job. Employees may prefer not to associate with the troublesome individual. Within these circumstances, exclusion can be viewed as defensive with no real intention to cause harm to another.[42]

Punitive Exclusion

Punitive is another descriptor of exclusion and may be experienced when victims believe that they are excluded because they do not conform to the group. They feel they are being punished because they look or act differently. Often they are unknown by others. It is not always understood that the group should welcome and embrace the newcomer so that integration may be possible with less difficulty.

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[41] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 24.
[42] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 25.

Oblivious Exclusion

Finally, oblivious exclusion refers to people who feel worthless and believe that they should be unnoticed by others. They feel invisible and do not recognize exclusion as punishment because they do not believe that they matter enough to warrant punishment.[43] It is possible that this is due to prolonged periods of exclusion but the possibility exists that many other factors could be involved.

There are often antecedents for excluding others

Feelings of threat

It may be easier to exclude others rather than confront or include them. Excluding others may be thought of as securing fundamental needs and, therefore, perceived as superior to confrontation. In a preliminary study, Zadro discovered that people possessing certain traits may be more likely to exclude than confront and two basic individual differences, such as low attachment needs and insecure relationships, were noteworthy predictors of the predisposition to be a source of exclusion.[44]

Negative personal qualities

People who are stubborn and avoid others may have negative personal qualities. Those who have questionable moral character or are socially repugnant due to improper hygiene or behavior are habitually excluded because they provoke the practice in whomever they meet. Other targets or victims react so strongly to any form of confrontation that others simply choose to exclude them.[45]

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[43] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 25.
[44] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 27.
[45] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 27.

Positive Reasons

Others, however, may be excluded for positive reasons. If they are perceived as possible threats to the perpetrator's sense of autonomy, exclusion may take place. If it is believed that the target is more highly educated, intelligent, attractive, or socially acceptable than the source, exclusion may be seen as the best means of maintaining a sense of power and control. Intimidation may play a significant role in a decision to exclude someone.

Understanding what perpetuates exclusion

Personality may perpetuate exclusion

When considering what perpetuates exclusion, it is necessary to look at certain personal attributes. It is important to discover if those who are excluded are able to take control of the situation or if they abandon all sense of personal responsibility and want to remain a victim. They may simply choose to blame themselves or others and become addicted to the recovery process. Sources or perpetrators of exclusion may not be faced with any resistance by the target or victim and are, therefore, not convicted of any wrongdoing. Exclusion becomes an acceptable norm.

Any perceived difference may perpetuate exclusion

If a person's life situation or physical appearance is perceived as different or abnormal, a perpetrator may exclude the individual on a continuous basis. Experiences of grief, depression, disability, intelligence, beauty, or giftedness may actually encourage exclusion. Regardless, however, basic human needs are threatened when a victim lives with exclusion.

Exclusion threatens basic human needs

Zadro and Williams have determined through their ongoing research that four basic human needs are threatened when a person is excluded. These include a need to belong, a need to feel in control, a need for self-esteem, and a need for a meaningful existence. When these needs are threatened, people suffer incredibly. They contend that the reactions to exclusion may lead to greater exclusion unless highly adaptive responses are incorporated. This is evident in their evaluation of the immediate, short term and long term effects.

Exclusion has detrimental effects on health and well-being

Immediate: aversive impact, pain, hurt feelings, bad mood, physiological arousal. There is a tendency not to understand what has happened and self-blame is common.

Short term: attempts to regain needs by strengthening bonds with others, making self–affirmations, taking control, maintaining cultural defense. This requires a great deal of energy and emotional exhaustion can occur.

Long Term: internalization of needs (self-imposed isolation, learned helplessness, low self-esteem, loneliness). It is perceived that no one really cares and that life has no real value compared to others.[46]

The foregoing research of social psychologists Williams and Zadro indicates that exclusion contains many variants, and may actually threaten survival. It has been discovered that it has the potential to have negative consequences on physiological, behavioral, psychological and emotional functioning. Overall, however, the common experience of exclusion seems to be alienation leading to loneliness. This opens the door

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[46] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 21.

for viewing exclusion as consisting of two basic categories. This is important for

understanding how exclusion can hinder a healthy perception of identity.

Two Basic Categories of Exclusion

An assessment of the research of Zadro and Williams demonstrates that exclusion

contains at least two basic categories: the external (communal) and the internal (personal)

aspects of exclusion. The external concerns how the individual is socialized in the world.

This may or may not have a significant effect on the individual. The internal pertains to

an individual's identification of self. A person may experience the reality of social

exclusion and grow accustomed to its actuality, but inwardly, may experience alienation

and loneliness. When the basic needs of belonging, acceptance, control, self-esteem, and

meaningful existence are threatened, a deep and personal suffering may be the result.

This will affect all psychological, sociological, and spiritual aspects of the individual.

Studying the intricate frameworks of both the external and the internal aspects of

exclusion for a Christian may, therefore, prove quite beneficial when considering both

those who exclude and those have been excluded. The following will clarify that the

identification of the individual in the social world may have a direct effect on personal

identity.

The External and the Internal Aspects of Exclusion

External - Fragmentation of Identity in Social World

Internal - Fragmentation of Personal Identity

Figure 3 The Communal and the Personal Aspects of Exclusion

External Aspects of Exclusion

The external aspect of exclusion involves the experience of being excluded socially. An individual may be a husband, brother, son, father, and teacher but may still be excluded. The external describes the socialization or lack thereof of a person in the social world. Regarding the perpetrators of exclusion, they may desire to secure power and control. This actually exposes a definite, inherent lack in the perpetrator because it reveals that there is a need to safeguard personal autonomy in order to strengthen personal identity. Zizioulas contends that perpetrators may feel as if their own sense of privacy and comfort with regard to the status quo is more important than embracing others. [47]

Internal Aspects of Exclusion

The second category proposed for exclusion involves dealing with the personal or internal reaction to exclusion. This may affect an individual's integration of self. For example, a lack of inclusion may affect esteem, ability to socialize, prayer life etc. For the one who is a victim of exclusion, a need to belong may be expressed. Being excluded may cause unbearable loneliness, as relational solidarity, which may have been hoped to be commonplace, is not. The person longs for something which is believed to be real but the individual is denied the experience. There is a sense of betrayal because of the obvious lack of community. The acute effects of this exclusion, however, have been largely misunderstood. As Zadro and Williams have discovered, reactions to exclusion over a long period are very detrimental to health and well being.

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[47] Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 1.

James J. Lynch expounds on the findings of Zadro and Williams, explaining that chronic experiences of exclusion by others may actually increase an individual's self-preservation efforts when threat is perceived. This can lead to a particular fight/flight response which may create physiological exhaustion. The person will begin to resist everyone who is met because it is believed that exclusion is inevitable. This triggers a desire to be separated from others on a continuous basis.[48] Lynch contends that in extreme cases, the prolonged communicative response to exclusion may lead eventually to "an increased sense of loneliness and social alienation, and ultimately to disease and premature death."[49] This concept of being excluded by others, therefore, warrants further attention.

The following illustration delineates the inclusion-exclusion continuum. The diagram exposes the extremities of inclusion and exclusion experienced as a direct result of the acceptance or rejection of a social group. The group is in an obvious position of power with regard to the sense of placement for the individual and could even represent a small group or the congregation of an entire church. It is obvious from the diagram that the effects of exclusion could be devastating. Concerning perpetrators of exclusion, there is often a failure to discern the practice of excluding others, and just how much a victim may be affected. The inclusion-exclusion continuum, however, demonstrates that an individual could be affected gravely by acts of non-acceptance.

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[48] Lynch, *A Cry Unheard*, 6.
[49] Lynch, *A Cry Unheard*, 6.

The Inclusion–Exclusion Continuum

MAXIMUM INCLUSION	ACTIVE INCLUSION	PASSIVE INCLUSION	AMBIVALENCE	PASSIVE EXCLUSION	ACTIVE EXCLUSION	MAXIMUM EXCLUSION
Group actively recruits member	Group welcomes member	Group allows member to join	Group neither accepts or rejects individual	Group ignores person	Group avoids person	Group rejects or ostracizes person
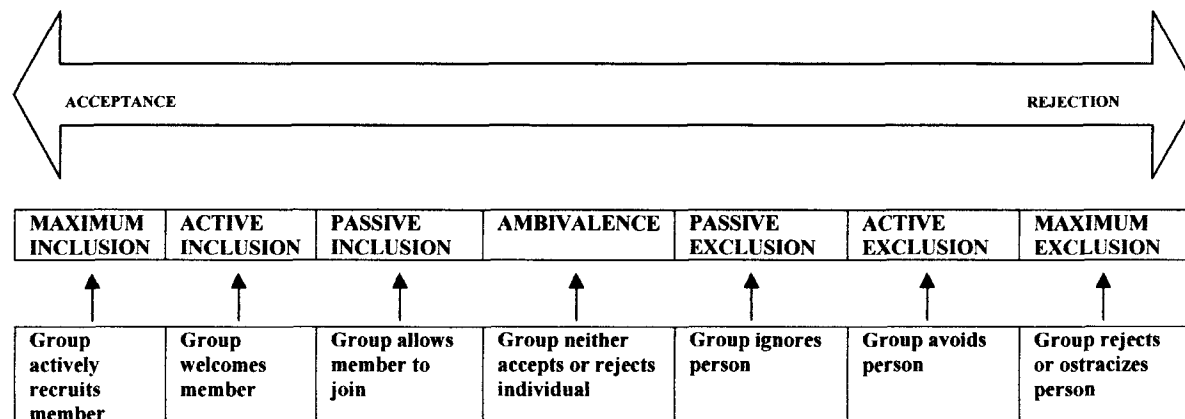
Figure 4 The inclusion–exclusion continuum.[50]

The central propositions of the continuum are as follows:

- People desire to belong to groups that enjoy distinct and positive identities.
- Social identification with certain groups leads to activities that are congruent with the group's collective identity and that foster stereotypical perceptions of self and others.
- Through social comparison between the in-group and out-group, in-group members will make an effort to maintain or achieve superiority over an out-group in some dimensions.
- The mere categorization of individuals, either voluntary or assigned, is all that is necessary to create in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination.
- Those who belong to groups with higher perceived social status will accept and include people they consider to be like them, while excluding and discriminating against those they perceive to be different from them.[51]

Exclusion of others often occurs when groups become a comfort zone for individuals. A need to belong is understood to be met when people are familiar and of 'like-kind' but the need to belong may not be satisfied entirely. Inclusion in a group of 'like-kind' may actually camouflage a much deeper need to belong. Finding identity in

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[50] Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 61. This diagram has been extracted from Leary's work, "Responses to social exclusion," 221–29.

[51] Mor Barak, "Social Psychological Perspectives," 245. The source is based on the work of Tajfel. *Differentiation Between Social Groups*, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Inter-Group Behavior," 7–24; and Turner, *Rediscovering the Social Group*, 1987.

social relationships may prove to be untrustworthy, however, as perceptions may change

concerning who is 'in' and who is 'out.'

All of the research conducted by Zadro and Williams may be found within the

continuum. People may be excluded on any particular point of the scale and the reasons

discovered for excluding others may always be in flux. People who feel part of an in-

group at one time may find themselves excluded at another time due to something new.

The hidden rules governing an understanding of difference may change as someone is no

longer perceived to be part of an in-group. Someone going through a divorce, recent

widowhood, or physical/mental disablement may experience being moved from the in-

group to the out-group. This experience is often very disturbing for the one who still feels

very much a part of the in-group. Donelson R. Forsyth says, "When individuals are

actively sought out by groups they experience maximal inclusion, and when groups

actively ostracize them people experience maximal exclusion."[52]

A theory which may explain intergroup relations is *social identity theory*.[53]

According to Michàlle Mor Barak, it "stands out as a mega-theory that can explain the

universal effects of social categorization and group membership regardless of the specific

type of group."[54] It is useful as a tool for explaining exclusion in human service

organizations and therefore is useful for understanding exclusion in the church.

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[52] Forsyth, *Group Dynamics*, 61.

[53] Regarding social identity theory Phillipa Pehi and John A. Hunter state, "Social identity theory was developed in an attempt to provide an explanation for the social psychology of intergroup relations and processes (particularly intergroup discrimination) that was non-individualistic and non–reductionist. This theory sought to account for many limitations of individual level theories such as the uniformity of group based social behavior and the diverse strategies used by group members across different situations." See, Pehi and Hunter, *Intergroup Discrimination and the Need to Belong*, 18.

[54] Mor Barak, "Social Psychological Perspectives," 244.

Social Identity Theory

SOCIAL STRUCTURES

INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

SOCIAL IDENTITY

DESIRE TO BELONG TO GROUPS THAT ENJOY DISTINCT AND POSITIVE IDENTITIES

SOCIAL COMPARISON BETWEEN IN-GROUP AND OUT-GROUP

IN-GROUP INCLUSION AND OUT-GROUP EXCLUSION
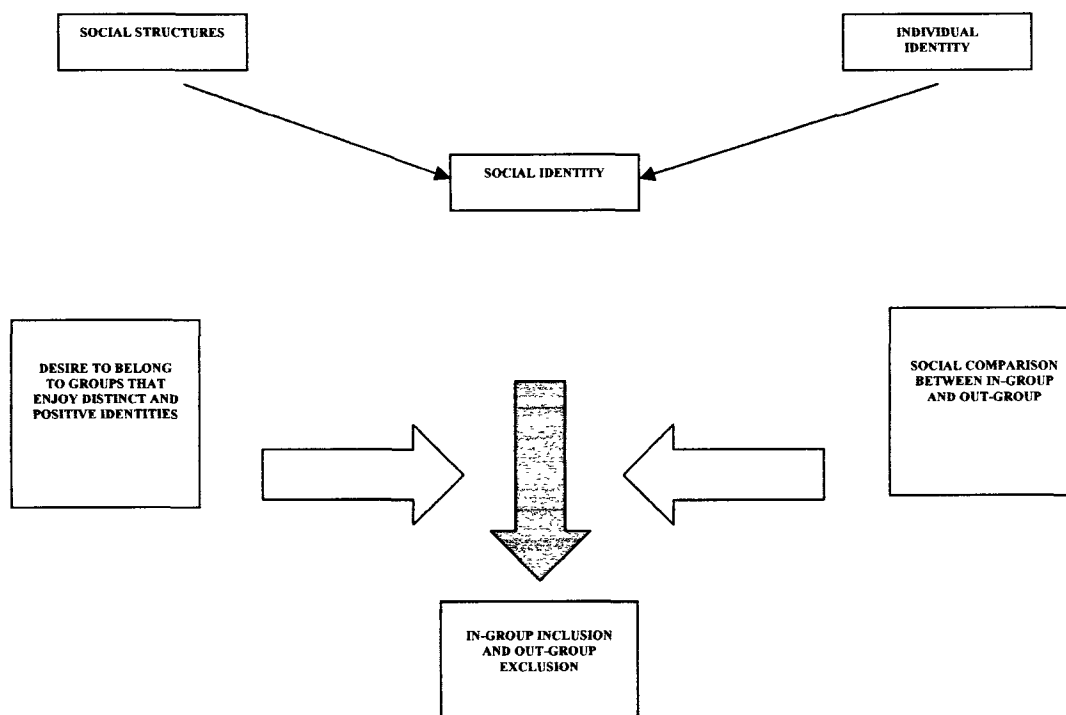
Figure 5 Basic Principles of Social Identity Theory[55]

Group based social behavior has permeated the church and the consequences of exclusion practiced within the church are clearly detrimental to those affected. The research involved in formulating the theoretical framework suggests that exclusion is linked to the distortion of a Christian's perception of identity and, therefore, basic meaning in the person's life. The need to belong is recognized as a strong influence on human behavior. Consequently, when the need is not being met, consequences must be anticipated and dealt with. Exploring the external and internal aspects of exclusion further will lead to even greater understanding.

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[55] Mor Barak, "Social Psychological Perspectives," 247.

Both External and Internal Aspects of Exclusion Reveal Alienation

When the reality of domination and control evident in the practice of exclusion (external) is compared to the isolation experienced as a victim of exclusion (internal), the common thread of alienation presents itself. Clearly, both the external and internal aspects of exclusion reveal alienation. This alienation implies a need to belong and that community is being yearned for.

Although alienation is a common thread, it does not have to be the end. There is such a need to belong and a yearning for community that, eventually, the silence in suffering will break, creating the possibility of narratives of resistance against the perpetrator or perpetrators of the exclusion. The following illustration serves to clarify:

Alienation: A Common Thread

**Social Exclusion
(External)**
_____   ➤ **Alienation**   **- a need to belong**
Self-Identification   **- a yearning for community**
(Internal)   **- narratives of resistance**

Figure 6 Alienation: A Common Thread

People are not always just going to suffer in silence concerning the church. The need to belong has a great deal to do with a person's sense of well–being. John Bowlby has stated,

> Intimate attachments to other human beings are at the hub around which a person's life revolves…From these intimate attachments a person draws the strength and enjoyment of life and, through what he contributes, he gives strength and enjoyment to others. These are matters about which current science and

traditional wisdom are at one.[56]

Bowlby's assessment is realistic and sound. There is an incredible need for Christians who have felt excluded to realize that they belong in the church. It is also essential for Christians who have excluded others to believe that the ones they have been excluding belong in the church. This may be realized through narratives of resistance but this is still not without its problems.

It may be difficult for those who have experienced alienation to give voice to their suffering. It will also be difficult for perpetrators of exclusion to welcome and include those whom they have never included before. This will necessitate a change in the way community is viewed. No longer is society's view of community valid for the church. This implies that a new understanding of community for the Christian will necessitate reaching out beyond the comfortable realm of privacy and insularity. If this does not happen, it is possible that those who have been excluded will desire eventually to 'usurp the perpetrator.' This may sound extreme but often occurs when people feel they have been excluded. Usurping the perpetrator may simply involve the sharing of feelings of alienation with others or voicing disapproval in some way. Or, it may involve choosing to avoid the perpetrator all together, criticizing and blaming the individual while developing an attitude of unforgiveness and bitterness. This action may influence others to exclude the perpetrator as they choose to take a stand against the injustice. In some instances, this will lead to exclusion being construed as cyclic unless narratives of resistance are able to encourage a different perspective. Without an end to exclusion, the victim may become the perpetrator and the perpetrator may become the victim, prolonging the exclusion. The

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[56] Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, 422.

following diagram illustrates this cyclical understanding:

The Potential Cyclical Nature of Exclusion

EXCLUSION   ALIENATION

USURP THE
PERPETRATOR   LONELINESS

NARRATIVES OF   YEARNING FOR
RESISTANCE   COMMUNITY
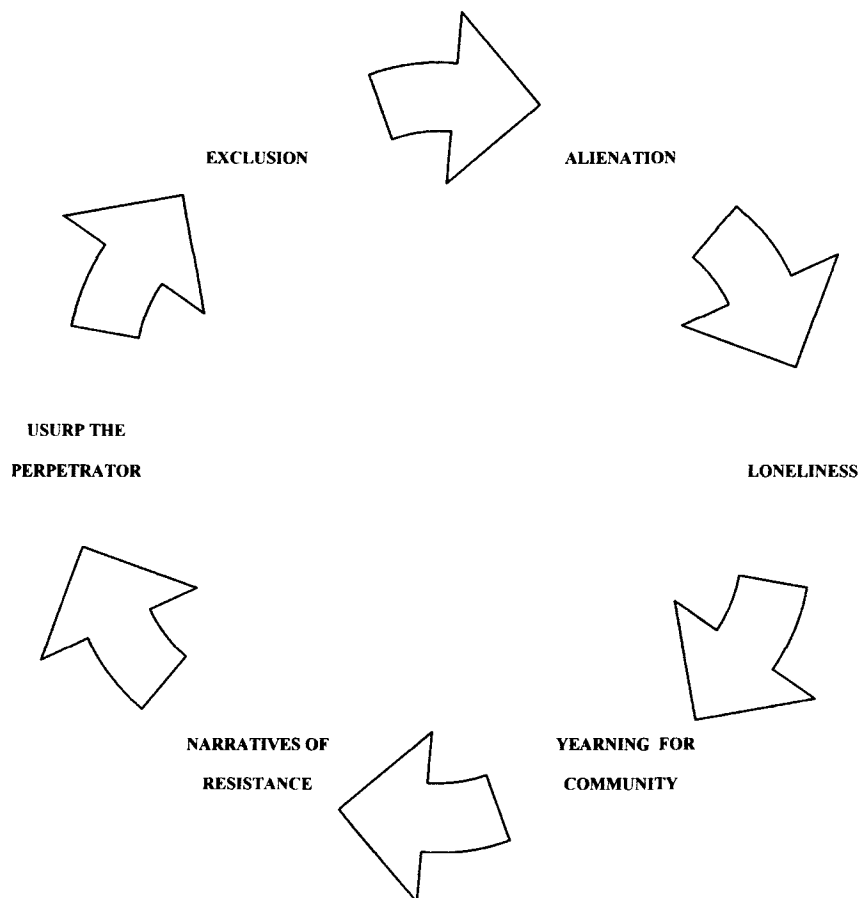
Figure 7 The potential cyclical nature of exclusion

Self-awareness and social responsibility are critical in any form of ministry to others but simply compelling Christians to do certain things so that the excluded will be included will never work. It is necessary that Christians understand that all have experienced alienation. An all-encompassing theology of Christ-centered community needs to be revealed if ministry to the excluded is to be authentic. In 2 Cor 5:15 Paul states, "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again." Alienation experienced as a direct result of

being excluded is the complete opposite of reconciliation. As personal situations become

narratives which resist the social definition of difference and abnormality, the church will

be presented with an opportunity to confront the cyclical nature of exclusion. This is

where a spirituality of presence is essential to recognize the fragmentation of present

community and the need for community to be more Christ-centered. According to

Richard R. Osmer, a spirituality of presence expresses,

> a spiritual orientation of attending to others in their particularity and otherness
> within the presence of God. The key term here is 'attending,' relating to others
> with openness, attentiveness, and prayerfulness. Such attending opens up the
> possibility of an I-Thou relationship in which others are known and encountered
> in all their uniqueness and otherness, a quality of relationship that ultimately
> depends on the communion-creating presence of the Holy Spirit.[57]

How is this possible in the midst of exclusion being practiced in the church? The

development of a pastoral theology of community is recognized as critical for

encouraging the inclusion of all Christians but a methodology must be chosen carefully to

enable the voices of the excluded to have a significant impact on pastoral theology. This

will influence the current understanding of the group dynamic within churches and raise

awareness concerning the need to allow the Holy Spirit to have greater influence.

Before concluding this section and choosing a method of research for this thesis,

it is necessary to present a brief outline of pastoral theology. This will help the reader

understand the need for pastoral theological interpretation in light of the experiences of

alienation because pastoral theology is assumed capable of providing comprehensive

insight with regard to the exclusion of others.

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[57] Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, 34.

Pastoral Theology: A Brief Introduction

Pastoral theology is a discipline which purports that its main objective is to care for people and to influence a greater orientation toward God in both the church and the culture. As a theological discipline it seeks to become incarnational while recognizing empowerment by the Spirit of God as participating in the mission of God. It utilizes four basic sources in its growth: scripture, tradition, reason, and experience thus enabling the integration of many other disciplines in its work and study.

Several important voices outline the various aspects of what pastoral theology both is and does. Derek Tidball asserts that pastoral theology seeks to bridge the gap between experience and truth, the subjective and the objective sides of faith, and between practice and scripture.[58] The discipline seeks to provide critical reflection on the foundational aspects of Christian life, placing it at the heart of applied theology. Thomas Oden adds that pastoral theology is also a form of systematic theology because of its systematic reflection on all aspects of ministry and their relationships to ministerial tasks.[59] He contends that, 'as theology,' the discipline considers the self–disclosure of God in scripture that is mediated through tradition, reflected upon by systematic thinking, and embodied in personal and social experience. It endeavors to provide clear definition to the ministerial tasks and to enable improved practice within the discipline on a continuous basis. Oden concludes that the discipline is 'pastoral,' because it desires to unite the theoretical with the practical, providing educated leadership throughout the experience of the consequences of God's self-disclosure to every Christian life.[60] It

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[58] Tidball, *Skilful Shepherds*, 8.
[59] Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, x.
[60] Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, x.

reflects fundamentally, therefore, on the social praxis of the Christian church pointing to

the formation of the Christian life, providing both meaning and transformation.

Seward Hiltner claims that pastoral theology concerns itself with the shepherding

aspect of ministry, calling it,

> that branch or field of theological knowledge and inquiry that brings the
> shepherding perspective to bear upon all operations and functions of the church
> and the minister, and then draws conclusions of a theological order from
> reflection on these observations.[61]

Hiltner spoke of the shepherding perspective as an attitude that is basic to the one who is

caring for another. He viewed this outlook as relational, because it is directed toward a

particular person or persons, and its basic content is tender, solicitous concern for those to

whom it is directed. The purpose of this perspective was to encourage love toward God

and others.[62] The shepherding perspective focused on both the church and its community

rather than on the particular duties of a pastor or individuals. In this regard effort was

being made by Hiltner to reduce the division between persons and society and encourage

a new 'relational' meaning to self-awareness. All of this is very helpful when confronting

the problem of exclusion in the church and for the development of a pastoral theology of

community. Having outlined briefly an understanding of pastoral theology it is now

essential to choose a methodology which is believed to be the most suitable for answering

the question concerning how a quality of relationship with one another which depends on

the communion-creating presence of the Holy Spirit can be encouraged. It is believed that

the revised critical correlation method may be the most suitable for this task.

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[61] Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology*, 20.
[62] Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology*, 18, 19.

The Revised Critical Correlation Method

One of the methodologies of pastoral theology is called the 'revised critical correlation method,' which is proposed as an appropriate methodology for this thesis. Regarding this method, Don Browning asserts, "Christian theology and cultural experience enter into a mutually 'critical' correlation."[63] In order to clarify the work of pastoral theology, concerning the topic of exclusion, for instance, implications for practice within the church involve "correlating the implications for practice of the central events of the Christian faith with the implications for practice of various expressions of individual and cultural visions and ideologies."[64] Elaine Graham contends that the Christian faith must engage its culture intentionally since the "fruits of human reason— scientific, artistic, socio-economic—offer raw material for divine disclosure." [65] The Christian faith needs to answer the questions of the culture.

There are two main forms of the revised critical correlation method of practical theology. The first is the apologetic, in which the Christian gospel must communicate relevantly, and second is the dialectical which uses reason and logic and sees God already at work in culture. [66] The revised critical correlation method specific to this thesis is understood to be a process of theological interpretation as correlation continues between pastoral theology and the human experience of alienation. Regarding exclusion and its experience of alienation theology must engage with contemporary culture.[67]

The revised critical correlation method assumes that the individual subject of

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[63] Browning, "Mapping the Terrain of Pastoral Psychology," 20.
[64] Browning, "Mapping the Terrain of Pastoral Psychology," 20.
[65] Graham, et al., *Theological Reflection: Methods*, 14.
[66] Graham, et al., *Theological Reflection: Methods*, 139.
[67] See Chopp, *Saving Work*, 1995 for a discussion of the critical correlation method. This is an adaptation of David Tracy's revised correlation method developed in *Blessed Rage for Order*, 1975.

theological reflection is a person from a particular background who comes to Christianity already influenced by numerous societal ideals. It also recognizes that 'talk about God' occurs in a specific time and place, stressing a community's placement in both culture and history.[68] The result is meant to encourage positive change through revelation and understanding concerning the development of a pastoral theology of community.

In this project the social sciences are recognized as being beneficial to pastoral theology because they are capable of enhancing an understanding of exclusion. They contribute toward a deeper and more insightful understanding of its basic nature. A hermeneutics of suspicion, however, operates within the revised critical correlation method. Swinton and Mowatt contend that it is necessary to be aware "of the reality of human fallenness and the complexity of the forces which shape and structure our encounters with the world."[69] There is a challenge to be aware of contemporary areas of critical correlation with the Gospel such as in regarding science and technology's view of what it means to be human. People have been inundated with all kinds of influences and need to develop a theological foundation.

Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward state, "The task of adult formation and nurture involves working with the inherent potential of all human creatures to know something of the divine, by virtue of their (God-given) faculties."[70] The revised critical correlation method, therefore, assumes that Christianity is to be conducted in public as well as experienced inwardly. This method recognizes that people dwell within a complex world which needs the permeation of the gospel.

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[68] Graham, et al., *Theological Reflection: Methods*, 138.
[69] Swinton and Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 76.
[70] Graham, et al., *Theological Reflection: Methods*, 139.

Don Browning suggests that the next step is to consider the nature of exclusion, implement the theory behind the practice, and consider Christian faith perspectives which are able to shed light on its complex nature.[71] The revised critical correlation approach for this thesis, therefore, will seek to associate the experiences of alienation with pastoral theology for addressing the problem of exclusion within the church.

Since the majority of this research involves an analysis of narratives of exclusion, utilizing narrative theology may also be viewed as a valuable addition to this research. It may be understood more concretely by first reviewing what is meant by narrative structuring and a core narrative. Meaning is derived from reflection concerning the stories of individuals and institutions in our environment. This is called 'narrative structuring' and, according to Lester, refers to "the mental process by which the raw data from the senses is organized into story form."[72] A person's sense of belonging and acceptance has a direct bearing on self–esteem. Kenneth and Mary Gergen, social psychologists, emphasize that narrative structuring seeks to establish a sense of coherence within an individual's identity.[73] In other words, a sense of self, for someone can be achieved through realizing that the personal stories of others' experiences are integrated with established core narratives.

Lester describes a core narrative as "the central interpretive theme that provides an individual (or system) with an overarching structure (composed of numerous smaller stories) that organizes and makes sense out of a particular aspect of our human

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[71] Browning, "Mapping the Terrain of Pastoral Psychology," 20.
[72] Lester, *The Angry Christian*, 95.
[73] Gergen and Gergen, "The Social Construction of Narrative Accounts," 174–75.

condition."[74] Narrative theory, in this regard, may recognize narrative theology as its overarching structure. Stanley Hauerwas asserts, "God is a particular agent that can be known only as we know [God's] story."[75]

The gospel is identified as a sacred story, providing the narrative account of God's revelation of Jesus Christ. Throughout scripture, it is evident that God has been working in human history to restore all people and all of creation to completeness and, therefore, a narrative approach to theology describes how people form their religious experiences into stories of faith.[76] These stories are acknowledged through the testimonies of those who are in relationship with God.[77]

This next chapter will encourage the centrality of a theology of alienation in a person's life. Prior to examining the stories of those who have experienced the alienation and loneliness caused by exclusion, it is essential to introduce this theology. This is important for six reasons. First, this current chapter has revealed that central to the human experience of alienation is a perceptive self understanding which requires a theological foundation and framework.

Second, a robust theology of community requires careful examination of the underside of where community is broken. Instead of surmising that the only reasons for excluding others are psychological or sociological, it is crucial to understand that alienation can also be looked at theologically.

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[74] Lester, *The Angry Christian*, 96.
[75] Hauerwas, "Story and Theology," 347.
[76] Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 40.
[77] Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 40–41.

Third, if a typology of exclusion is to be developed in chapter three from published narratives of exclusion, this necessitates theological reflection on the core biblical theme of alienation.

Fourth, the perceived lack of inclusion within the North American evangelical church warrants the centrality of a theology of alienation if a pastoral theology of community is ever to be realized.

Fifth, it is important to make some theological sense out of alienation because it may be instrumental in creating sacred space where faith can become known. Alienation has been experienced by every Christian prior to their conversion and without the experience of alienation from God; individuals would never come to Christ. Understanding the need for ongoing realized reconciliation with God will open the door for encouraging resistance against the injustice evident in the lives of those experiencing alienation. Developing a theology of alienation, therefore, will help both perpetrators and victims understand what may be lacking theologically in the current state of community.

Sixth, God is familiar with alienation and as Kenneth E. Eberhard said, "Far from being a sickness to be cured, or a state of mind to be avoided, alienation is the human experience of a transcendent God."[78] Christ understood what it meant to be forsaken and alone and lives in solidarity with the alienation of humankind. Isa 53:1–7; Mk 15:34; and Mt 27:46 affirm this. Not only does he live in solidarity with each individual but he has also provided the means of reconciliation with self, others, and God. The theology of alienation in the following chapter will set the stage for narratives of exclusion in chapter three.

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[78] Eberhard, *The Alienated Christian*, 14.

CHAPTER TWO

A THEOLOGY OF ALIENATION

A theology of alienation is important as a root idea which describes the common experience of exclusion. This chapter will seek to disclose both humanity's alienation from God and the biblical motif of reconciliation to God. These form the foundation for a deeper understanding of the practices of exclusion which often occur in human relationships. Contending with the issues that 'difference' brings is a challenge for the church in North America. A theology of alienation is needed, therefore, to understand exclusion more fully and to offer a way forward—one that will serve as the foundation for a pastoral theology of community.

Alienation from God which began in the Garden of Eden and its implications throughout human life are important for the development of a theology of alienation. This does not mean that alienation from God and alienation experienced within self because of exclusion are the same. The experience of being alienated from God because of sin is similar in some respects to the experience of being alienated from self and others. Christian relationships are less than perfect because of the presence of sin in the world. Society can also have a significant impact upon both perpetrators and victims of exclusion. What this implies is that alienation may be experienced by all people and needs to be understood in this regard.[79]

Originally, people were created for community and, as already discussed, this

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[79] *The New Penguin English Dictionary* defines the verb alienate as follows: to make hostile or indifferent, especially where attachment existed formerly or to cause something to be withdrawn from or a feeling of apathy towards a person's former attachments or society in general. See Robert Allen ed., "Alienate, Alienation," in *The New Penguin English Dictionary*, 1st Ed., 31.

community is modeled perfectly in the Holy Trinity. The Trinity can teach people a great deal about relationships with others. Within the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the desire to include the other comes from being united. Within the Trinity, the 'other' is not considered different and is never perceived as a threat. In other words, the ability to be united with another is absolute. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are different but there is never any confusion or strangeness with the other. Zizioulas puts it simply, stating, "…communion does not threaten otherness, it generates it."[80] Humans have been created in the image of this relational God and therefore were created for community (Gen 1:26–27). Relationships, however, have been disrupted at every level because of the experience of alienation.

Alienation has been given multiple meanings by numerous theological thinkers engaged in the study of the scriptures. Many scholars agree that alienation is a word filled with mystery and one that is difficult to define.[81] Gerald Sykes, who wrote a two-volume anthology on alienation, refused to define the term. He claimed that alienation was best treated as a mystery which would only be revealed gradually as people immersed themselves in their own experience of alienation and participated in the alienation of others.[82] Greater understanding of the effects of alienation may be possible through an examination of individualism and personhood by scholars Vladimir Lossky and Christos Yannaras.

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[80] Zizioulas, *Communion & Otherness*, 5.

[81] According to Richard Schacht, many authors refer to alienation differently. See Schacht, *Alienation*, 160 –75, 194–96, 237–48. Any hope of finding a common denominator is believed to be difficult. This thesis will differentiate between exclusion and alienation. Exclusion will be understood as a practice committed by a perpetrator, and alienation, as the experience of being excluded.

[82] Sykes, *Alienation*, xiii.

Individualism and Personhood

Vladimir Lossky, a Russian eastern orthodox theologian, emphasized in his writings that the primary symptom of sin is separation and divided being. He understood that a *person* contained the whole but as an *individual*, a human being was only a part of the whole. He asserted, therefore, that original sin caused human nature to become divided. Human nature became split and broken forming many individuals. Lossky asserted that human beings were left with a double character: as individual natures they were part of a whole, part of the elements which make up the universe; but as persons they could not be considered a part of the whole because personhood implies that all is contained within.[83]

It was Lossky's contention that all individual beings are affected by original sin (Gen 1–2). He claimed that this was where human nature lost its likeness to divine nature. Lossky emphasized that Adam and Eve became two separate natures and therefore two individual beings having external relationships between themselves. Lossky alleged that the Fall of humankind made it impossible to "know the person, the human hypostasis in its true condition, free from alloy."[84]

In the state of sin there are limits which prevent knowledge about each other. Persons are known only through individuals and as individuals.[85] This has potential to shed light on the reason for the exclusion of others. People become objects which are then placed into mental categories for assessment and review by others. If a person is classed as 'different' or 'abnormal' they are not given the same value as others.

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[83] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 123.
[84] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 121.
[85] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 123.

Personhood has been replaced by individuality. Christos Yannaras, a Greek

philosopher, contends that as the separation progresses, there is ever deepening

fragmentation and alienation as humankind weakens in relationship and communion with

God. Humankind becomes independent and self-sufficient. Sin takes even deeper roots

when an individual renounces the possibility of participation in true life—the personal

manner of existence and identity which is found only in God.[86] When people reject the

call to return to the place of communion with God, the place of true identity, they pursue

independence. As a result of being alienated from God, people become alienated from

themselves which leads eventually to alienation from 'others.' Yannaras states,

> The 'other' is always an affirmation of the inescapable fragmentation of our
> nature. Every 'other' is an immediate testimony to the person's inability to
> overcome the dynamic impulse towards the fragmentation of human nature into
> individual, autonomous units: the 'other' is my condemnation to be the bearer of
> an individual or natural will for survival.[87]

This condemnation represents the "feverish history of humankind, subject to the

instinctive, natural need for independent survival."[88] This understanding is enacted in the

parable of the prodigal son found in Luke 15:11–32 which is worth visiting at this time

because it is capable of shedding light on the experience of alienation and personhood.

The parable demonstrates that the experience of alienation can actually draw people to

self, others, and God. Henri Nouwen said that it contains:

> ...not only the heart of the story that God wants to tell me but also the heart of the
> story that I want to tell to God and God's people. All of the gospel is there. All of
> my life is there. All of the lives of my friends is there...a mysterious window
> through which I can step into the Kingdom of God. It is like a huge gate which
> allows me to move to the other side of existence and look from there back into the

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[86] Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, 29–30.
[87] Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, 30–32.
[88] Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality*, 31.

odd assortment of people and events that make up my daily life.[89]

The parable of the prodigal son is able to inform lives, answering questions concerning alienation. It answers questions concerning how situations materialize and what direction is needed. It is capable of shedding light on alienation because it has the power to illuminate the reality of human life, as people are willing to be identified as prodigal sons and daughters. Henri Nouwen said,

> For many years I tried to get a glimpse of God by looking carefully at the varieties of human experience: loneliness and love, sorrow and joy, resentment and gratitude, war and peace. I sought to understand the ups and downs of the human soul, to discern there a hunger and a thirst that only a God whose name is Love could satisfy. I tried to discover the lasting beyond the passing, the eternal beyond the temporal, the perfect love beyond all paralyzing fears, and the divine consolation beyond the desolation of human anguish and agony.[90]

What Nouwen realized in his struggle was that his true home, his place of welcome and rest, was only to be found in God. John 14: 23 says, "Jesus answered him, 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.'" The problem which hinders finding true home in God, however, is sin.[91] The following will illustrate this claim.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

In the parable, the younger son asserts his autonomy and requests his inheritance on order to leave home. I. H. Marshall contends that the younger son was probably in his late teens because he was still single.[92] This does not imply, however, that a desire for autonomy is restricted to the youth. It may simply denote immaturity or a lack of wisdom concerning the gravity of the request. It is of interest, though, that the son desired his

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[89] Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 15, 16.
[90] Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 16.
[91] Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 16.
[92] Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 607.

father's inheritance before the father's death. Darrel L. Bock explains this request for the inheritance meant that the son was requesting to extract 'the life' that his home represented.[93]

Bock claims that estates were usually not divided until the father's death. According to Jewish law, the younger son would have received one-third of the father's estate (Deut 21:17).[94] Kenneth E. Bailey argues, however, that the request of the son implies that the son had no respect for the father and no valued relationship with him because asking for the inheritance early implied that the father was already dead.[95] It is obvious that the son wanted to sever all ties and to go his own way. In relation to what Lossky and Yannaras suggested the youngest son could be viewed as abandoning his 'true home' in God because of sin.

The father granted the young son's request only to experience the departure of his youngest. Bailey asserts that the suffering of the father in the beginning of the parable has no apparent effect on the son.[96] The son was oblivious to all of the love that had been shown him growing up and everything that could have implied belonging and community in his life was discounted. As a result, the prodigal believed that his way was the best way. Proverbs 14:12 states, "There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death." Having extracted 'the life' from his home he was to face nothing but hardship.

The son left the home of his father and converted all of his inheritance to cash. He was living an undisciplined, wild life and squandered the money recklessly. Luke 15:30

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[93] Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1309.
[94] Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 1309.
[95] Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 165.
[96] Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal*, 69, 70.

speaks of the son's association with prostitutes. The son enjoyed his life in the beginning when he had money and it was only when the son came to poverty and famine that he sought employment. However, the only employment he found was working for a Gentile, feeding pigs. Bock says, "This was the most dishonorable work for a Jew, since pigs were unclean animals" (Lev. 11:7; Deut 14:8; Isa 65:4; 66:17).[97] Bock asserts that the son had taken the lowest job possible and that no Jew would have wanted it. It is clear that the youngest son was willing to take whatever he could get.[98] It is interesting, however, that the job was not capable of meeting the prodigal's needs and there was no one to help him. The son was reduced to coveting the food of an unclean animal and finally came to himself (Luke 15:17). Nouwen said, "He was shocked into the awareness of his utter alienation and suddenly understood that he had embarked on the road to death. He had become so disconnected from what gives life...that he realized that death would be the natural next step."[99]

This caused him to begin to rediscover his deepest self, his personhood, and to recognize how his own sin had caused him to abandon his true home. This began the process of his conversion. Wayne A. Meeks contends that conversion stories are often idealized. The 'about face' is often thought of as instantaneous but it is essential to realize that in reality lives take time to change.[100] The prodigal was only just beginning to realize the state of others and that his father's hired hands were better off than he was. T. W. Manson points out that the prodigal saw that the servants had plenty and, therefore, his

[97] Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1311.
[98] Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1311.
[99] Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 48.
[100] Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality*, 23.

own father was recognized as a better master than the one he had.[101] He had not appreciated the blessings of his home and Bock contends that the prodigal knew he had forfeited all privileges concerning sonship and inheritance. The prodigal believed that it was better to throw himself upon the mercy of his father rather than continuing to live in squalor.[102] He had reached the "bottom line of his identity."[103] Upon reaching the bottom line, he "hit the bedrock of his sonship."[104] He realized that he belonged to someone.

The son had everything planned concerning his confession and realized that he had no claims. Bock says that this is "what repentance looks like: no claims, just reliance on God's mercy and provision."[105] As the son was heading toward the home of his father, however, the father came to meet him, showing mercy, compassion, and love. The son was accepted back into the family without having to say a word to his father and yet he chose to offer his confession of humility. The son was now willing to serve.

Bailey asserts that the son needed to witness a demonstration of the father's suffering. Without witnessing this demonstration, the hardened son would never have understood that he was the cause of the broken relationship. Without the father's visible demonstration of suffering, the prodigal would have returned to the house as a servant and the prodigal may have succumbed to the self-righteousness evident in the older brother, who was living a life alienated from self, others, and God, even though he had remained in the house of his father.[106]

Concerning the mercy and forgiveness shown by the father to the son, this was

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[101] Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 288.
[102] Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1313.
[103] Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 49.
[104] Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 49.
[105] Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1313.
[106] Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal*, 69, 70.

essential for the son's realization of his need of this love. Bailey said, "Without this visible demonstration of costly love, there could have been no reconciliation. Isn't this the story of the way God deals with the sin of the world on the cross?"[107] The children of God, have been given freedom by the Father, who loves unconditionally, regardless of whether there is obedience or disobedience, consecration or defiance, faithfulness or presumption. Atonement has been made and relationship with the Father restored through Christ.

A Theology of Alienation Derived from the Parable

The parable of the prodigal son demonstrates that sin is linked closely to alienation. Sin causes alienation from true self and causes denial concerning the humanity of others. Clive Marsh states, "Where humanity is denied people become isolated, marginalized, or are treated as non-persons."[108] Decisions are often made to exclude others out of a longing to please selfish desires, as is recognized in the parable when the younger son leaves his father and brother, yet, the perpetrator of exclusion in the parable, living in a state of alienation from self, others, and God is able to recognize the depths of alienation as he is brought to himself, acknowledging sin and his need to repent. Therefore, living the experience of alienation may be a common reality for all perpetrators and victims of exclusion. Sin alienates from self, others, and God and there seems to be gradual movement from being a perpetrator to becoming a victim—the youngest son excluded his family only to experience alienation.

Those experiencing alienation may recognize lack, become aware of limitation, and speculate reasons and causes for the lack of relationships. Marsh says, "It is precisely

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[107] Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal*, 69, 70.
[108] Marsh, *Christ in Focus: Radical Christocentrism in Christian Theology*, 194.

because of this consciousness of sin and its consequences that God's gracious availability and God's power to work on their behalf are clear to them."[109] What this reveals is that alienation demonstrates both lack and opportunity. It involves great suffering and yet is not without hope.

There is a clear correlation that can be made between the alienation that Jesus was willing to experience and the alienation experienced by every human. The Son of God became a prodigal, experienced alienation, so that all humans, made prodigals because of sin, could experience the love of the Father. The display of love on the cross was for humanity to see just how far God would go to be reconciled to his own. Karl Barth said, "It has reference to us in Jesus Christ."[110] Christians have been reconciled to God through Christ and have become the true image of God in Christ only because Jesus experienced the utmost alienation.

Nouwen commented that,

Seeing Jesus himself as the prodigal son goes far beyond the traditional interpretation of the parable. Nonetheless, this vision holds a great secret. I am gradually discovering what it means to say that my sonship and the sonship of Jesus are one, that my home and the home of Jesus are one. There is no journey to God outside of the journey that Jesus made. The one who told the story of the prodigal is the Word of God, "through whom all things came into being." He "became flesh, lived among us," and made us part of his fullness.[111]

It is imperative for Christians to experience the alienation that Jesus experienced and to realize the curse that was placed upon him for the sake of humanity's redemption. If people allow their own selves to experience Christ's alienation and rejection they can be identified as the elect and sanctified but this does not imply a fullness or completion of

[109] Marsh, *Christ in Focus: Radical Christocentrism in Christian Theology*, 193.
[110] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 740–41.
[111] Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 56.

conversion. It does not mean that embarking on a spiritual journey of faith with Christians is unnecessary. There is a need to participate daily in what Christ has done and to realize the acceptance and inclusion of the Father of all who would come to him.

There is often a failure to realize that the inclusion and welcome of others reflects directly the salvation that Jesus has provided. His love for humanity far exceeded his own desire to have the cup of suffering removed from him. Life is filled with suffering and struggle but there is a need to love others and to journey together in faith.

Having reviewed Lossky's and Yannaras's version of the effects of sin and the creation of 'otherness,' the parable of the prodigal son, and reconciliation with God made possible through Christ, alienation is caused by sin. Sin alienates people from God and others and the experience of alienation only remains after conversion as Christians fail to realize that their identity is found only in Christ. Society tempts individuals into thinking that it can offer meaning and fulfillment through the development of agency but, as the prodigal discovered, true identity is only found in reconciliation with God. It is in this reconciliation that participation with God is carried out in a life of interacting with others. The prodigal son was returning to a place which he had undervalued previously. He had demanded the inheritance of his father and squandered it. He had left his brother behind and would now need to cultivate new relationships, working toward reconciliation with all whom he had abandoned. He would have to learn how to extend forgiveness and mercy. No longer could his own will dominate his life feeding a sense of superiority but he could only yield to the will of his father as a direct response to the mercy he had been shown. Nouwen said, "Mercy comes from a compassionate heart; it comes from a desire to be an equal. Jesus didn't want to look down on us. He wanted to become one of us and

feel deeply with us."[112] Nouwen added,

> There are no divisions in Jesus' heart, no double motives or secret intentions. In Jesus there is complete inner unity because of his complete unity with God. Becoming like Jesus is growing into purity of heart. That purity is what gave Jesus and will give us true spiritual vision.[113]

This takes time. Any experience of alienation is a result of the effects of sin which has succeeded in fragmenting identity and implies that reconciliation with God is not recognized fully. Even Christians can revert to becoming autonomous individuals, objectifying others rather than embracing them as persons. Experiences of alienation, as a direct result of exclusion, reveal that 'otherness' and 'difference' are accepted and common and that the true depths of reconciliation with God through Christ have not been understood or experienced. The Holy Spirit is needed to reveal Christ who has ended the experience of alienation in the lives of individuals. Returning to Christ and finding true home in God, therefore, is the only answer for the current state of alienation which is often experienced in both the perpetrator and victim of exclusion. If community is to be realized, reconciliation is warranted between self, others, and God and this is only possible through returning to Christ and understanding that this implies 'seeing' others and participating in life with them.

Having articulated a theology of alienation this thesis will now examine published narratives of exclusion in chapter three. These narratives will have a pedagogical quality which is meant to help the church understand its current state of fragmented community. Hearing the stories from various categories of exclusion will help the church get a

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[112] Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, May 28.
[113] Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, May 29.

glimpse of the suffering taking place when community is idealized. Therefore, utilizing the stories, as 'teaching narratives,' is hoped to accomplish three key elements. First, the reader will become aware of what exclusion looks like up close and personal and what alienation feels like through story. It will emerge from being a mental concept to actualized lived experiences.

The second key element in chapter three will be the creation of greater awareness with regard to why exclusion may be happening in the church. It has been discovered that alienation from true self is the root cause. While a deep and insightful theology of alienation is essential, structures in society have had direct bearing on the propensity to exclude others. People are often unconscious of bias toward others and society has taught individuals that some people are more worthy and deserve to be privileged. The reader will be given an opportunity to reflect upon Zadro and Williams' social psychological analysis of exclusion as well as the scriptures describing the normative identity of Christians which were laid out in the theoretical framework.

The third key element in this chapter will be the proposal of a typology of exclusion. The narratives will fall under types of exclusion which are common in the North American evangelical church. They will expose elements of suffering and exclusion will be recognized for its complex nature, as patterns become apparent regarding the overlapping of the various types. The overlap will reveal the complexity of exclusion and the effects of alienation. The narratives will, therefore, set the stage for a theology of loneliness in chapter four.

CHAPTER THREE

NARRATIVES OF EXCLUSION: A PASTORAL TYPOLOGY

In this chapter specific realities of exclusion will be explored concretely by

reflecting on narratives of exclusion. This is an important dimension of pastoral theology

as the "everydayness of faith"[114] is examined. These compelling accounts of exclusion or

'teaching narratives' assist with understanding the various experiences of exclusion that

are encountered commonly in the church. Narratives of exclusion expose the reality of

'otherness' and 'difference' being conceptualized. The ways people express

themselves—the words they choose—reveal the depths of alienation that is being

experienced. Their voices articulate dimensions of suffering which welcome meaningful

responses but many Christians continue to struggle alone.

Loving one another does not come naturally and Miroslav Volf asserts that the

mere forming of a judgment is deemed an act of exclusion. He says that strong

disagreement with lifestyle, belief-system, or a course of action, can be understood to be

exclusionary.[115] There are times when the church may need to judge actions, as discipline

is sometimes required, but regarding less critical issues, the church has borrowed

generally from the culture's problems with 'difference,' and has developed a 'comfort

zone'—a solidarity regarding exclusion. The published narratives included in this chapter

will make it clear that a pastoral theology of community is needed to encourage the

inclusion of all Christians.

Before narratives are examined, it is necessary to provide a theological alternative

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[114] Patton, *From Ministry to Theology: Pastoral Action and Reflection*, 42.
[115] Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, 67.

for viewing both practices of exclusion and experiences of alienation. A theology of alienation was developed in chapter two and it was realized that alienation from true self is the root cause of exclusion and that Christ has enabled reconciliation with the Father. Therefore, it is essential to realize the spheres from which exclusion is practiced and from which the experiences of alienation occur. It is critical that the church understands how the self is influenced and to be able to provide a means of discerning what is taking place.

God is often perceived as transcendent. Realizing God's presence within the spheres of reference and relationality, as well as in the over-arching heavenly sphere, holds the potential for further understanding of God's desire to participate in the formation of self and relationships with others. Understanding that reconciliation with self, others, and God is possible only by the grace of God will encourage a new perspective of community. God is often viewed solely in a religious setting or in the personal belief system of individuals, but viewing God as over-arching all of life as well as participating in all of life will encourage greater solidarity among Christians.

The following diagram will illustrate the horizons of relational identity. The analytic strategy for examining the narratives of exclusion will utilize this diagram thus enabling a mapping of the identified types of exclusion. It will be revealed through the 'teaching narratives' that will follow that the various spheres of reference and relationality examined are found to be nested within one another. What this implies is that the identity of the self is negotiated in relation to the 'other' on numerous levels at the same time. The following diagram will illustrate this notion.

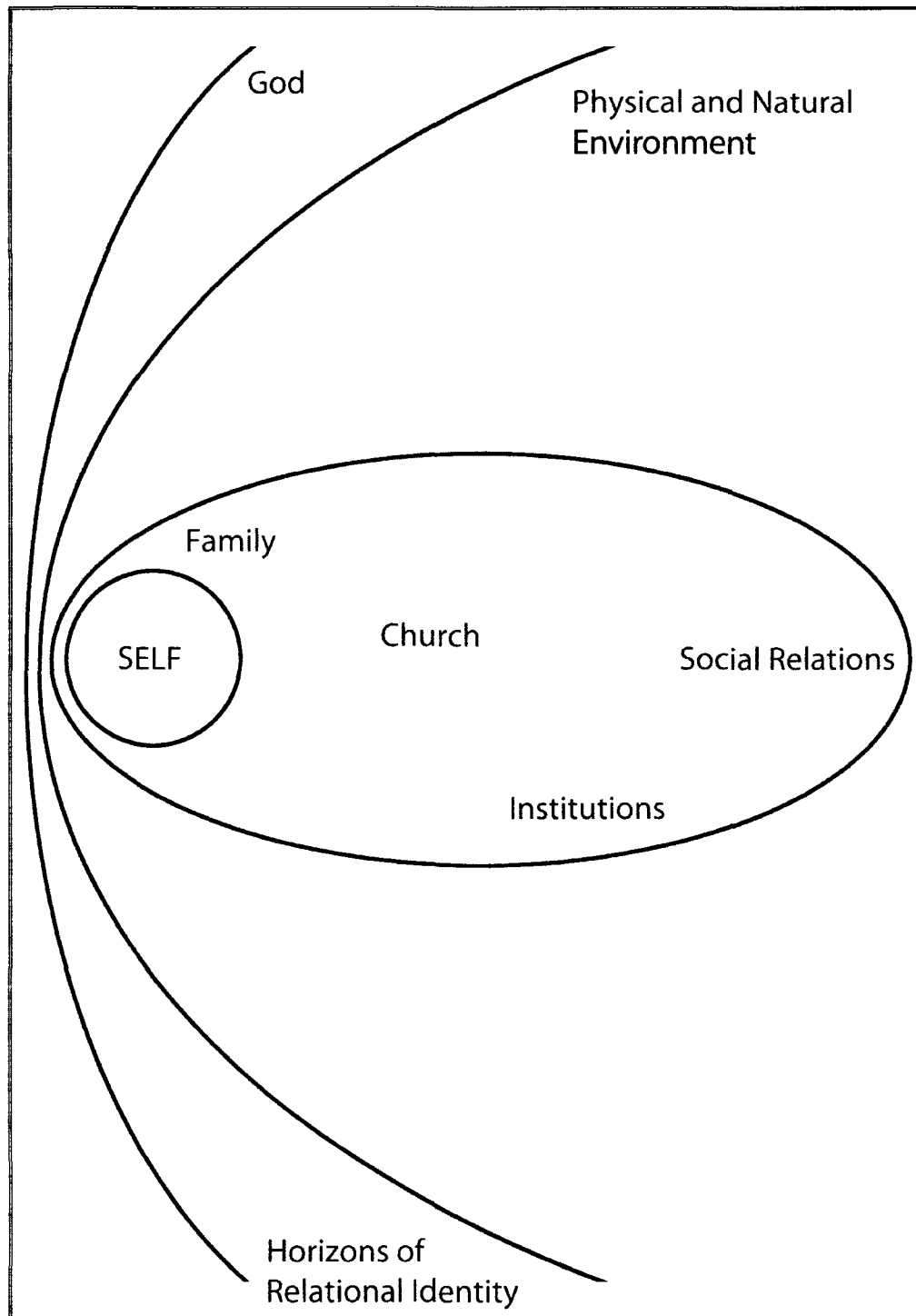**Horizons of Relational Identity**

Figure 8 Horizons of Relational Identity (Donated by Artist–Dr. Michael Knowles)

The self is often confronted with fragmented relations involving church,

institutions, social relations (friends and acquaintances), and family resulting from the practice of exclusion. This will become obvious as the 'teaching narratives' reveal ageism, divorce, widowhood, depression, a 'dark night of the soul,' disability, racial discrimination, gender inequality, class discrimination, and homelessness. In contrast, as recognized in the development of a theology of alienation, the over-arching God sphere offers the promise of a new self, identified in Christ. While the broader context includes more limited sets of relationships within itself, it will become apparent in the 'teaching narratives' that when God is the largest, most inclusive category, a changed relationship with God through Christ could necessitate a changed relationship with literally everything that involves God.

Utilizing the revised critical correlation method will involve a process of theological interpretation as correlation is made with pastoral theology and the human experience of alienation. In general, the analysis of the narratives will rely on the theoretical propositions which have influenced the choice of particular published narratives, but it is necessary to build a descriptive rather than prescriptive framework around which the narratives are organized so that a clearly defined typology of exclusion is understood. The following section will, therefore, examine four types of exclusion: Type 1: Relational Brokenness; Type 2: Spiritual Disruption; Type 3: Social Ostracism; Type 4: Self-Alienation. In each section narratives of exclusion will be explored with commentary in order to provide teaching concerning the deeper experiences of each type.[116]

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[116] Psychologists Ruthellen Josselson, Amia Lieblich, and Dan P. McAdams, state emphatically "Relationships are central, from the very beginning of and throughout life, to the constitution and expression of the self." See Josselson et al., "Introduction,"3. Distinguishing self from other and

Type 1: Relational Brokenness

Relational brokenness implies the disintegration of relationships affected by discrimination, age, divorce, jealousy, unforgiveness, neglect, rape, abuse, disinterest, hate, miscommunication etc. but it may also imply a disintegration of relationship with God. Something is amiss when relationships become broken. It is possible that a distorted relationship with God, or lack thereof, has caused alienation from self, thus affecting relationships with others.

Causes of relational brokenness from a solely psycho-social perspective may be associated with a distorted understanding of love, commitment, forgiveness, suffering etc with consequences affecting self-esteem, security, economy, peace, etc. From a theological perspective, however, the cause may be associated with a lack of relationship with God, preventing the ability to be someone that the Holy Spirit can work through in order to minister to others. This causes alienation from others, as demonstrated in the inclusion/exclusion continuum and from the research results of Zadro and Williams. It may be argued that this category is similar to social exclusion but it will be obvious that relational brokenness often implies a personal perpetrator affecting a personal victim. Social exclusion more often demonstrates a communal perpetrator and therefore communal victims. Relationships break down as a direct result of practices of exclusion and this is a common personal experience for seniors in many churches where the

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understanding how self creates, and is created, has challenged philosophers and social scientists in post modernity. Agency, or personal power/governance, has been privileged in the past over communion because agency and dealings of the self have been easier to understand. This is because agency is considered more accessible to language than the flux of experience that is evident in relationship. A theory told from the point of view of agency emphasizes "movement toward action, competence, and individuation. The same theory cannot illuminate compassion of care or the capacity to love, which are not states of doing but of being–with." See Josselson et al., "Introduction,"3.

concentration is often on the 'youth.'

Narratives of Aging

'Ageism' is age prejudice and this term was coined by gerontologist Robert Butler in 1969. He discovered that the concept of ageism originated in community action where it was obvious that the elderly were being discriminated against, simply because of age. In an affluent city in Maryland for instance, opposition arose concerning amenities in apartment dwellings such as swimming pools, air conditioning, and parking for the elderly. The middle-aged local residents felt that the elderly did not need these luxuries and that the younger age group could make better use of the premises.[117] This is a good illustration that ageism is a harsh reality in North American society. John G. Bruhn makes some excellent points to this effect. He states,

1. Ageism generates and reinforces a fear and denigration of the aging process and opens the door for stereotyping.

2. Ageism legitimates the use of age to differentiate classes of people who are denied resources and opportunities that people in younger age groups enjoy.

3. Ageism suggests that older people are less competent, dependent, and in need of protection.

4. Evidence of ageism in health care delivery and in the attitudes of health care professionals has been well documented. The incurable, chronically ill, elderly represent the limitations of medicine and many medical professionals view their illnesses as unchallenging.[118]

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[117] Bruhn, *The Sociology of Community Connections*, 149.
[118] Bruhn, *The Sociology of Community Connections*, 150.

Aging, therefore, provides a common axis of analysis for the dysfunction caused by relational brokenness because social, political, and economic factors continue to provide the context for which people age.[119]

Karen Scheib has done extensive research challenging the invisibility of seniors and has interviewed several Christian women. Narratives of those who have been excluded because of age expose numerous problems concerning identity and otherness within the church. For example, Rose, a retired teacher, was quite active in her church as a lay member and as a minister's wife. She felt liberated from the role of minister's wife following the retirement of her husband, but was beginning to understand how constrictive that role was. In the past she was unaware of her age and had never used her age as a means of interpreting her experiences. She found, however, that younger people in the church succeeded in reminding her of her age, and treated her as if she was invisible. She experienced an obvious brokenness in her relationships with them.[120]

On one occasion, when Rose was volunteering at a church event to help prepare for a luncheon, she found herself working beside two younger women. These two women were engaged in conversation regarding their positive experiences with older women, yet were ignoring Rose who was right beside them. Rose describes her experience:[121]

> They were having this conversation about how they really enjoyed knowing some of the older women [in the church]. I was standing right there and they had never spoken to me, and never did. It was just as odd as it could be...I'd say they were in their late thirties or early forties. It was strange. That was really startling to me.

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[119] Useful information concerning the issue of aging and resultant practices of exclusion is addressed in the following: Minkler and Estes, *Critical Perspectives on Aging,* 3. Exclusion in the form of invisibility is also detailed in: Arbor and Ginn, *Gender and Late Life,* 1991. Also see, Fischer, *Growing Older in America,* 1977, for a history of American attitudes toward aging. For the social construction of aging see: Thompson et al., *I Don't Feel Old: The Experience of Late Life,* 1991, and Estes, *Social Policy and Aging: A Critical Perspective,* 2001.

[120] Scheib, *Challenging Invisibility,* 1–2.

[121] Scheib, *Challenging Invisibility,* 1–2.

I had no thought about being invisible to that point. But since then I have realized that older women don't attract the attention that younger women do. Older women are really sort of past noticing somehow.[122]

Rose was convinced that stereotypical opinions of older people shaped opinions in the church. She called this 'little old lady syndrome' and remarked, "Little old ladies just really don't seem to account for much to a lot of people."[123] Rose is not alone. Many seniors feel forgotten and 'written off' by the church when they are no longer able to attend. Some have had to miss church for long periods because they become caregivers to sick spouses or become ill themselves. Unable to attend, they often feel alienated and lonely because they receive little contact from the church they had been attending faithfully for years.

Jane, who was ninety-one years of age and on her own, experienced the loneliness associated with alienation. She had survived two husbands, two children, and all of her siblings, and moved to a place where care was available if needed. The establishment allowed her to remain well connected to her extended family and she was able to make her own decisions and maintain her own life as much as possible. Giving up her driver's license, however, prevented her from attending the congregation which she has been a part of her life for many years. However, she continued to give to her church financially and had not forgotten her friends.[124]

The problem was that the church had forgotten her. She had suffered throughout her life and needed the support of the church community. Her experience was one of alienation. She remarked,

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[122] Scheib, *Challenging Invisibility*, 1–2.
[123] Scheib, *Challenging Invisibility*, 2.
[124] Scheib, *Challenging Invisibility*, 2.

Well I have gotten depressed about that a few times. I told my minister one time when he came here. They don't come much, just once in awhile. The first time he came I said, "You know, I sure am glad you came because I had just about decided that with our church it was out of sight out of mind." I told him that. I felt like as long as I was there everything was fine, but when you are not there, you are forgotten.[125]

It is difficult to understand why the aged are seemingly written off within some church communities. The experience of alienation has revealed that the women have not altered their own sense of identity and yet, within their life-world, they are well aware that the church has given them a socially constructed identity. The modernist effects of cultural imperialism seem to have succeeded in categorizing these women as abnormal others, rendering them invisible.

This stigmatization concerning aging, which has been largely socially constructed, has influenced the opinions of Christians. What this entails is that the understanding in society concerning aging, which has been adopted by the North American evangelical church, is not necessarily universal or permanent. Cultural beliefs can change over time which no doubt will influence the attitudes of the church. However, this stigmatization creates negativity toward seniors, broken relationships, and an ever-deepening experience of loneliness. The perspectives of the church concerning aging were never meant to be changing only as the culture changes.

Loss of status is inevitable for the seniors in the church if the church continues to be swayed by the culture concerning its perspective on aging. Identity, therefore, is in question concerning both the church as a redemptive community, and the individuals who find themselves excluded. Eric Erikson describes the world-image of Western culture as "a one-way street to never ending progress interrupted only by small and big

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[125] Scheib, *Challenging Invisibility*, 2.

catastrophes" and that the lives of individuals are viewed similarly as "one-way streets to success—and sudden oblivion."[126] Pastoral theologian Donald Capps comments, however, that Erikson proposes a view of life that is not linear but cyclical. He perceives two cycles merged into one: "the cycle of one generation concluding itself in the next, and the cycle of individual life coming to a conclusion."[127] According to Erikson, if the individual cycle "turns back on its own beginnings, so that the very old become again like children, the question is whether the return is to a childlikeness seasoned with wisdom—or to a finite childishness." [128]

Capps asserts that this is an important question for the individual involved, but it is also an important question for later generations, because if younger generations perceive the last phase of life as a sanctioned period of childishness: "Any span of the cycle lived without vigorous meaning, at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end, endangers the sense of life and the meaning of death in all whose life stages are intertwined." [129] This perception concerning a lack of significance in senior years may fortify relational brokenness between seniors and younger adults within the church. It may also influence the way family is perceived. If relational brokenness occurs as a direct result of aging, the concept of family warrants further attention.

Capps contends that the 'letter from Christ' image of the church, applied to the believers in Corinth, also applies to today's church family or community. The Apostle Paul stated,

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all;

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[126] Erikson, "Human strength and the cycle of generations," 132.
[127] Capps, "Erikson's Schedule of Human Strengths and the Church's Self-Images," 347.
[128] Erikson, "Human strength and the cycle of generations," 133.
[129] Erikson, "Human strength and the cycle of generations," 132.

And you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor 3: 1b–3).

Capps emphasizes that the 'letter from Christ' image centers on how a community comes into existence and the purpose for which it was formed. [130] Paul S. Minear agrees stating that it invites Christians "to recall the forces that have been at work in their own hearts and to accept the resulting responsibility."[131] Capps believes that when seniors exemplify integrity and wholeness, younger people envision future wholeness and therefore move toward that wholeness. The 'letter image' indicates that seniors are a testimony to others and "invites mature adults to discern how the Spirit of the living God has been involved in the writing of their own lives." [132]

Seniors need to be heard because their voices reveal experience, wisdom, and fortitude. They are living examples of the faithfulness of God and have a great deal to offer the church. Their ability to mentor and guide the youth has been discounted and undervalued, but Capps concludes that the Christian life is filled with wholeness and integrity, and is capable of helping believers understand that the Christian life lived by seniors is not the work of fate or experience, but of the Holy Spirit of the living God.[133]

When considering pastoral theology, experiences of aging expose the need for theological interpretation, which presents the aging process in a positive light. The Bible portrays human life as engaged in a continuous process toward salvation. Aging, therefore, may be viewed as a spiritual journey, filled with growth and an opportunity for the cultivation of spiritual maturity within community. Karen Scheib contends that this

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[130] Capps, "Erikson's Schedule of Human Strengths and the Church's Self-Images," 347.
[131] Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, 31.
[132] Capps, "Erikson's Schedule of Human Strengths and the Church's Self-Images," 347.
[133] Capps, "Erikson's Schedule of Human Strengths and the Church's Self-Images," 347.

requires "communities and communal practices that can sustain an alternative theological approach."[134]

Pastoral theology can draw from the narratives used in scripture to recognize their effectiveness. As narratives continue to be voiced which describe the unrelenting loneliness, this may encourage the reconstruction of relational meaning for the church. Scheib states, "Narrative practices are foundational and provide the means for articulating an alternative construction of aging."[135] Relational practices include the sharing of tending relationships and creating communities of support. As stories are shared about what God is doing in each one's life and the love of Christ shared through the in-working of the Spirit of God, there is hope.

Age discrimination does not heal relational brokenness; it alienates people and warrants confrontation. There has been an individualistic approach to aging because of a modernist social construction and cultural imperialism. This has caused relational brokenness in the lives of seniors and a pastoral theological interpretation is required. This necessitates an adaptation of a theological anthropology of personhood. The Trinitarian view portrays the three persons of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in relation to one another rather than being recognized for their substance or absolute individual characteristics.[136] God comprises the entire relationship of the Trinity, meaning that his being is recognized only in communion. Catherine Mowry LaCugna describes the relations among the Trinitarian persons saying, "they mutually inhere in one another,

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[134] Scheib, *Challenging Invisibility*, 37.
[135] Scheib, *Challenging Invisibility*, 13.
[136] Indepth discussion concerning theological relational anthropology can be found in the following works: McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 1990; Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 2001; Fiddes, *Participating in God*, 2001; and LaCugna, *God for Us*, 1991.

draw life from one another, 'are' what they are by relation to one another."[137] Herein is

the meaning of family. John Zizioulas asserts that human beings are created in the

'image' of this relational God and, therefore, are understood to be 'in relation' with

others, regardless of age. Miroslav Volf agrees offering this comment,

> Hence, even though every human being is constituted in his or her personhood by
> God, that person's inner "makeup" is still that of a social and natural being.
> Without other human beings, even God cannot create a human being! Even if God
> were to create an isolated human being, that being would not be a human being.[138]

Henri Nouwen supported this argument contending that aging should be

understood exclusively in the center of a person's being. He said,

> No one can decide for anyone else how his or her aging shall or should be. It
> belongs to the greatness of men and women that the meaning of their existence
> escapes the power of calculations and predictions. Ultimately, it can only be
> discovered and affirmed in the freedom of the heart. There we are able to decide
> between segregation and unity, between desolation and hope, between loss of self,
> and a new recreating vision. Everyone will age and die, but this knowledge has no
> inherent direction. It can be destructive as well as creative, oppressive as well as
> liberating.[139]

Age discrimination will only be healed if walls of exclusion within the human

heart come down. It has been realized that pastoral theology is capable of confronting age

discrimination by drawing from Biblical narratives to emphasize the need for life to be

viewed as a spiritual journey of growth and maturity rather than decline leading to death.

Additionally, as pastoral theology reflects upon the individualization of others in society,

it is understood that the appropriate response would be to offer a theology of personhood

derived from the Holy Trinity. Seniors have a significant place in the church and when

considering authentic community it is realized that a theology of personhood points to the

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[137] LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life*, 270–71.
[138] Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 183.
[139] Nouwen and Gaffney, *Aging: The Fulfillment of Life*, 86.

cross of Christ enabling deeper appreciation concerning the depths of reconciliation.

Narratives of Divorce

Another example of relational brokenness that is prominent in the church involves

marital breakdown. Many Christian marriages end in divorce and, as a result, divorced

Christians are the walking wounded; often feeling marginalized and unaccepted. Craig S.

Keener says that divorce is a tragedy, and that the church has often had a confused

response to it, resulting in the compounding of the heartbreak.[140]

According to Statistics Canada, there were 76,030 reasons given for divorce in

2003. These reasons comprised separation for at least one year, adultery, physical cruelty,

and mental cruelty.[141] John Stott says, however, that the sociological reasons for the

increase in the divorce rate are both numerous and varied. The emancipation of women,

changes in the pattern of employment (both parents working), pressures on family life

exerted by unemployment and financial anxiety, and the provisions of civil law for easier

divorce comprise a few of the reasons. He does not hesitate to say, however, that,

> The greatest single reason is the decline of the Christian faith in the West,
> together with the loss of commitment to a Christian understanding of the sanctity
> and permanence of marriage, and the growing non-Christian assault on traditional
> concepts of sex, marriage, and family.[142]

Relational meaning has a direct influence on the health of a marriage. A possible

pastoral theological interpretation of this situation may realize the Christian's enhanced

need for community as a framework supporting the marriage. It is obvious that the

marriage did not just break down at the point of divorce but that many factors were

involved. Additionally, the relational brokenness which occurs does not just affect two

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[140] Keener, *And Marries Another*, vii.
[141] Tulley, et al., *Statistics Canada 2003 Shelf Tables*, 30.
[142] Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 286.

people. There may be children involved, and extended families. Many are affected and it would seem that a deeper understanding of marriage, according to scripture may be valuable and result in less divorce. Those experiencing divorce need compassion and a spirituality of presence. It is possible that responsibility has been neglected in this area and that the stigma of divorce has influenced the exclusion of individuals rather than a realization of the Christian's need of support. Forgiveness is available for divorce but the church is often unyielding in its views.

One pastor, Michael A. Braun, tells a story of one of his parishioners who had experienced a divorce and how it caused him to see how doctrinal views can further exclude the alienated and lonely. A Christian, named Jim, had endured a twenty year marriage with a wife who had serious mental health issues and who had accused him incessantly of having an affair. Braun says,

> Jim's private hell lasted over twenty years. Hysterical charges, tearful denials, shame, gossip, more moves and more new jobs. Finally it became impossible. Not for Jim, but for his wife. The divorce came and Jim went into a deep depression. He came to me. His rented room was collapsing in on itself like some kind of tacky black hole that he was in the middle of. His work was boring; his life felt barren. What could he do? His loneliness screamed to him night after sleepless night.

> Jim had attended conservative Bible churches most of his adult life. He was certain that divorce was a great sin in his life. He felt sure that remarriage, under any circumstances, was unthinkable. He actually had no prospects, and he cursed himself for even imagining in moments of weakness that he could ever share his life with a sane and happy woman. So he came to me for advice.

> How do you make someone comfortable in hell? I listened in silence. Then, with all the sober wisdom that a twenty-seven year old could muster (like the medieval scholar or whom it was said, "he was often in error, but never in doubt"), I spoke with absolute conviction:

> 'All divorce is sin,' I said comfortingly. 'And for you, of course, remarriage is out of the question,' I said to give him hope. 'Maybe reconciliation is possible,' I finished lamely.

He just looked up at me. We were both sitting down, but his head was hanging much lower than mine. His hands were folded lifelessly between his knees. He looked like a man trying, but just too tired to pray. All at once I felt as if I were walking him down some long, last corridor toward the electric chair—only I wasn't the chaplain, I was the executioner.

I made a final effort to say something positive. 'Jim, why don't you let the church be your family? Let her be your wife?' I had placed my hand on his shoulder. He didn't recoil when I said that, he just sort of ...shrunk.

I sat there, a twenty-seven-year-old clergyman, and watched a fifty-year-old, lonely little man dissolve into a reservoir of twenty-year-old tears. It wasn't silent weeping. They were deep heart rending sobs.

After a time he quietly rose to go. He thanked me as he shook my hand. There was no irony or bitterness in him.

Shortly after that, Jim found a better job in a community about fifty miles to the south. I ran into him several years later in a shopping mall. He looked ten years younger and almost radiant.

With little comment, but a great deal of kindness, he greeted me and told me that about a year ago he had married a fine Christian woman and they were working together in a local church serving the Lord, and they were very much in love.

Until the day I die, I will thank God that Jim didn't take my advice.[143]

What Braun seemed to understand from this experience was that there are

sometimes flaws in doctrinal interpretations which blur an understanding of the mercy

and the love of God governing the lives of people in the church. Divorce often carries a

stigma because of the ways scripture is interpreted and, therefore, Christians may be

insensitive to many of the deep needs that divorced people experience. A church will

exclude the divorced if it feels divorce is wrong and this may cause a divorced individual

to disappear into self-imposed exile. By doing so, the divorced are attempting to avoid

any further judgment or condemnation from the church. Programs are often implemented

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[143] Braun, *Should divorced people be treated like Second Class Christians?* 93–95.

to offer some type of ministry to the divorced but if complete integration back into the mainstream of church life does not happen, feelings of alienation and its indwelling loneliness will continue.

Relational brokenness, initiated by divorce, may also involve the other types of exclusion. When a person who has experienced divorce is made to feel that they have sinned against God, with no possibility of forgiveness should remarriage occur, the sufferer may feel social ostracism, spiritual disruption, and self-alienation in addition to the relational brokenness. The situation often seems impossible.

While it is realized that divorce is happening between two married people, it affects entire families and church communities. Michael A. Braun contends that unbalanced judgment and incorrect use of scripture creates "an escalating insensitivity to human need."[144] This causes the church to move even further away from being a loving and caring community. Allowing pastoral theology to shed light on divorce involves an appreciation of the fact that God is not pleased with divorce while recognizing at the same time that divorced people have a place in God's kingdom. The exclusion of the divorced from community serves to challenge pastoral theological concepts of community as well as theologies of marriage, suffering, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The experience of divorce introduces the reality of brokenness and vulnerability in community and so a theology of community necessitates the implementation of these theologies. However, it must be noted that inclusion of the divorce simply because it seems like the right thing to do does not necessarily create Christ-centered community. The Apostle Paul exhorted the church at Rome in this way,

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[144] Braun, *Should divorced people be treated like Second Class Christians?* 99.

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God (Rom 15:5–7).

A Christological vision of community is required for inclusion to become reality. Christ welcomed every believer into his kingdom and therefore, the welcome must be more Christ-centered than emotional and therefore, as Bonheoffer has revealed, a communion of both the spiritual and emotional may be essential for the realization of authentic community. This is evident in the following narratives concerning widowhood.

Narratives of Widowhood

The death of a spouse has been understood to be one of the most difficult experiences to face in life. Marriage leads to changes in social identity and therefore self-identity, and when relational brokenness occurs because of a partner's death, identity reconstruction must begin. The death of a spouse often means that anxiety and loneliness plague the sufferer, introducing isolation and exclusion to the experience of new life as a single. The sense of community wanes, as friends feel they don't know what to say and find the burden too heavy to bear. One man who lost his wife to cancer reflected on his experience in this way,

> My initial reaction was a superficial grief based on an intellectual understanding of her death that had no reality for me. She was simply 'gone' for a while. This unreality was abetted by the many distractions and activities following the funeral: friends bringing cold cuts and casseroles, attorneys calling about estate issues, grief counselors calling about the children, life insurance, health insurance, overdue bills, missed dental appointments. I was too busy to notice her absence. I had thought that I had missed her, but the real awareness came later.
>
> Gradually, reality settled in. She was, in fact, gone. By this time, most of our friends from our life as a couple had stopped calling and moved on with their own busy, complex lives. The men of these relationships, like most men, generally don't talk about real issues, and women feel uncomfortable somehow

befriending a man whom they had related to through a now deceased spouse. My social world contracted with the death of my spouse. This contraction reinforced a sense of isolation and loss, which in turn made the reality harder to ignore.[145]

Many are afraid to confront those who grieve and deprive them of a healthy sense of community. When Katie Funk Wiebe lost her spouse to a rare disease, she realized that her church did not open the same doors of opportunity for a woman as they did for a man. She said,

> Suddenly I had lost my role. I retained the name, but it was an empty title. I had no concept of my true identity. I was a nothing; a total blah. I couldn't answer the question, 'Who are you?' I never answered 'Mrs. Walter Wiebe' as I heard other widows do, for that answer shrieked a lie. He was dead, dead, dead. Though I still had the children, I had lost my wife role, and society doesn't recognize the mother role as it does that of the wife.[146]

Incredible loneliness and a mounting bitterness seem to threaten the once secure and peaceful, life-world of the recently widowed. Relational brokenness is obvious because of the death of a spouse but even greater brokenness can be experienced as walls are erected to prevent any further hurt. Wiebe says, "Sorrow which should make us more open to others and to God, becomes a selfish thing like the Dead Sea, giving up nothing and becoming so saturated with hard feelings that people find no reason to come close to the person going through it."[147]

Wiebe called herself an "incomplete social unit."[148] She was very aware of an "unconscious ostracism" operating within the church.[149] She said,

> Many hearts are big enough to accept a widow and her children into family gatherings but few will help widows or single persons find their place as individuals in church and community. When I was invited to the homes of women

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[145] Beatty, "On the Death of a Spouse: Reflections of a Medical Oncologist," 959–60.
[146] Wiebe, *Alone: A Search for Joy*, 53.
[147] Wiebe, *Alone: A Search for Joy*, 43.
[148] Wiebe, *Alone: A Search for Joy*, 41.
[149] Wiebe, *Alone: A Search for Joy*, 53.

my own age, it was usually when their husbands were away for business trips or other reasons. [150]

A widow is forced to develop a new self-image because, in many instances, she is now recognized as different. Congregants often overlook her need to belong in the church amongst both men and women and discount her new status as a single woman. This may cause her to believe that loss of marital status also means loss of personhood.

So few understand the depths of suffering that an individual may experience in grief but it is also filled with great depth and mystery. There are treasures to be found in the depths of such pain and loss. David Whyte in his CD, *Close to Home*, has written a poem called *The Well of Grief*. It provides an opportunity to visit a dimension of grief that is often missed.

The Well of Grief

Those who will not slip beneath
the still surface on the well of grief
turning downward through its black water
to the place we cannot breathe
will never know the source from which we drink,
the secret water, cold and clear,
nor find in the darkness glimmering
the small round coins
thrown by those who wished for something else. [151]

People do not usually want to get involved with those who grieve but it is in the descent, Henri Nouwen believes, that true wisdom is discovered.[152] A willingness to enter the 'well of grief' influences a perception of authentic community. Grief has been described as complicated, raw, of an inarticulate nature, and having its own communion.

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[150] Wiebe, *Alone: A Search for Joy*, 53.
[151] Whyte, "The Well of Grief," CD.
[152] Nouwen et al., *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*, 63.

It is while grieving that body, soul, and spirit are in close conversation seeking common ground and balance. Nancy Moules understands that this communion is articulated by knowing "where the feet hit, the heart hurts, and recognizing the hollow that sorrow wears."[153]

Grief, experienced through the loss of a loved one, is mysterious, life–changing, and requires support. The previous life can never be re-entered. Uncharted territory is experienced and life needs recalibration. This groundless terrain of grief should promote conversation between those called to serve and those who need the care but this is not always the case. Courage is required as well as a veneration of the sacredness, privilege, and healing possibilities of those conversations. Many find the grief process too threatening and overwhelming.

Excluding those who grieve is an ethical violation. Believers have been called to live justly by correcting oppression, defending the fatherless, and pleading for the widow (Isaiah 1: 11–17). The people who heard the call in the Old Testament appreciated the moral distinctive of a Holy God.[154] The same call was echoed in the New Testament. James 1:27 states: "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress…" Entering into their suffering was what God had in mind but widows and orphans often experience neglect.

Allowing pastoral theology to speak to the experience of grief necessitates remembering Jesus' willingness to suffer grief on behalf of all people. He was willing to 'take on' the sins of the entire world and therefore 'suffer with' every single human being who had lived, was living, and who would live, until the end of time. His willingness to

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[153] Moules, et al., "The Soul of Sorrow Work," 139.
[154] Anderson, *Incarnational Ministry*, 17–18.

suffer for the sake of others teaches that grief has a tremendous price. There was no

weakening of his obedience. In John 18:11 Jesus' words to Peter, who wanted to avert his

plight, were "Am I not to drink the cup that the father has given me?" He drank the cup

of wrath for people to be able to drink the cup of salvation. When he agonized with tears

in the Garden of Gethsemane for the Father to remove the cup, there was ministry. God

sent an angel.

Henri Nouwen says,

> In the midst of the sorrow is consolation, in the midst of the darkness is light, in the midst of despair is hope, in the midst of Babylon is a glimpse of Jerusalem, and in the midst of the army of demons is the consoling angel. The cup of sorrow, as inconceivable as it seems, is also the cup of joy. Only when we consider this in our own life can we consider drinking it.[155]

In grief there is consolation. A confrontation must be made with the reality of the

situation and its personal effect on the individual, but there is also a need to incorporate

all of who God is and how he wants to be involved in the healing process. There is

consolation from God even if people fail to provide it. In John 14: 18 he says, "I will not

leave you as orphans, I will come to you." Recognition of hope is needed for the one who

grieves.

This understanding of theology informs pastoral theology about consecration,

maturity, and empathy. Jesus was always willing to obey the will of his Father in every

aspect of his ministry and therefore community needs a theology of discipleship. In Luke

9: 23 Jesus said, "...if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and

take up their cross daily and follow me." This involves asking the Holy Spirit how to

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[155] Nouwen, *Can You Drink The Cup?* 38.

minister to those who grieve and being willing to be led of the Spirit in a ministry of consolation.

Type 2: Spiritual Disruption

This type of exclusion deals with the human experience of deficiency in an individual's relationship with God. There is noted disruption in the spiritual life and this disruption may occur due to physiological, psychological, spiritual, or emotional reasons. Human beings are fundamentally social in nature (Gen 1:26; 2:18) and spirituality for Christians can be viewed as being in relationship with God. Fundamentally, when viewing spiritual disruption through a purely spiritual lens, original sin created spiritual disruption. Genesis 3:8–10 reads,

> They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

Adam and Eve knew it was the Lord. They knew his sound and knew his presence. They had met him in the garden many times and God knew exactly where they were but they had lost their way and were ashamed because of disobedience. They were no longer connected to God spiritually; their eyes were open to their nakedness and there was an automatic disconnection between them and God. This has caused all of humanity to be shaped in iniquity (Psalm 51:5). C. Ellison states, "…the intrusion of sin introduced alienation and isolation between human beings as well as in the God-human relationship. Sin introduced a variety of ego defense mechanisms which destroy human intimacy."[156]

Though not always because of sin, people experience alienation from a life in God

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[156] Ellison, "Social Isolation," 1188.

and often react. As Zadro and Williams discovered, in an attempt to fulfill the need for

community or connection with God, the excluded often resort to drastic means for

securing a sense of power. They often resort to exercising desperate means of securing

control to offset the pain of exclusion.[157] This, however, offers a meager substitute for

God's love and spiritual wholeness. God is holy and it is impossible to connect with God

through human means. As mentioned in the theology of alienation, Jesus has provided the

means of reconciliation, and yet human nature continues to contribute toward spiritual

disruption as people attempt to reconnect with God by their own means. People often do

not understand how to have a relationship with God. Kennedy Vanterpool adds, "When

there is imbalance… it creates disconnection within and we become frustrated, confused,

angry and withdrawn because we can't explain what is happening in our lives."[158]

Narratives of Spiritual Disruption

Another possibility for feeling disrupted spiritually is a loss of confidence in

God's ability to eliminate suffering. Bart Ehrman has left Christianity and has become an

agnostic because he cannot find any logic in the fact that God allows so much suffering in

the world. According to William Willimon, however, Ehrman has a very subjective and

superior view. He says, "Ehrman appears to have a low tolerance for intellectual

ambiguity of any sort. He demands logic as he defines it, and finding the God of Jews

and Christians to be caught in a web of contradictions and irrationality, he therefore

dismisses God."[159] The problem, however, is that Ehrman, an agnostic, spends an

incredible amount of time criticizing and discrediting the Christian God. Why create so

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[157] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 21.
[158] Vanterpool, *The Great Disconnection*, 9.
[159] Willimon, "God's Problem." (Online).

much personal suffering and strife if there is no God? It would seem that he is wasting his

time but the possibility remains that he may be seeking a worthy challenge from those

who claim to follow Christ. If he is excluded from the church and Christian fellowship,

will he ever find a worthy opponent? His situation speaks to pastoral theology in that an

opened door to return is needed for those who leave the faith.

Ehrman contends that he no longer feels connected to the God of his youth. To

him God does not offer a place of safety and security and, therefore, he refuses to become

anchored in the Christian God. Nouwen asserted that people feel disconnected spiritually

when they have not found their 'true home' in God. In *The Wounded Healer*, he

described the young people he encountered as: "fatherless", "inward" and "convulsive."

He defined the "fatherless generation" as:

> a generation which has parents but no fathers, a generation in which everyone
> who claims authority—because he is older, more mature, more intelligent or more
> powerful—is suspect from the very beginning... Today, seeing that the whole
> adult, fatherly world stands helpless before the threat of atomic war, eroding
> poverty, and starvation of millions, the men and women of tomorrow see that no
> father has anything to tell them simply because he has lived longer.[160]

This statement suggests the failure of the generation's parents and grandparents in

their mission to bring about world peace, social justice and the elimination of poverty but

Nouwen believed that there was still hope. He said,

> It is the behavior of people who are convinced that there is nothing "out there" or
> "up there" on which they can get a solid grasp, which can pull them out of their
> uncertainty and confusion. No authority, no institution, no outer concrete reality
> has the power to relieve them of their anxiety and loneliness and make them free.
> Therefore the only way is the inward way. If there is nothing "out there" or "up
> there, perhaps there is something solid "in there." Perhaps something deep in the
> most personal self holds the meaning to the mystery of meaning, freedom and
> unity.[161]

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[160] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 30, 31.
[161] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 28.

Nouwen understood what it was like to grow up in a world without meaning and value, where major political, economic and environmental problems seemed unsolvable. The generations that were supposed to change the world did not do a very good job.[162]

Inwardness seemed to be the means to the end but there was skepticism. Sociologist Jeffrey K. Hadden did not agree that inwardness could lead to a new monasticism. As mentioned earlier, he thought it could lead to an anti-authoritarian and anti-institutional form of privatism.[163] Nouwen was unaffected, however, and knew that solitude could introduce change. Ehrman's greatest challenge may be faced in this regard. Logic and reason must recede to a sufficient degree for solitude to be welcomed and embraced. Very few discover the treasure which it embodies and depression is often the result.

Spiritual disruption is frequently a common experience for people suffering from depression. Depression often results from a variety of reasons and is faced by many as the search for meaning continues. A spiritual relationship with God is often in question. Judith Hills, along with a research team, discovered that depressed people who were angry with God or questioned him and the church were found to be more distressed, confused and depressed than others. They demonstrated negative religious coping and their recovery was much slower than people who were not angry with God.[164]

Fifteen patients under treatment for depression at Loma Linda University Behavioral Medicine Center in Loma Linda, California were interviewed by Dr. Siroj Sorajjakool. The interviews were conducted to explore the role of spirituality and

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[162] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 34.
[163] Hadden, "A Private Generation," 68.
[164] Hills et al., "Spirituality and Distress in Palliative Care Consultation," 782–88.

meaning among depressed individuals. Many reported that depression brought a sense of

spiritual disruption and that this emerged from anger toward God. They felt abandoned

by God. One participant stated, "Right now I am angry with God...I am angry because

He is not attending to my need especially because I am vulnerable. He has not proved

that He is there listening to me...He is not there."[165]

Many of the participants refused to go to church and join in fellowship because of

their lack of spiritual connection during their depression. They felt excluded by God and

their anger, aimed at God, caused them to refrain from reading their Bible and having

regular devotions. Many admitted, however, that their spirituality continued to be of help

to them in their depression. Most recognized a close connection between spirituality and

meaning in their lives.[166] All participants in the study admitted that spirituality was a

coping method, even when there were bouts of disruption, and 'God' was mentioned by

all.

A particular participant felt that God had excluded her but related also that her

spirituality had prevented her from committing suicide. Her words were, "Sometime I

just want to get out there and go to God quickly. And I think the only thing that has kept

me from doing it is that they told me I am going to burn in hell."[167] Another who

struggled with chronic pain commented further on the role of spirituality:

> The first time I went back to church it was at the beginning of February and it was
> the first time I had felt peace in over a year. I did not feel my pain (in church). I
> want to commit suicide but then hope will come back when I read my Bible—it is
> a kind of tingling sensation (that) goes through my body. I can't explain it, but it
> is peace, joy, and love. All in one unconditionally—Sometimes I also get this
> overwhelming feeling, and I know that there is either somebody there that is

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[165] Sorajjakool, et al., "Disconnection, Depression and Spirituality," 526.
[166] Sorajjakool, et al., "Disconnection, Depression and Spirituality," 527.
[167] Sorajjakool, et al., "Disconnection, Depression and Spirituality," 526.

watching me—whether it is my guiding angel—It starts through my stomach or my shoulders. It is a feeling like I have been touched. It is like somebody you love coming to touch you. [168]

The majority of the participants in the study found a connection between spirituality and meaning in their lives and had an intense desire to make sense of their experience with depression. They want to understand the purpose of their suffering. A young female participant stated,

> I asked God why when I was sexually abused by my father. I came to the conclusion that maybe this can enable me to help others. But when I was abused the second time by [my] brother, it did not make sense…the thing that I struggle with is, why did it have to happen twice? Why was my brother a little like my dad? I have always believed that everything happens for a reason, that every situation may not be positive. But what you take out of it can be positive and that is what I struggle with now. It happened once and I'm getting through that stuff but why twice—why…I think it [depression] has really opened my eyes to different spectrums of pain and suffering that I think are important in life. That you can't fully experience happiness until you fully experience pain. You don't know happiness until you know pain. [169]

It is clear that the aforementioned participants felt there was a connection with their depression and their knowledge of God concerning their circumstances. They experienced spiritual disruption and they had no answers. Where distinctions have been drawn between a psychoanalytic approach to depression and the spiritual 'dark night of the soul,' coined by St. John of the Cross, poet, mystic and theologian of the sixteenth century, it is possible to realize commonalities between the secular and spiritual.

D. M. Dombroski asserts that in the dark night of the soul, a devotee's prayer life becomes empty and greater effort in prayer bears no fruit. The person experiences life in an emotional desert. The loss of connection with God can be compared to "the fading

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[168] Sorajjakool, et al., "Disconnection, Depression and Spirituality," 526.
[169] Sorajjakool, et al., "Disconnection, Depression and Spirituality," 527.

light of dusk as the objects of the world gradually vanish from sight."[170] As the night of

the senses gives way to the night of the spirit, deeper emptiness is introduced because a

person feels complete spiritual disconnection. Dombroski describes this desolation as the

"darkness of midnight when detachment has left us all alone and all is lost."[171] Sandra

Cronk contends that people enter a 'dark night' when they "are suddenly bereft of any

experience of God's presence, direction, and consolation…[and they experience] the

unexpected opaqueness of all those areas of their lives through which God's light used to

shine, giving meaning and purpose."[172] They feel abandoned and alone.

Michael O'Connor relates that the major similarity between depression and the

dark night of the soul is loss. He believes, though, that Christians understand God to be

the source of the dark night whereas those who experience depression may attribute their

feelings of disconnection to losses of a more secular nature. O'Connor asserts that the

main difference between the two is that those who were once connected to God feel his

absence. Those who are depressed, however, blame other factors.

Gerald G. May, psychiatrist and spiritual director, notes the following similarities

between dark night experiences and depression: "feelings of hopelessness, helplessness,

agitation, and emptiness … impoverishment of thoughts, absence of motivation and loss

of self-confidence."[173] Cronk describes the dark night of the soul as a spiritual death of

the old ways of living, providing opportunity for new life. She says,

> We move away from our autonomous understanding of self to a recognition that
> we live in and through God. This deeper self cannot be measured, analyzed or
> defined. Its worth does not depend on its talents and skills. It cannot even be

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[170] Dombroski, *St. John of the Cross*, 30.
[171] Dombroski, *St. John of the Cross*, 30.
[172] Cronk, *Dark Night Journey*, 1.
[173] May, *Care of Mind, Care of Spirit*, 90.

perceived as an object. We are grounded in God...the image of the death of self refers to the movement from the perception of ourselves as an object to that of living and being in relationship with God and the death of the false and autonomous self. Living into the reality of our life in God is called the birth of the true self.[174]

Cronk's description is very close to Henri Nouwen's spiritual journey in that experiences of solitude can lead to the discovery of the true self. There are often medical reasons for chronic depression and it is possible that long term treatment is warranted but, as Dombrowski contends, there must be openness to an inner solitude. When an individual welcomes God in their heart, the Holy Spirit is more than willing to enter.[175] Kaye P. McKee, a Presbyterian minister who has suffered the 'dark night of the soul' as well as depression, states,

> For years I begged God to free me of depression. God chose instead to make depression a powerful teacher—and a tremendous humbler! As we walk through the dark night and/or when we suffer depression, let's hold fast to this truth: neither the dark night nor depression is a symptom of faithlessness. Neither is cause for shame or guilt. Instead both, when given to God, are potent with possibility. For both bring us to a place of emptiness. The psalmists emptied their souls' ache into poetry. I emptied my soul in screams. When our trials exhaust us and pain strips us bare, we become a space ripe for filling. However deep anguish plunges us, God is deeper still.[176]

It is remarkable that a person in the midst of a depression may be aware of God's presence, even in his apparent absence. The journey is often dark and filled with despair but prayer could only benefit the spiritual journey of those enduring such trials of the faith. Jacobsen recognizes, however, that many churches neglect to realize any spiritual disruption regarding self, others, and God and this does not help those suffering with

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[174] Cronk, *Dark Night Journey*, 67.
[175] Dombroski, *St. John of the Cross: An Appreciation*, 172.
[176] McKee, *When God Walks Away*, 77.

depression.[177] Those suffering severe depression are often excluded because they are

deemed unstable.

In Ephesians 4:1–3, the Apostle Paul wants to remind believers about being

united in Christ,

> I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

It would also seem that any disregard of the Lord's calling to genuine community with

one another may grieve the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 4:30 and 5:2, he says,

> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption…Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The tension remains, however, in dealing with 'difference' and attempting to find

a theological answer. Allowing the experiences of depression and the 'dark night of the

soul' to shed light on pastoral theology, involves an appreciation for scriptures focused

on agony and torment. When considering the Biblical narratives concerning Job, and

Satan receiving God's permission to torment Job (Job 1:12), pastoral theology is

challenged concerning proper means of ministry. Suffering can be used of God to bring

people closer to God but people often judge those who suffer as those who have sinned

against God. This was apparent in the many conversations offered by Job's friends. With

this in mind a theology of reverence for what God may be doing in people's lives is

needed. This theology opens the door for welcoming lament, prayer, intercession,

encouragement, and patience as those who suffer continue in their journey. It encourages

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[177] Jacobsen, *Crowded Pews and Lonely People*, 50.

respect for one another and solidarity in suffering and hope. In this way, those who are suffering depression or a 'dark night of the soul' will receive affirmation and support rather than exclusion.

Type 3: Social Ostracism

The church may not always discern the reality of people's lives and treat people as Jesus would but it has also been recognized that practices of exclusion have permeated the church from the culture. Social exclusion affects millions as it relates to the alienation of people within societies for the potential benefit of others. Murray Last describes it as "...more than a system of categories and boundaries; it is also a series of processes that require negotiating."[178] Jodi Estivill states, "...exclusion is related to the dissatisfaction or unease felt by individuals who are faced with situations in which they cannot achieve their objectives for themselves or their loved ones."[179]

It would appear that exclusion is often interpreted subjectively but it is not always perceived as negative. Estivill relates that exclusion also emanates from certain trends, customs and ideas which appear dominant in a particular society. This exclusion seems to hold positive effects for particular individuals, groups or communities. The need for exclusion, such as is felt within gated communities or particular groups, may actually reinforce the internal cohesion of the group. While this is true, Estivill has also discovered that, in other cases, "voluntary exclusion may be a prerequisite for the stimulation of artistic or intellectual creativity, or a more philosophical or religious life of reflection."[180]

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[178] Last, "Social Exclusion in Northern Nigeria," 224.
[179] Estivill, *Concepts and strategies for combating social exclusion*, 13.
[180] Estivill, *Concepts and strategies for combating social exclusion*, 13.

John G. Bruhn also recognizes the familiarity of exclusion, construed as normative, when people from different cultures and situations try to blend with individuals from the dominant culture. People raised in different cultures certainly have varying ideas and values concerning space. Surroundings are, therefore, constructed to meet particular needs and these affect behavior. A sense of power is determined by social rules and the ownership of space and, therefore, the domination and competition continues. [181]

Bruhn contends that in larger urban areas, it is common to see cloistered communities develop which cater to a particular culture. Preservation and containment are the objectives when integration is undesired. It is recognized that space is monopolized and when less dominant groups of society are relegated to inferior space, it is clear that those who own the most territory feel that they have the right to draw the boundaries between those who will be included and those who will be excluded. The boundaries that are drawn aid in the creation of binary opposites, or the 'us' and 'them' way of thinking.[182] Many are excluded, therefore, because they are recognized as a deviation from the norm. They are often excluded because of age, employment, social class, gender, education, living standards, disability, or race etc.

Narratives of Disability

One of the most visible forms of social exclusion is recognized in the lives of persons living with disability. Western cultures often identify persons living with impairment as 'different' or 'other' and feel justified in excluding them from mainstream society. Those living with disability feel the communal repercussions of exclusion to a

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[181] Bruhn, *The Sociology of Community Connections*, 134.
[182] Bruhn, *The Sociology of Community Connections*, 134.

significant degree. Their sense of community has been fragmented because they have

been viewed by society as deficient and dependant. Their sense of place in society has

been jeopardized because they are made to feel as if they do not belong.

Thomas E. Reynolds asserts that disability should never be seen as a human

deficiency or tragedy, but should be recognized as a means of living life vulnerably with

others and in God.[183] Wholeness is not determined from self-sufficiency or independence

but from the act of sharing humanity with one another in light of the grace of God. Jürgen

Moltmann says,

> a person with disabilities gives others the precious insight into the woundedness
> and weakness of human life. But a person with disabilities also gives insight into
> the humanity of his own world. Through persons with disabilities, other people
> can come to know the real, suffering, living God, who also loves them
> infinitely.[184]

Jean Vanier adds that disability allows the opportunity for everyone to

acknowledge human weakness and, therefore, opens people up to the grace of God in a

radical fashion.[185] As mentioned, Miroslav Volf contends that the exclusion of others

emanates from evil within the walls of the self.[186] Jenny Morris, however, a well–known

author, who is mobility impaired, feels that people exclude persons with impairment

because they fear the reality of human weakness.[187] Rod Michalko agrees stating that

impairment reminds people of the fragility, vulnerability, and mortality of their

existence.[188] He contends that people exclude because of impairment because they do not

know how to react and often feel as if the experience of living with a disability is

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[183] Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*, 16.
[184] Moltmann, "Liberate Yourselves by Accepting One Another," 110.
[185] Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 39–41.
[186] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 60.
[187] Morris, *Pride Against Prejudice*, 192.
[188] Michalko, *The Difference that Disability Makes*, 95.

completely beyond their understanding. It is foreign and unwelcome due to a lack of

knowledge and understanding.

For the foregoing reasons and many others people with impairment are excluded

from common humanity and often feel excluded by God. Morris adds that she has come

to the realization that able-bodied people erect barriers habitually between those with

impairment and themselves. They hide their fear and discomfort by turning people with

impairment into objects of pity, thereby comforting themselves by acts of kindness and

generosity. Consequently, non-disabled people have defined the experience of living with

impairment, dominating the lives of those who are impaired.[189]

Gary Albrecht asserts that persons living with impairment have actually become

objects of commerce.[190] This is recognized in the establishment of nursing homes for

people living with impairment which has turned into a multi–million dollar business.[191]

Capitalist states are now forced to balance their financial interests and social constructs

when governments across Europe and North America advocate a cutback. When cutbacks

are announced the capitalist states are confronted directly with the appraisal of social

justice afforded to those living with impairment. Gareth H. Williams states,

> Disablement makes an important contribution to the ideological crisis surrounding
> health and welfare in capitalist societies. This is because disabled people, being
> both deserving and expensive, pose a crisis of legitimacy for the State in those
> capitalist societies which seek to be both profitable and civilized at the same
> time.[192]

Moving into the twenty-first century has meant further change for those with

impairment. Support for inclusive education has gathered momentum but Colin Barnes

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[189] Morris, *Pride Against Prejudice*, 192.
[190] Albrecht, *The Disability Business*, 68.
[191] Russell, *Beyond Ramps: Disability at the End of the Social Contract*, 96.
[192] Williams, "Disablement and the ideological crisis in health care," 517.

asserts that people living on the margins of the labor market are still encountering a variety of economic, political, and social deprivations.[193] People who are impaired are still perceived, as 'disabled persons' within their social context even when it is realized that these individuals do not identify themselves as 'disabled.' Those living with disability recognize their condition as integral to the process and progress of their life as they know it and do not like to be perceived as 'different.' As far as they are concerned, they are whole persons, who just happen to live with impairment.

Being ostracized from society is the cause of most of their oppression. John Swain and Sally French agree, stating that disability is not caused by impairment or a function of the individual, but is a direct result of the oppression caused by a disabling society.[194] Adele McCollum suggests that social, political, and religious structures within a community actually encourage the perception that the embodied self is merely a physiological body. Personal identity is constrained in the physical with no sense of selfhood beyond the physical. In other words, for many in society, personhood is dependent upon body image. The capacity of someone with a physical disability to be accountable or responsible for others is not even considered. Theirs is a 'disabled identity' which robs them in their capacity of 'being' as a physical, psychological, and social person.[195]

Being excluded, due to the erroneous perception that they are not 'whole persons,' people living with impairment, find it almost impossible to identify with people within their own community. As a result, they lead very isolated and lonely lives. They are

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[193] Barnes, et al., *Exploring Disability*, 10.
[194] Swain and French, "Towards an Affirmation Model of Disability," 570–71.
[195] McCollum, "Round Table Discussion: Women with Disabilities," 127.

perceived by society as being completely consumed with their disability and therefore, completely dependent on others. Also, they are often not recognized for any particular innate giftedness.

For many of these reasons and more, those who live with impairment endure constant marginalization. They do not see themselves as 'disabled' but endure being politically invisible on a constant basis because they do not get enough attention in their fight against discrimination. They face economic obstructions, no–access zones, and prejudice daily. They are members of society and culture but are ignored for the most part. Victimized by this oppression, people with impairment are familiar with the practice of exclusion and need to be embraced as human beings created and loved by God.

The North American evangelical church should have a different attitude than society but they have yet to articulate a pastoral theology of community which embraces and welcomes those living with impairment. Nancy Eiesland maintains that throughout its history, the church has been complicit with societal perceptions of disability. She emphasizes that the church has also supported attitudes of sympathy and paternalism writing, "For many disabled persons the church has been a 'city on a hill'— physically inaccessible and socially inhospitable."[196]

Eiesland relates her narrative about feelings of exclusion even during a communion service. She admits to having been part of several congregations whose practice of receiving Eucharist included filing to the front of the sanctuary and kneeling at the communion rail. She was often in a wheelchair or using crutches and was alerted by an usher to remain seated. After everyone had received communion she would be

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[196] Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 20.

offered the sacrament. The congregation was trying to accommodate her with what they perceived to be an inclusive action but she saw the Eucharist transformed from a corporate experience to a solitary one for her. She said, "...from a sacralization of Christ's broken body to a stigmatization of my disabled body."[197]

Eiesland relates that she is not alone. The Eucharist should be recognized as the 'ultimate sacrament of unity of believers' but has become a 'ritual of exclusion and degradation.'[198] Access to the celebration of the Body of Christ is restricted. There are not only access barriers but also ritual practices, demeaning body aesthetics, unreflective speech, and bodily reactions. She adds, "The Eucharist becomes a dreaded and humiliating remembrance that, in the church, we are trespassers in an able–bodied dominion."[199] Eiesland realizes a much deeper dimension. She remarks,

> This Eucharistic exclusion is symbolic of a larger crisis. The Church has often supported societal structures and attitudes that have treated people with disabilities as objects of pity. The primary problem for the church is not how to 'accommodate' disabled persons. Even some of the best denominational statements articulating a theology of access still speak in the voice of the able–bodied community, advocating for persons with disabilities but not allowing our own voices, stories, and embodied experiences to be central.[200]

The majority of churches have made little effort to listen to those with impairment and continue to support societal attitudes and actions. Brett Webb–Mitchell states,

> By and large, the church has adopted the language used by health service professionals and groups who serve as advocates for people with disabilities. By adopting that language, we also adopt strategies and approaches framed by the world but not necessarily by the Gospel of God.[201]

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[197] Eiesland, "Encountering the disabled God," 6.
[198] Eiesland, "Encountering the disabled God," 6.
[199] Eiesland, "Encountering the disabled God," 6.
[200] Eiesland, "Encountering the disabled God," 6.
[201] Webb–Mitchell, *Dancing with Disabilities*, xv.

The church, therefore, has become 'disabled' in its own mission because it has adopted society's mindset concerning persons living with impairment. Perpetuating the hegemony of normalcy in society, however, has never been its calling.[202] As a result of compromising its mission, the church is now living as a blurred image of the body of Christ. This compromise lingers on through a lack of discernment concerning its own gospel–centered identity. The church has become blinded by its own practices of evil, fear, and ignorance, pitying those who suffer with impairment while comforting itself through patronizing acts of generosity and kindness toward them. This leads to even greater exclusion both on the part of the person living with the disability and the church.

Rachel Esdaille, born with cerebral palsy, relates in her story that many pastors failed to notice her when she attended their churches and this left her feeling as if God did not love her. A copy of the transcript of her interview reveals that she had given up on religion until a pastor approached her in a new church she had visited. He put his arm around her, and asked if he could pray for her.[203] This was a life-changing experience for her and she testified that God spoke to her at that moment saying, "I love you." For Rachel, the pastor's arms were the arms of God. She emphasized that people need to take time for disabled people and for all who have been left on the margins, and not exclude them, because it is possible to be used of God to change someone's outlook. She elaborated further saying that everyone has greatness and that God has a purpose for each one. She is enjoying her Christian life and is an incredible witness of God's compassion and embrace in the midst of so much social exclusion.[204]

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[202] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 41.
[203] Esdaille, "Overcoming Cerebral Palsy," HS8382.
[204] Esdaille, "Overcoming Cerebral Palsy," HS8382.

Her experience, along with Eiesland's, demonstrates how practices, which are deemed exclusionary, can affect a person's spiritual life as well as the physical. Rachel requires a theology of acceptance and love. Knowing that God loves her has been her most powerful narrative of resistance against all of society's judgments. The church is made aware of how it has aligned its views with the culture's view and the door is opened to ask for forgiveness from Rachel and God and to move toward reconciliation with all people living with disabilities.

Adrienne Rich has written a poem which seems to articulate a measure of the exclusion and loneliness experienced by someone living with a disability in an able–bodied world. It is clear that the suffering comprises the entirety of the person's existence. She writes,

> The problem unstated till now, is how to live in a damaged body
> in a world where pain is meant to be gagged, uncured, un–grieved–over.
> The problem is to connect, without hysteria...
> the pain of any one's body with the pain of the body's world.
> For it is the body's world filled with creatures... filled with dread misshapen so...
> yet the best we have...our raft among the abstract worlds
> and how I longed to live on this earth walking her boundaries...never counting
> the cost.[205]

This longing gives voice to the depths of exclusion felt in the life of someone mobility impaired. There is a yearning for wholeness and community which cannot be measured. Instead of a sense of belonging, however, there is agony and torment. It would seem that all hope is gone and that God does not understand or care. This, however, is not the case.

It does seem that God is often portrayed as an able–bodied God. Isaiah 59:1 reinforces this stating; "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor God's ear

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[205] Rich, "Contradictions: Tracking Poems, XVIII," 100.

too dull to hear." John M. Hall, however, explains it this way, "God represents perfection and the signs of redemption are to be found in the recall of the peripheries to this centre of perfection." [206] Isaiah 35:6 states, "Then will the lame leap like the deer and the mute tongue shout for joy." This implies that there will be future healing for those living with impairment.

Hall explains that this convergence is modelled after the perfection of creation in Genesis chapter one. This perfect creation was meant to reproduce according to its kind, assuring the stability and the continuation of the characteristics of normalcy. Hall states, "This convergence is rooted in the domination of the majority and returns in eschatological visions toward the singularity of the average."[207] All who have suffered 'difference' will be made whole.

Jesus is the archetype of this normalcy, without spot or blemish. 1 Peter 1:19 states, "but you were purchased with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless" and Christ never deviates from the image of God which is considered normal. This is evident in Hebrews 1:3: "And he is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature, and upholds all things by the word of his power. When he had made purification of sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high..."

In Mark 1:41 Jesus touched the outcast and healed him. He recognised the spiritual authenticity of those who lay outside of the boundaries of Judaism (Luke 7:9) and recognised that those who do the will of God in all nations are his brothers and sisters

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[206] Hall, "A Spirituality of Disability," 21–35.
[207] Hall, "A Spirituality of Disability," 21–35.

(Mark 3:35).[208] It is interesting to many, however, that there were no people living with impairment among the group of Jesus' close disciples. This was for the simple reason that Jesus would have restored them to full health. Restoration seemed to be emblematic of the experience of becoming a disciple. Blind Bartimaeus sat on the side of the road begging but when he received his sight, he followed Jesus (Mark 10:52). Also, any spiritual struggle that Jesus faced involving impairment, seemed to be conquered quickly as he confronted the forces of evil (Luke 13:16).

Hall remarks, "As eschatological Son of Man he was bringing to fruition the convergence of which the prophets had spoken (Matt 8:17), and as healer he had brought the disabled out of the oppressive powers of darkness" (Luke 11:20).[209] Interestingly, though, Jesus himself became blinded (Mark 14:65, Luke 22:64), immobilised (Mark 15:24), and excluded (Gal 3:13, Heb 13:12). Hall emphasizes that Jesus has also created solidarity with those living presently with disability, by remaining an impaired God. Hall is referring to the fact that Jesus still bears the scars of his crucifixion even after his ascension to glory (John 20: 24–29). Hall contends that throughout Jesus' ministry he had accepted the infirmities of humanity by healing them, but finally he accepted the infirmities of humanity by participating in them, by becoming one of them. "He was despised, shunned by all, pain-racked and afflicted by disease" (Isa 53:3), identifying perfectly with the socially excluded.[210] It would seem, therefore, that the centrality of Christ is the cornerstone of community.

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[208] Hall, "A Spirituality of Disability," 21–35.
[209] Hall, "A Spirituality of Disability," 21–35.
[210] Hall, "A Spirituality of Disability," 21–35.

Social ostracism affects the church in its entirety and corresponds with relational brokenness, spiritual disruption and self-alienation. The experience of disability has a significant effect on pastoral theology because, for the Christian, it represents the reality of brokenness in communion. It echoes the sacredness of the cross and is a visible reminder of the brokenness of Christ's body. Its witness of the gospel serves to break down the world of the powerful and competitive. This is illustrated in 2 Cor 12: 1–9, where the thorn in the flesh is recognized as being a superior witness to the grace of God than a heavenly experience. It informs pastoral theology of the incarnation—as an indication of emptying—of God's acceptance of vulnerability and of the leaving behind of the divine faultlessness (Phil 2:5–8). Christians living with disabilities, therefore, are an incredible witness of God's self-giving love.

Adrienne Rich longs to be unaffected by the stigmatization of her body. She is looking for freedom, relief, and enjoyment. Her feeling is that she is in the world but not of it. She has always been confronted with practices of exclusion and she longs to transcend all of this. She requires a theology of access. In John 6:37, Jesus said, "...anyone who comes to me I will never drive away." Jesus welcomed people living with disability to inaugurate his kingdom (Luke 19:10). Dennis Schürter relates that Jesus' desire was to reverse the structure of society. He placed himself at the center of community for God's people and gathered around himself people living with impairment to demonstrate the focal point of his kingdom.[211] Christ-centered community will enable the inclusion of Adrienne.

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[211] Schürter, "Jesus' Ministry with People with Disabilities," 33–47.

Narratives of Class Discrimination

Social stratification is a present reality within the North American evangelical

church. Status and class continue to divide people because difference is emphasized in

influence, reputation, and privilege. Liston O. Mills contends,

> Status relates to prestige and privilege among persons in a social system. Class
> involves groups of persons with similar social profiles and shared perceptions and
> interests. Status and class, then, reflect the ways a population ranks its members in
> hierarchical groups, some higher and some lower. Since one's location in the
> social system has a decided, some would say a determinative, influence on one's
> life, awareness of this system and its implications are essential consideration for
> pastoral care.[212]

According to Mills, issues of social class have received little attention in pastoral

care. He asserts that the pastoral care movement is middle-class oriented. This is apparent

when considering the "psychological sciences, the sixty-minute hour, structured

relationships, and the minister as professional." Mills says, "By and large ministers have

not demonstrated any deep sense of the ways the social system affects individuals, groups

and their dilemmas."[213] It is possible that awareness of status and class should precede

ministry in any given situation. Ministers are part of a social system thus reflecting

patterns, understandings, and beliefs that cause discomfort with difference. When those

who minister are with 'like-kind' there is comfort and security. The problem that this

creates, however, is an attitude of always having the correct perception of reality.

Solutions to problems will appear to be the best solutions, moral values viewed as

superior to the values of others. This attitude fosters intimidation, when others appear

more advanced, and arrogance, when people are perceived as having lower status. Mills

remarks, "Congregational expectations of pastors and their understandings of religious

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[212] Mills, "Social Status and Class Factors in Pastoral Care," 1194.
[213] Mills, "Social Status and Class Factors in Pastoral Care," 1195.

symbolism do indeed reflect class and status. But such perceptions also reflect their understanding of their lives and deserve to be taken seriously."[214]

Class and status awareness is critical for understanding the vast dimensions of problems. Problems concerning abuse, divorce, marriage, aging, widowhood etc. are often created because of perceptions concerning acceptable behavior. Loneliness is often related to feelings of not being able to achieve something or to overcome a particular habit. Expectation concerning an individual's position in life is often placed on people as a direct result of status or class. Distress in many forms comes as a direct result of inequalities in the social system.

Understanding the destructive powers of social structures is of significant benefit to the church because the frustration and injustice that people face is often a direct result of inequality within judicial systems, education, health care, and religious communities. The church concentrates on leading people to place all of their security and sense of worth in God, by encouraging the transcendence of all attachments to a worldly class system. The problem which arises is that little value is placed upon the structures within society that have fashioned them as individuals. This prevents a deeper understanding of self, others, and God as well as ministry within the class system to promote social justice within society.

It is difficult to understand that a human being could exist without some form of class or status. This sheds light on the way this experience may be viewed when confronted with scripture. If there is to be complete transcendence of the world system to the point of having no sense of attachment, there will be no desire to care for the

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[214] Mills, "Social Status and Class Factors in Pastoral Care," 1195.

environment or its inhabitants. This presents tension between theology and experience and as these two are associated, pastoral theology is challenged to articulate means of ministry and care. This is where a theology of incarnation is valuable.

Jesus left glory to enter a world system with its power and hierarchical structures, to lay down his life. He demonstrated love for the world rather than a desire to leave or to be so immersed in his divine life that he had no relationships with others. The experience of classism allows pastoral theology to appreciate new depths of understanding required concerning socially formed identities and how identity in Christ is affected. Education is more than just a means of transferring information. God's wisdom is capable of infusing situations by his Word. Also, the social sciences as well as theology are needed to equip congregations with information by encouraging focus on the ways that God is able to transform society. This is empowering as insight is gained concerning mindsets that need to be changed.

Narratives of Racial Discrimination

Racism encourages the exclusion of a 'different' other in an attempt to secure community comprised of like-kind. William Pannell has defined racism as "a scheme of oppressive social classification based on physical features, mainly skin pigmentation."[215] He contends that this definition suggests that the roots of racism lie in the biological realm where classifications are made based upon physical characteristics.[216] Racism expresses itself in patterns of segregation, stereotyping tendencies, and laws of discrimination and, therefore, reflects the attitudes and actions practiced by individuals or

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[215] Pannell, "Racism," 1035.
[216] Pannell, "Racism," 1035.

institutions which deprive people of privileges based on color or ethnic origin.[217]

Victims are exposed to negative images of themselves and these images are internalized, producing numerous detrimental effects.[218] Racism has significant effects on community within the North American evangelical church and it is essential to realize that racism may be more rooted in fear than actual skin color. Pannell asserts that racism is "related to the need to be in control, especially when social circumstances suggest that others, unlike themselves, threaten to supplant or marginalize their social position."[219]

A paper was presented in August 2005 at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania titled, "Churches Need Sociology Too: Examining Perspectives on Racism in Evangelical, Mainline and New Thought Congregations." It was presented by Jeanette Baust, and represented perspectives shared from ten different churches in Denver, Colorado.[220]

Baust had conducted four hundred and fifty–two surveys and ninety interviews concerning the issue of segregation. She discovered that most interviewed thought of racism in terms of Black and White rather than across diverse ethnicities. Most White respondents believed that their country was no longer segregated. Of interest, however, was the fact that the majority of the White respondents lived in predominantly White neighborhoods, attended White churches, and worked in predominantly White job settings. She discovered that as interviews progressed it became clear that those who were White felt connected to people of color on television, in the movies, on sports teams, and within the music they enjoyed. Baust labeled this scenario, "The I Know

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[217] Pannell, "Racism," 1036.
[218] Pannell, "Racism," 1036.
[219] Pannell, "Racism," 1038.
[220] Baust, "Churches Need Sociology Too," 1.

Oprah Phenomenon."[221] To these individuals, the fact that they did not have any significant personal relationships, or even much direct contact with people of color, did not undermine their perceptions that they lived in an integrated city and country. Baust said,

> Among Whites who acknowledged widespread segregation, a common sentiment was that people desire racial and cultural separation, and that this is a fairly natural phenomenon. One individual said, "It's just human nature. There's nothing really wrong with this." Another said, "They want it too, you know," (meaning that people of color do not want to live near Whites either). A few African Americans suggested that they didn't know a way around segregation when it came to churches, since it seemed like Blacks and Whites simply wanted to worship differently. Though this was their perception around the issue of integrated churches, there were few Blacks who indicated that neighborhood segregation was a good idea or justified. In fact, many African Americans laughed as the White view of "positive segregation" was recounted. One Black man retorted, "Perhaps the ghettos are open to anyone living there – but they don't seem to be integrated. And the ritzy neighborhoods? No one has to call them segregated – they're just unaffordable."[222]

Baust related that root causes such as fear, discomfort with difference, and deep, personal commitment to cultural norms and comfort levels, were shared as respondents became more engrossed in the subject of racism. Some people interviewed seemed frustrated as they related that segregation was a normal way of life and most did not believe that things could change. Some Evangelicals attributed racism to sinfulness. In general, however, respondents took a relaxed approach. Baust said,

> There was little reflexivity about intentionally broken family structures or economic stress, only comments about needing to take more personal familial responsibility. There was little analysis about White flight (as many interviewed lived in almost exclusively White suburbs) or the impact that racial segregation has on neighborhoods and public schools when sizeable tax bases are removed. When there was any mention of handed-down legacies of racism, such as the impact of slavery, it became clear that the residual consequences of historical racism have been reified and are now assumed as part of the contemporary

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[221] Baust, "Churches Need Sociology Too," 19.
[222] Baust, "Churches Need Sociology Too," 19, 20.

context. Overt adoption of personal responsibility for the past was often dismissed as unnecessary or unhealthy. One ancestral connection made by a White respondent suggested that any shame and blame must be born by those who went before him, since he was not responsible for slavery or its impact. He did not suggest that any continued preference or privilege that he had accrued should not be honored, however.[223]

Baust discovered in her findings that "almost eighty percent of congregants said that churches should be involved in alleviating racism, almost seventy percent said their church addressed the issue of race, and almost seventy percent said they would like their pastor to address this issue when preaching."[224] This sounded positive but when she compared the quantitative and qualitative data, different views became known. She said,

> When people said that churches should be involved in alleviating racism, most congregants did not believe that this referred to any difficult or important work within their own congregational contexts. They most often believed that the larger church should stand against hate crimes in Texas and generic injustice. When asked if their church addressed racism, almost seventy percent of congregants said yes. Yet when interviewed, and asked how the pastor or the congregation addressed these issues, many congregants replied that they talked about loving their neighbor. In only one case did an Evangelical church meet annually to discuss and repent of racial injuries among themselves. Finally, the assertion that congregants would like their pastor to preach about racial issues is suspect when it becomes apparent that most pastors never discussed race openly from the pulpit, yet congregants had the impression that they did. One Evangelical pastor was refreshingly honest when he revealed in an interview that the only sermon he ever gave which received absolutely no response from his usually engaging congregation was on race and racism. He didn't know what to make of it, but said he never returned to the topic again.[225]

Racism is a strong display of exclusion. Racism influences institutions, churches, politics, and all elements of social welfare. It holds the potential to ruin lives and destroy identity. It is capable of affecting congregations and the redemptive quality of the church community. Associating theology and the experience of racism encourages the possibility

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[223] Baust, "Churches Need Sociology Too," 20.

[224] Baust, "Churches Need Sociology Too," 19, 20.

[225] Baust, "Churches Need Sociology Too," 21.

for a theology of society. Education is needed to help Christians appreciate 'difference' and to value it as a gift from God. Sensitivity is needed requiring social issues and education is warranted for congregations to have greater understanding of the world around them. Rather than excluding those of different races, diversity must be recognized as God's creative plan. The forces which segregate and destroy need to be confronted through the power of the Holy Spirit. This also entails the implementation of a theology of resistance, equality, and justice when ministering to those who have been discriminated against.

Narratives of Gender Inequality

Sexism also affects community in its denigration and exclusion of women. It has been described by psychotherapist Dr. Charlotte Ellen as "discrimination against, and domination and exploitation of women by men."[226] Political strategist Suzanne Pharr also defines sexism as "an enforced belief in male dominance and control held in place by systems of power and control that ultimately keep women subordinate to men."[227] Professor and co–editor of *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, Heather W. Hackman, contends that prejudicial attitudes or beliefs are combined with social power that is recognized in institutions, cultures and in individuals.[228] Hackman says,

> Examples of sexism range from denigrating jokes, to objectifying females in the media, to job discrimination, to acts of violence against women. Sexism can be directed at a girl or woman individually or, on a larger scale, can encompass cultural views, social attitudes, or institutional policies. The severity of these examples may differ, but they all serve to undermine the power, safety, and personal freedom of women.[229]

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[226] Ellen, "Sexism," 1143.

[227] Pharr, *Homophobia as a Weapon of Sexism*, 8.

[228] Hackman, "Sexism: Introduction," 199, 200.

[229] Hackman, "Sexism: Introduction," 199, 200.

Sexism may be either condoned or condemned. This would depend upon beliefs concerning both the function and worth of men and women. Many attitudes about the relationship between the sexes may be deemed legitimate. Ellen says that these attitudes may include an understanding that "women are naturally more emotional than men; women should stay out of the labor force because they take jobs away from men; women's place is in the home."[230] People who hold these attitudes usually do not view their opinions as sexist but believe that they represent truth. Ellen contends, "all beliefs and practices which confine women to particular spheres or denigrate their status in relation to men are discriminatory, arbitrary, prejudicial, restrictive, exploitative, and therefore sexist."[231]

Power continues to reside with men causing women to be victimized in diverse ways. A few examples are as follows: Discrimination on the basis of sex is not prohibited by the constitution of the United States; Women hold few powerful positions in governing bodies, despite increases in their education; Seventy–five percent of America's poor are women and children; Women earn less than men; Women as sexual objects continues to dominate media images.[232] Here are some words one woman wrote following a worship service:

> I sit in church today alternately smoldering with anger, fighting back tears of hurt and regret, and grasping at those elusive moments when I can truly affirm the experience of worship. Because suddenly I feel left out. 'Once to Every Man and Nation,' 'O Brother Man,' 'How Shall a Rich man . . . ,' 'Rise Up, O Men of God,' and on and on and on. Lots of male words; no female ones.
>
> Except for some women in the choir there are only men in the service – in the pulpit, at the altar, in the aisles. There are mostly women in the pews.

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[230] Ellen, "Sexism," 1143.
[231] Ellen, "Sexism," 1143.
[232] Ellen, "Sexism," 1144.

We've turned to another hymn, 'Open My Eyes.' Here's where the tears want to come. At last I can really sing. In this one God is a spirit, not a man. And there are no words that call only the men and not the women. I wish people would open their eyes and see what I am seeing.

The sermon is talking about ethical issues for mankind. 'Every man ought to have an equal chance.' (Women too?) Finally the preacher mentions a woman but she is 'only a midwife.'

It is time for the last hymn, 'Turn Back, O Man.' Ha! There's an admonition I don't have to heed. It's not talking to me! Oddly enough as the stanzas wear on, the first significant mention of the female occurs. Earth and nature are both labeled 'she.' The existence of the female side of the universe is at last recognized. [233]

The struggle continues through narratives of resistance. Sexism can be understood to have communal perpetrators and victims and yet, it often is met with resistance by women, who have been subordinate to men throughout their lives. To resist sexism means challenging the traditional roles of women in the church and standing up to the male domination tendencies.

Sojourner Truth (1797–1883) was not afraid to confront sexism and to take her stand. People excluded her because of their perceptions of difference. [234] However, Sojourner was not afraid to stand up and confront the oppression. She had been sold into slavery and was excluded throughout her entire life. She knew of the injustice that accompanied being poor, black, and female but knew that God had sent her on a mission. She triumphed in Christ because her spiritual journey had been successful in bringing reconciliation with self, others, and God. She gained her freedom from slavery in 1827 and "Ain't I A Woman?" was the name given to a speech, delivered at the Women's

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[233] Clinebell, "Liberating the Church" Online Book.
[234] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 21.

Convention in Akron, Ohio on May 29, 1851.[235]

> Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?
>
> That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?
>
> Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?
>
> Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.
>
> If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them. Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.[236]

Sojourner believed she had been called by God and told a journalist, "The Lord has made me a sign unto this nation, an I go round atestifyin, an showin on em their sins agin my people."[237] When viewing this experience in light of theology, it is clear that the Holy Spirit provided divine enablement. A theology of presence is needed. This theology

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[235] This speech was edited by Frances Gage, a journalist at the time. For further information see Stanton et al., eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 114–17.

[236] Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?" 241.

[237] Stowe, "Sojourner Truth–The Libyan Sibyl," 473.

encourages an understanding of being in the 'in-group' even when people class an

individual as being in the 'out-group.' A theology of presence enables and empowers

narratives of resistance which usurp the perpetrators in love and compassion. The

presence of God brings hope to the situations filled with suffering and despair, sexism,

racism, and classism. Pastoral theology is able to offer Sojourner a theology of freedom

and entitlement. John 8: 36 states, "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free

indeed." This theology enables a church to come along side those who have suffered and

work toward restoration and reconciliation where alienation has abounded.

According to Andrés T. Tapia, combating exclusion necessitates "calling out our

differences, not minimizing them."[238] He names this "the inclusion paradox" because

"calling out differences unleashes the true creative contributions of diverse perspectives

that play off each other…"[239] This understanding is critical for the church because there is

oneness in Christ rather than sameness. Galatians 3:28 rejoices in the celebration of

difference and this difference is meant to enhance inclusion rather than promote

exclusion.

Type 4: Self-Alienation

This is the process of distancing oneself from personal feelings or activities. It can

be found and studied in private situations involving divorce, grief, homelessness, poverty,

illness as well as in public situations such as in the church, workplace and corporate

empires. According to Jane Costas and Peter Fleming, its definitive feature is a "self-

awareness of failure." [240]

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[238] Tapia, *The Inclusion Paradox*, 3.
[239] Tapia, *The Inclusion Paradox*, 3.
[240] Costas and Fleming, "Beyond Dis-identification," 360.

The effects of self-alienation are often evident in occurrences of mental illness or emotional distress. Nathaniel Branden describes self-alienation as a condition revealing that persons are out of touch with their own needs, emotions, longings, and frustrations. Self-identity is distorted, as lives are a mere reflection of their adopted roles.[241] Performance, for the sake of being accepted and becoming like everyone else can create a great deal of damage to a healthy sense of identity. This does not imply, however, that seemingly healthy individuals cannot experience self-alienation. Seemingly healthy individuals may function quite normally as deep-seated loneliness consumes them.[242]

Self-alienation is often evident in the lives of people who are homeless and living on the streets. This is because the need to belong and the yearning for community have not been met. The individual may have lost touch with family members, friends, and home, preventing the ability to hear, understand, and appropriate God's message and God's Kingdom. Self-alienation creates an incredible loneliness and John C. Whitehorn asserts that psychological analysis, which focuses on a person's self conception, reveals that loneliness is actually perceived as an estrangement between the person and his or her true inner feelings. Articulation is difficult and people develop facades or false fronts in the hope of finding acceptance and love. They become alienated from their own selves as a result.[243] Whitehorn comments, "Some substantial incongruity between the self as felt and the self as reacted to by others, generates and accentuates a feeling of loneliness, and this process may become a vicious cycle of loneliness and estrangement."[244]

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[241] Branden, *The Disowned Self*, 237.
[242] Rouner, *Loneliness*, 1.
[243] Whitehorn, "On Loneliness and the Incongruous Self Image," 15–17.
[244] Whitehorn, "On Loneliness and the Incongruous Self Image," 15–17.

Narratives of Homelessness

This experience is prominent among the homeless. Their sense of displacement

and lack of self–identity warrants attention. According to Kenneth Kelling,

"Homelessness is much more than rooflessness, it is the lack of a secure and satisfactory

home."[245] T. O'Reilly-Fleming, who conducted a study of homelessness in Canada, found

that the homeless interviewed were overwhelmingly average. They represented many

different lifestyles and were from a cross-section of ethnic and racial backgrounds.[246] A

similar study conducted by Ami Rokach revealed that emotional distress was very

common in the lives of the homeless. The self-alienation and loneliness was

"characterized by numbness, immobilization and denial."[247] One homeless woman stated,

> No one really cares if I die today or tomorrow because they are so consumed with
> making money, having power and control, and even if I died today…people won't
> care…But one thing is for sure, sitting here all alone, cold and desperate to find a
> little bit of meaning to my life, I realize that really there isn't any.[248]

The search for meaning is often desperate for those who exclude themselves.

They recognize little hope and have lost their sense of place and belonging. The homeless

woman's words reveal a level of expectation of others that is quite high and yet she does

not seem to understand that she is alienated from herself as well as alienated from those

whom she believes have the ability to help her. She does not believe that she has any

ability to help herself and therefore discounts herself as worthless. According to Zadro

and Williams' work, this act of self–alienation may only perpetuate exclusion by

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[245] Kelling, *Older Homeless People in London*, ii.
[246] O'Reilly–Fleming, *Down and Out in Canada: Homeless Canadians*, XIV.
[247] Rokach, "Private Lives in Public Places," 103.
[248] Hill, "Finding Refuge in Writing," A15.

others.[249]

Nathaniel Branden describes self-alienation as a condition in which persons are out of touch with their own needs, feelings, emotions, frustrations and longings. They are oblivious to their actual selves and their lives are the reflection of unreal selves that they have adopted. Self-alienation and its treatment psychotherapeutically present an incredible challenge for trained professionals.[250] Branden adds,

> So long as an individual cannot accept the fact of what he is, cannot permit himself fully to be aware of it, cannot fully admit the truth into his consciousness, he cannot move beyond that point: if he denies the reality of his condition, he cannot proceed to alter it, cannot achieve healthy changes in his personality.[251]

The loneliness experienced is immeasurable because of this disconnection. Self-alienation causes the individual to feel surrounded by others but not really part of any supporting group or nurturing community. Nouwen says, "Out of this pervading loneliness many cry, 'Is there anyone who really cares? Is there anyone who can take away my inner sense of isolation? Is there anyone with whom I can feel at home?'"[252] Nouwen continues saying, "it is this paralyzing sense of separation that constitutes the core of much human suffering."[253] When people perceive themselves as passive bystanders, who cannot contribute to the story of life, their pain is no longer life-giving, and trials cease to offer new life, because it is believed that life dies out behind them and does not lead anywhere.[254]

Violence often becomes a means of attempting to secure a type of belonging and

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[249] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 25.
[250] Branden, *The Disowned Self*, xi.
[251] Branden, *The Disowned Self*, 89.
[252] Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, 32, 33.
[253] Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, 33.
[254] Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, 33, 34.

community but this simply intensifies the loneliness and increases the alienation. It becomes physical, social and spiritual. Theodore I. Rubin says that people experiencing self–alienation no longer have any sense of an authentic self and feel positioned on the periphery of their lives. A person believes he lives on "the edge of the world and that the central substance of the world is invariably at a great distance from him."[255] This was obvious in the poem presented earlier by Adrienne Rich, when discussing the social exclusion of those living with disability.

Narratives of Dis-integration at Work

In the 1840's, Karl Marx believed that labor under capitalism actually encouraged self–alienation. He contended that because any object produced by a worker through forced activity is not the property of the worker, there is alienation. He contended that workers become estranged from themselves because creativity and a sense of ownership are lost, and asserted that this led to the dehumanization of the worker.[256] It was his conviction that alienation from others would occur as well, because people would be competing with each other in the labor market constantly.[257]

Marx felt that the only way that this alienation could be conquered was to transcend the need for private property. Interestingly, he believed that this would initiate the "complete return of man to himself as a *social* being…; the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, between man and man—the true result of strife between existence and essence."[258] Problems arose, however, in attempts to determine what necessitated an authentic self.

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[255] Rubin, *Compassion and Self-Hate*, 181–82.
[256] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," 75.
[257] Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," 77.
[258] Marx, "Economic and philosophical manuscripts of 1844," 85.

Interestingly, there are now self-alienation studies being conducted in the workplace where ordinary workers are found to perceive the truth concerning their individual selves as 'alien.' This is explained in the context of culture management where 'dis–identification' allows employees to avoid the stress involved when dealing with who they 'really are' and who they are expected to be at work. This 'dis-identification' seems to present itself through multiple means such as: cynicism, humor, skepticism, and irony. Workers practice this to maintain a sense of authenticity.[259] They protect their authentic selfhood by establishing a boundary between what they perceive to be genuine, and what they perceive to be counterfeit. Jane Costas and Peter Fleming discovered that research has also revealed that employees receive a sense of satisfaction and relief knowing that they can protect their perceived 'identity' from the clutches of corporate power. This enables them to integrate more effectively as it provides a sense of autonomy.[260]

Costas and Fleming have conducted several interviews with employees working for a corporation under the pseudonym, 'Y-International.'[261] This corporate title represents a professional firm with a prestigious identity emphasizing themes such as diversity, difference, and inclusion. It also encourages achievement, drive, and success. Ironically, employees describe the business culture as "long hours," "slave-driven," "robotic," and "very aggressive."[262]

It is apparent that problems arise when the employees believe that they have become strangers to themselves as the 'truth of oneself' is recognized as false and filled

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[259] For further information on this subject see Kunda, *Engineering Culture*, 1992; Sturdy, "Customer care in a customer society," 27–53; also, Whittle, "Preaching and Practicing Flexibility," 1301–22.
[260] Costas and Fleming, "Beyond Dis-identification," 354.
[261] Costas and Fleming, "Beyond Dis-identification," 364.
[262] Costas and Fleming, "Beyond Dis-identification," 364–65.

with deception. Employees, in many cases, however, really do not grasp what is meant by

a true sense of identity and begin to see themselves bearing an unavoidable, corporate

identity. Rico, who is a management consultant, feels that he no longer understands who

he is. He had traditional family values but is finding that they are almost impossible to

sustain because of his lifestyle and work habits. He now realizes that what he had

believed to be his real self is foreign to him and others.[263]

Helen, a 34 year old manager, also feels that she has been denied an authentic self

in the workplace. She comments,

> I don't feel that there is much room for me to express myself here and it seems
> that the culture stifles you…It is like you are at a masquerade party and you come
> to the party everyday and choose a mask. And you wear that mask everyday and
> return it at the end of the day. [264]

Alice, a consultant for the same company, contends that her life is all about her

job. This makes her feel devastated and she finds that she has lost freedom and control

over her life. She no longer has time for family and friends and has become the person

that she never wanted to be. Her life has become defined by the 'corporate lived self.' [265]

Jason, a 32 year old manager, also states,

> I realize that I am not the person that I have to be at work and I am not enjoying
> it. I would definitely say that Y-International has separated me from my
> personality. Maybe not changing it but certainly forcing me to be two people at an
> expense of my happiness if you like.[266]

It is obvious that self–alienation is a lived reality in the corporate world. People

look to a career for fulfillment and a sense of identity only to discover that their sense of

identity is distorted. They battle to discover the reality of their true self through their

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[263] Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character*, 20.
[264] Costas and Fleming, "Beyond Dis-identification," 365.
[265] Costas and Fleming, "Beyond Dis-identification," 365–66.
[266] Costas and Fleming, "Beyond Dis-identification," 366.

'narrated imaginary of authenticity' as Costas and Fleming would phrase it.[267] An employee wants to believe that there is an authentic self which can be lived, but what seemed so authentic and real often loses its validity and idealism, as a worker is conditioned to adopt the corporate mindset and values. This is similar to the mindset of the homeless woman who believed that she had fallen prey to the mindset of the culture and had, therefore, lost her sense of identity in both a personal and communal sense.[268] Loneliness becomes an actual lived experience in this context, yet few would recognize its ever-present reality. Self-alienation simply becomes a part of a blurred personal identity.

Pastoral theology is able to offer Helen a theology of work. The Bible portrays creation itself as the work of God. Gen 2:2 states, "And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done." God, however, is still working. In John 5:17 Jesus said, "My Father is still working, and I also am working." The act of work, therefore, is filled with intrinsic meaning, significance, and dignity when God has directed the work. This will enable Helen to understand her work in a new way while realizing that it cannot define who she is. Her true identity is only to be found in Christ. Theology affords Helen opportunity for discovering a new perspective regarding work and gives her space to hear the gospel in a theology of work and to reflect upon her need to be reconciled to God. Theology is enriched by her narrative because the gospel needs to be incorporated fully in a theology of the workplace. The culture needs the permeation of the gospel.

Alice's narrative described feelings that her life was centered on her job. She said

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[267] Costas and Fleming, "Beyond Dis-identification," 366.
[268] Hill, "Finding Refuge in Writing," A15.

she was devastated and had lost freedom and control over her life. There was no time for family and friends and she admitted that she has become someone that she never wanted to be. Her life is now defined by the 'corporate lived self.'[269] Like Helen, Alice needs to know that life 'in Christ' brings new perspective. She feels displaced and confused by a forced corporate identity. Pastoral theology offers Alice a theology of rest. Her narrative speaks of many living lives caught up in the fast pace that supports competition and rivalry. She contributes to theology by disclosing a vast need for the integration of theology in the workplace.

Jason's narrative reveals that he feels separated from his personality. He has been forced to be two separate people. This has jeopardized his happiness.[270] He feels controlled and manipulated and has no idea what to do. Pastoral theology offers Jason a theology of personhood. This theology was described in chapter two when discussing the work of Lossky and Yannaras. Concerning Jason, understanding identity is not simply an intellectual process. Personhood is recognized in relation to others and is modeled after the Holy Trinity operating as persons in relation. Jason's narrative contributes to theology by disclosing the individualism dominating the culture. Personhood is realized fully when reconciliation with self, others, and God becomes reality. This is impossible outside of experiencing the reconciliation with God made possible through Christ.

What happens in the workplace may also take place in the church. People have a narrated imaginary of authenticity concerning 'identity in Christ' but the workings of a church often tend to blur the identity of an individual in Christ by concentrating on the core values of the corporate body. Within the endless activities, small groups, programs,

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[269] Costas and Fleming, "Beyond Dis-identification," 365–66.
[270] Costas and Fleming, "Beyond Dis-identification," 366.

rules, and rituals, people often become disconnected from the one who has forgiven their sins, made them part of a new humanity, and given them a new identity. When speaking about their relationship with God, Christians often refer to their denomination, particular church, doctrinal beliefs, or their knowledge of scripture. Identity in Christ, therefore, can become alienated from the false, conforming, and competitive religious self.

When associating the experience of homelessness with theology, within the category of self-alienation, it is realized that the need to belong is paramount. The homeless do not have a fixed address. An emergency shelter is not a home. This means that the homeless do not feel any welcome in either the public or private sphere of society. They have been excluded from common life and many have become alienated from their very selves. It is important, therefore, to incorporate a theology of adoption when ministering to them. In Isa 49:15, 16 God says, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me." Attending to their need for inclusion means the creation of safe place where wholeness and health is experienced, where people know they are loved, accepted, forgiven and blessed.

It is also essential to realize that homelessness can have spiritual connotations. Unless an individual realizes that their place of belonging and rest is in Christ, there will never be peace or satisfaction concerning identity. Without the assurance of identity in Christ exclusion will continue to cause alienation and loneliness.

Reviewing The Types of Exclusion:

Type 1: Relational Brokenness

Type 2: Spiritual Disruption

Type 3: Social Ostracism

Type 4: Self-Alienation

At this time, it is important to review the types of exclusion which positioned the narratives in the diagram demonstrating the horizons of relational identity. Of interest is the fact that exclusion is understood as having three sources: self, others, and God. It is also interesting, however, that the experience of alienation affects a healthy relationship with self, others and God because is seems that exclusion perpetuates itself when there is no resistance. All of the types show strong connections with the others and in many of the narratives all four types are recognized. They are all recognized as being nested within the others and overlap occurs regarding the types in many of the narratives. This reveals that exclusion represents the underside of community; a place of untold suffering and relational fragmentation. The typology that emerges describes a need for speaking into the loneliness and encouraging a return to Christ.

The typology which has emerged also involves a non–overlapping dimension. The typology which is meant to be more descriptive than prescriptive is comprised of both a destructive and constructive dimension of exclusion. These destructive and constructive dimensions reveal a wide variety of responses. Clearly the narratives have revealed that when exclusion occurs there is a degree of suffering. The narratives have unmasked homelessness—a loss of 'place' both physical and spiritual, dis-identification, disregard and neglect, bewilderment, loneliness, emptiness, and despair. They have also

revealed faith, hope, resistance, expectation and yearning. The exclusion is sometimes visible as in the case of the absence of a ramp for someone mobility impaired but it is often invisible and only brought to the awareness of others through the sharing of narratives. On the constructive side 'voice' whether verbal or non-verbal demonstrates longing for improvement. Voice is a powerful resistor revealing that the problem is recognized as solvable. There is hope for change. When 'voice' is impossible it is likely that individuals may often just leave. This leaving may be physical but may also be emotional and involve complete exclusion of those who had caused pain. 'Exit' becomes their voice and this is happening in many churches across North America. People speak with their feet as they journey toward the promise of something better.

It is also evident in the orthogonal dimension of this typology that the narratives have further reinforced the need for an undergirding theology of alienation researched in the previous chapter. This has been demonstrated in fours ways. First, the narratives have demonstrated clearly that people are often looking for honest recognition of their identity from others. There doesn't seem to be a deep theological foundation which allows them to know who they are in Christ and to discern the evil and fear undergirding the act of exclusion.

Second, experiences of alienation disclosed through the sharing of narratives reveal deep rooted pain and anguish. The loneliness reveals something about the understanding of self, others, and God. It also reveals a need for forgiveness and reconciliation between the perpetrators and victims of exclusion.

Third, the narratives have indicated that hope is to be found in the experience of alienation and loneliness only when there is a solid theological foundation realized in the

life of the one who feels excluded. In many of the narratives, it is apparent that the church is not believed to be capable of offering the inclusion, welcome, and embrace that is needed.

Fourth, the narratives have demonstrated clearly that the church needs to welcome the voice of lament. Many pastors and leaders realize a myriad of Christians have fallen through the cracks of the institutional system and are suffering as a result and yet there have been few efforts made to speak to those who have left.

A Brief Summary of the Research

This thesis has laid out a theoretical framework which has proven to be very informative concerning the progression of suffering in the lives of those who have experienced alienation. This has encouraged investigating a theology of alienation because treating the symptoms of alienation rather than the root cause is futile. What has been discovered is that the root cause of exclusion is an alienation from true self. This has laid a foundation for the formation of a typology of exclusion which is more descriptive than prescriptive. The narratives have been pedagogical in nature by opening up the reality of alienation thus revealing to the church its all too common practice of excluding others. These narratives of exclusion have helped identify the complexity and depth of human anguish caused by practices of exclusion. They have also revealed just how difficult it is to comprehend barriers to authentic community. It will become apparent, when reflecting upon the work of sociologists and social psychologists in chapter one that within the narratives shared in chapter three it is recognized that barriers erected as a direct result of being excluded are often constructed in the personal experiences of loneliness—the deepest element of alienation. This requires a deeper

spiritual understanding of the core experience of loneliness resident in both the lives of the excluded and those who exclude.

The turn in the next chapter, therefore, will provide a framework for the experience of loneliness as a core element of alienation. Loneliness will be described as depicted in the writings of the late pastoral theologian and priest, Henri Nouwen. Nouwen addresses this loneliness as a clue to a pastoral response because he realized that it would provide hope and relief in the midst of the pain and anguish. He does not stigmatize loneliness but places it within the framework of shared spiritual journey toward the inward, outward and upward. Loneliness is recognized as a common experience, though often filled with suffering, holds the potential for encouraging spiritual growth and the shaping of community. This journey is meant to be made by all Christians revealing that there is hope in the midst of alienation and its core experience of loneliness. The journey detailed by Nouwen encourages a spirituality of imperfection,[271] rather than striving toward an ideal which cannot be lived. Every Christian is recognized as needing to embark on this journey to spend time in prayer and solitude. This journey is recognized as empowered by the Spirit of God and therefore changes will take place within the human heart. Without this necessary journey, influence from society is just too penetrating and detrimental.

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[271] The term 'spirituality of imperfection' is borrowed from a recent book by Wil Hernandez. See, Hernandez. *Henri Nouwen: A Spirituality of Imperfection*, 2006.

CHAPTER FOUR

HENRI NOUWEN'S PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF LONELINESS

The symptoms of exclusion experienced in the lives of those who shared their narratives of exclusion have revealed the complexity and depths of alienation. It is clear that the deepest and core element of this alienation is loneliness. The problem, though, is that not everyone speaks out. Many narratives of exclusion are never voiced or understood and people often live with incredible loneliness, believing that there is little hope for inclusion and welcome. Christians yearn for community and belonging in silence, while other believers seldom engage with the reality of their loneliness.

In his writings Henri Nouwen recognized the communal disjunction that Bonhoeffer described. He also understood that the symptoms of alienation could not just receive treatment and knew that the root of the problem was alienation from self. The familiar and often accepted presence of the 'false self' among Christians encouraged his belief that the essence of authentic community in Christ has been overlooked. The Christian life in community is not an ideal to be pursued but is a reality which is already present in Christ. He writes this message to the church as well as to all who are excluded. This is obvious in his account of his own spiritual journey involving the inward, outward, and upward. He demonstrated to both the perpetrators and the victims of exclusion that there is a need for prayer and solitude in the Christian life if the false self is to be dealt with and authentic community realized.

In contrast to projecting the popular idealism, Henri Nouwen spoke directly into the lives of those suffering from loneliness. He saw into the reality of alienation in

people's lives and was saying that a personal admission of an experience of loneliness is legitimate. No one is deserving of exclusion because all are loved by God. In other words, everyone has a place. Nouwen wanted to concentrate on what exclusion and inclusion actually feel like.

This insight is crucial for the development of a pastoral theology of community. Without listening and understanding, without empathy and compassion, there is no authentic connection with another. Nouwen's own life was consumed with loneliness and yet his journey can be viewed as the common experience of many. He was lonely but was intentional about demonstrating solidarity in suffering to instill hope. So few will admit that they have felt excluded or have excluded someone from their lives, but this is the reality of human existence.

Henri Nouwen's entire theological reflection was grounded in a key precept, that what is most agonizingly personal is often the most universal. From this stance, he shared with the victims and perpetrators of exclusion, the importance of finding 'true home' in God. In finding 'true home,' there would be clear self–awareness and an understanding of responsibility toward others.

The spiritual journey which he describes does not foster false idealism. This journey involves the recognition of the reality of imperfection in a human life and the need to embrace the one who is the source of all life. The yearning for community, therefore, holds the potential to propel movement inward, outward, and upward, addressing self, others, and God.

Nouwen's work is framed by an over-arching understanding of loneliness

described as having two dimensions: the first loneliness and the second loneliness.[272] This structural understanding of loneliness gives hope to the excluded by confronting the reality of loneliness at the core of their experience. It also causes people, who have been in the habit of excluding others, to realize that loneliness is a reality in each of our lives and that competition with others has not solved all problems. This chapter, therefore, will attempt to lay out Henri Nouwen's core assumptions about the spiritual connections of self, others, and God within the overarching framework of the first and second loneliness and will reflect upon how Nouwen's journey may help to shape a pastoral theology of community capable of encouraging the inclusion of all Christians..

The First Loneliness

Nouwen contended that the experience of the first loneliness is filled with emotionally unsatisfying friendships.[273] During this time, an individual is out of touch with God and is looking anxiously for someone or something that can give a sense of belonging, intimacy, and home. This does not necessarily mean that the individual has never had an experience with God. The first loneliness is often experienced prior to an experience with God or when a person has not yet experienced a deepened walk with God. In the first loneliness the individual shows signs of having been affected by the competitiveness operating within society.

Nouwen believed that every human being experiences some existential loneliness, and that no one is capable of eliminating the loneliness of another. Loneliness has the potential to imprison people and there is a constant yearning for intimacy, coupled with a

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[272] Nouwen, *Home Tonight*, 43.
[273] Nouwen, *Home Tonight*, 43.

sense of homelessness.[274] Nouwen, however, asserted that this knowledge is essential for realizing the place of an individual in the community of humankind, as well as in relationship with God.[275]

Many theorists would argue, though, that experiences of loneliness are due specifically to lack of attachments, social interaction, or experiences of loss and that whenever social needs are met, loneliness is simply silenced in consciousness.[276] They neglect to attach the deeper spiritual meaning to loneliness that Nouwen describes. Even though loneliness is an ambiguous term with multiple meanings, Nouwen recognized that it is possible to live an entire life carrying the enduring pain of loneliness.[277] Where many would be embarrassed and tempted to shy away from any admission to the experience of an indwelling loneliness, Nouwen encouraged people to 'claim their story' by embracing their humanity, flawed as it may be, with the one who has created them.

Nouwen was not making light of the suffering of others and realized fully that loneliness is recognized as one of the most painful human wounds in Western society. He likened the wound of loneliness to the "Grand Canyon—a deep incision in the surface of our existence..."[278] Nouwen understood that loneliness is the root cause of many suicides, alcoholism, drug use, and the source of many psychosomatic symptoms. In spite of this fact Nouwen was filled with hope.

Refusing to dwell on the devastation and possible death that loneliness can bring,

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[274] Nouwen, *Home Tonight,* xvii.
[275] Nouwen, *Home Tonight,* 48.
[276] See Peplau and Perlman, "Perspectives on Loneliness," 1–20.
[277] Nouwen, *Home Tonight,* xvii.
[278] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer,* 84.

he chose to focus on its ability to inspire creativity and a deep spiritual awakening. In fact, Nouwen asserted that all creativity demands an encounter with loneliness.[279] He believed that it is the actual fear of this encounter, as well as the fear of individual freedom, that limits the expression of the self.[280] For this reason, he longed to bring a message of comfort and hope by emphasizing that "all human suffering is forever embraced in divine compassion."[281]

According to Nouwen, recognizing the first loneliness actually marks the beginning of the road to a deeper conversion and the formation of self–awareness. Revelation, made possible through the work of the Holy Spirit, unmasks the first loneliness allowing a person to perceive life as a paradox. It is now understood that the ideals which have been presented can never be lived in reality. The illusion is extremely compelling, but it is now realized that life as an ideal can never be lived.

Nouwen said,

...no love or friendship, no intimate embrace or tender kiss, no community, commune, or collective, no man or woman, will ever be able to satisfy our desire to be released from our lonely condition. This truth is so disconcerting that we are more prone to play games with our fantasies than to face the truth of our existence.[282]

He understood that people could make choices in life with the hopes of dispelling personal loneliness but he realized that this drives the self into excruciating relationships. He said, "To wait for moments or places where no pain exists, no separation is felt and where all human restlessness has turned into inner peace is waiting for a dream world."[283]

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[279] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 18.
[280] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 18, 19.
[281] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 107.
[282] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 84.
[283] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 19.

Many psychologists would assert that part of all individual development is the integration of relational contexts and the cultivation of increasingly complex forms of relatedness. They propose that relatedness involves several dimensions such as holding, attachment, passionate experience, eye to eye validation, idealization and identification, mutuality, rootedness, and attentiveness and care. All people do not develop in the same way but all of these dimensions are linked to developmental needs.[284] What is missing, however, is the need of the innermost self to be related to God. Ecclesiastes 3:11 states, "He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end."

Human relations cannot penetrate the depths of loneliness experienced in a life that the God–made void creates. The depths are there for a reason and this is what Nouwen was trying to address. Facing the truth of existence, therefore, involves the reconstruction of meaning for all people and Nouwen used narrative to offer his findings with regard to coming to terms with the first loneliness. He believed that it is necessary to experience both the fear and exhilaration of being alone with self, others, and God. His story involved every aspect of his past, present, and anticipated future and, again, he believed that the most personal could become the most universal.

Nouwen's perspective in this regard has contributed greatly toward narrative reconstruction in a person's life. According to Andrew Lester, narrative theory explains that our present identity is not formed solely from past stories but that future stories also contribute toward the formation of self. Lester adds, "Our consciousness of time makes it

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[284] Deutsch, "From Island to Archipelago," 77.

necessary to have stories of our past which structure the core narratives *from* which we live, as well as enabling us to create future stories that establish the core narratives *toward* which we live."[285] To encourage narrative reconstruction, therefore, Nouwen skillfully combined narrative theory with narrative theology. He articulated how his own story inhabited the much larger story of how God was at work in his particular life, bringing him to himself, into communion with others, and finally to finding his 'true home' in God.

Clark E. Moustakas does not hold the same perspective as Nouwen in that he does not see the need for finding 'true home' in God but he does realize a particular lack in the inner life. With regard to loneliness, he states,

> It is not homelessness. There is no departure or exile, the person is fully there, as fully as he can ever be… It calls for strength, endurance, and sustenance, enabling a person to reach previously unknown depths and to realize a certain nakedness of inner life.[286]

The problem in recognizing an inner nakedness is that this revelation in itself simply offers no remedy. Nouwen has provided direction and hope to dispel the fear and devastation of loneliness by stressing that it is exacerbated by the reality of homelessness in the person's life. People try to dispel the harsh reality of loneliness with everything and anything that comes to mind and they develop props and supports for survival. Their constructed sense of reality necessitates a continuing process of conversion, however, if they are to experience meaning reconstruction which enables the discovery of an intimate home. Encountering the reality of the first loneliness and realizing the deceptive qualities of the perceived reality can therefore be recognized only as an act of the grace of God.

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[285] Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 40.
[286] Moustakas, *Loneliness*, 8.

Nouwen had a great deal of insight to share with his readers to help them recognize the reality of this first loneliness. He understood that there is a need to embrace the reality in one's life. This is an essential step in the development of a pastoral theology of community because, unless a person is self-aware, they will never be able to experience community. Nouwen, therefore, unpacked carefully all of what God had been revealing to him, enabling vulnerable solidarity with the suffering. The spiritual life according to Nouwen involved a "reaching out to the innermost self."[287] This was precisely how God had been working in his life and he was not afraid to speak of that which was most sacred. What he always considered the first source of search and research, though, was the lonely self.

Self

Nouwen divided the self between the 'false self' and the 'true self.'[288] He attempted to distinguish between identity that is formed because of the perception of others and identity 'in Christ.' M. Robert Mulholland Jr. understands that unless people realize that there are two selves they will never be able to allow God to lead them into a deeper life with Christ.[289] The 'true self' is hidden in God alone. Nouwen says,

> When we find ourselves able to continue to serve our fellow human beings even when our lives remain the same, even when few people offer us praise, and even when we have little or no power, we come to know ourselves as God knows us, as sons and daughters hidden in God's love.[290]

As mentioned already, in North America, seeking after power is very common.

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[287] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 9.
[288] The term 'false self' has a long history in the Christian tradition which began with the Apostle Paul in Colossians 3:9. It has found contemporary use with other writers such as Merton in *The New Man*, 1981 and Pennington in *True Self/False Self*, 2000.
[289] Mulholland Jr., *The Deeper Journey*, 24.
[290] Nouwen, *The Selfless Way of Christ*, 66.

Many Christians believe that climbing to the top and living successful lives leads to self–assertiveness and a greater contribution toward society. The self is affirmed through social recognition and the lure of upward mobility. Nouwen names this the 'false self' because it has not found its home in God.[291] It is very deceptive and obscures a deep existential self–identifying union with Christ. Mulholland agrees saying, "You are created to experience your true life, your true identity, your deepest meaning, your fullest purpose, your ultimate value in an intimate loving union with God at the core of your being."[292] The false self however prevents all of this. John Calvin described the human heart as a "perpetual factory of idols"[293] and believed that every person is an expert in inventing idols. Richard Gaffin concurs and expands upon this saying:

> Because we are, each of us, the image of God, we will worship, in fact we must worship, someone or something, either our original, as we should, or, with the illusion that we are the original or our own ultimate point of reference, ourselves. If the latter, we will give ourselves over, with the full, still efficient resources of our imaging capacities, to some figment, some distorted image, focused on ourselves or on some aspect of the world, ultimately seen as an extension of ourselves. What Calvin observed long ago is no less true today: the human heart, our image–bearing and image–fashioning nature, is an idol factory.[294]

Martin Luther also stated,

> All those who do not at all times trust God and do not in all their works or sufferings, life and death, trust in His favor, grace and good–will, but seek His favor in other things or in themselves, do not keep this [First] Commandment, and practice real idolatry, even if they were to do the works of all the other Commandments, and in addition had all the prayers, obedience, patience, and chastity of all the saints combined. For the chief work is not present, without which all the others are nothing but mere sham, show and pretense, with nothing back of them... If we doubt or do not believe that God is gracious to us and is pleased with us, or if we presumptuously expect to please Him only through and

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[291] Nouwen, *The Selfless Way of Christ*, 66.
[292] Mulholland Jr., *The Deeper Journey*, 27.
[293] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 108.
[294] Gaffin, "Speech and the Image of God," 186.

after our works, then it is all pure deception, outwardly honoring God, but inwardly setting up self as a false [savior]...[295]

When idols are erected in the heart of a Christian, Jesus cannot be front and center. Manifestations of God's grace may be evident, such as success or good health, but they are not worthy of worship. They present no creditable substitute for intimacy with God.

Nouwen recognized that Jesus "asks for a single-minded commitment to God and God alone."[296] People strive without opening up their heart to God only to remain empty and alone. Jonah 2:8 states, "Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty." The 'false self' is also often filled with fear and this fear does not create a home. People live in protective shelters but no intimate home is found. Nouwen says, "Fear conjures either too much distance or too much closeness. Both prevent intimacy from developing."[297]

The 'false self' has not recognized true identity in Christ. It is filled with artificial supports and longs to please those who will offer it a sense of belonging. Messianic expectations of others keep the 'false self' in its endless practice of assertiveness and power with no understanding that it lives in bondage to the social system.[298] While communities continue to construct narratives of their individuals, it is essential to realize that, according to Nouwen, this perpetuates the 'false self.'

Andrew Lester demonstrates how narrative relates to identity in saying, "... human personality is storied. Human beings do not simply tell their story or illustrate their lives with story telling. We construct our sense of identity out of stories, both conscious stories and

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[295] Luther, *A Treatise on Good Works*, 29–31.
[296] Nouwen, *The Living Reminder*, 50, 51.
[297] Nouwen, *Lifesigns*, 30.
[298] Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love*, 5.

those we suppress."[299] Lester understands that personal narrative process is affected greatly

by the narrative structuring of the larger culture and the meanings that are attached to gender,

politics and ethnic heritage.[300] Nouwen, therefore, realizes the importance of reconstructing

meta-narratives for both Church and society.

Reconstructing the meta-narrative for Christians is primarily what Nouwen is

attempting as he speaks about the experiences of the self in the first loneliness. There is

evidence of an innate thirsting for the reign of God that is not readily discerned.

Christians believe that they have desperate need of certain things and will compromise

intimacy with Christ to have these needs met. Whether this attention to perceived need

involves money, sex, or power, the quest is made to achieve a particular end. It is realized

eventually, however, that no pleasure, friendship, possession, status, or wealth can

replace God for the individual. There is no potential substitute in any of these benefits.

People are not only children of God because of their natural birth but they are also

in need of becoming children of God through an act of God's grace.[301] Nouwen, however,

sees his life with God as a spiritual journey from the first loneliness to the second

loneliness rather than as a singular event of conversion. He relates to Augustine's words,

"My soul is restless until it rests in you, O God,"[302] understanding that life in God implies

more than an initial encounter with God and the receiving of forgiveness.

Ironically, the culture is promoting togetherness, unity, and harmonious

community as ideals to strive for, but its members are so individually competitive, that

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[299] Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 29.

[300] Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 38.

[301] Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 38.

[302] This is the famous passage from St. Augustine's Confessions (Lib 1, 1–2, 2.5,5: CSEL 33, 1–5) in which St. Augustine wrote, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." This was a favorite quote that Henri Nouwen's used, as is evident in *Life of the Beloved*, 37.

there is little possibility of togetherness.[303] The lurking danger that may be identified

deals with the possibility of an over-emphasis on either an objective or subjective view of

reality. Parker Palmer agrees, recognizing that people often compartmentalize reality and

make attempts to gain a kind of control by manipulating and controlling others, society,

nature and all of reality.[304]

Dr. Hui-Chueh Huang also realizes that in the pursuit of both objective and

subjective goals, others are depersonalized. People lose the ability to be creative and

imaginative while ignoring relationships with others and their identities as human beings.

He adds, "This dehumanization is a problem that shapes the worldview of many

contemporary people."[305] For this reason the loneliness of many continues to increase.

Nouwen experienced the paradox of life firsthand while on a subway in

downtown New York City. As he sat in fear and suspicion of those around him, who

were avoiding any type of eye contact, he noticed that all of the advertising lining the top

of the windows in the subway car portrayed a perfect sense of community and well–

being. Smiling faces promised attentiveness and care, inclusion and acceptance. These

pictures were a stark contrast, however, to the isolation experienced in the subway.[306] It

seemed obvious that people are simply not capable of inhabiting such ideals and,

therefore, the life portrayed is a life which simply cannot be lived.

The Church may promote a 'glittering image'[307] of Christianity as a perfect life

which may count on blessings as a direct result of the favor of God but the idealized

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[303] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 15.

[304] Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known*, 2.

[305] Huang, "Spiritual Life and Educational Ministry in the Work of Henri J. M. Nouwen," 1.

[306] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 14.

[307] This term 'glittering image' has been borrowed from Susan Howatch's book titled, *Glittering Images*, 1988. It is an excellent depiction of the false front that is often portrayed in the Christian life because of the shame and embarrassment that comes with being imperfect and longing to hide the truth of this fact.

sense of community that is often portrayed is not what is experienced. Many individuals

searching for authentic community exit the 'back door' of churches in their quest for

something genuine. They face disappointment when they do not feel welcomed, loved,

and included and suffer in an incredible silence. They are often referred to as the ones

who have 'fallen through the cracks,' but little has been done to find out where they are

going and why they have left. They are lonely and either search for something deeper or

give up the quest all together. Some are hidden away in jobs, apartments, homeless

shelters, nursing homes, or overly demanding jobs, with no voice to be heard, while still

others just roam from church to church seeking a proper 'home.'

The 'false self' that is evident in all believers does not wish to embrace this

loneliness and its inevitable suffering. It only sees what it wants to see and knows little

about the necessity of denying the self in order to embrace a relationship with God and

others. The false self doesn't realize, as mentioned earlier by Nouwen, "all human

suffering is embraced in divine compassion."[308] The false self knows little about union

with God or with one another because of its indulgence in self–assertion. Therefore it

pays the price of loneliness. The results bring devastation and loss. Needs are never met

and the self-life is bruised continuously by its own deception. This applies both to those

who stay and to those who leave the church. No human being can represent God for an

individual and a different perspective is critical.

As mentioned earlier, many theories and perceptions of loneliness in Western

culture reflect an overemphasis on objective or subjective realities. Nouwen notes that

people compete with others objectively at any cost or subjectively make themselves

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[308] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 107.

exclusive in-groups or cliques.[309] It is essential, therefore, to realize that Nouwen

recognized a critical need for the cultivation of solitude in personal lives for the sake of

recognizing solidarity with others.[310] Community will not be recognized outside of

solitude and reflection and a pastoral theology of community will, therefore, encourage

movement in this direction enabling re-orientation of ministry to the excluded.

Nouwen saw the movement from loneliness to solitude as the actual beginning of

the spiritual life. Being overwhelmed with loneliness makes solitude of the heart

seemingly unreachable but Nouwen states,

> when we have sensed what this solitude can mean, we will never stop searching
> for it. Once we have tasted this solitude, a new life becomes possible, in which we
> can become detached from false ties and attached to God and each other in a
> surprisingly new way.[311]

True solitude means solitude of the heart.[312] So many Christians believe that it all

happens when Christ is 'accepted' and salvation is assured but little attention is given to

cultural influences that have prejudiced the perception of loneliness and helped create the

'false self.' Believers acknowledge the constant battle with the sinful nature and the need

to 'walk in the Spirit,' but they are often oblivious of their need to perform and compete.

Solitude for the believer, therefore, must become a search for an honest, loving response

to God and others. If there is no love for others, there is no opportunity for true ministry.

Others

Nouwen, McNeill, and Morrison understood competition to be the main motivator

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[309] Nouwen, *Intimacy*, 65–73.
[310] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 22.
[311] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 33.
[312] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 25.

for Christians in this life.[313] He contended that the perception of self is based culturally

upon the identifiable differences among others. High expectations with regard to personal

performance were believed to keep the 'false self' striving for ideals which are not

attainable. There may be moments of exhilaration when popularity has increased because

of an achievement but loneliness is never far behind.

In the North American evangelical church, people are often recognized because of

difference and this exposes the need for a pastoral theology of community. Having a

sense of personal inequality and distinction, rather than a communal sharing of creative

gifts, determines the amount of recognition or rejection. An individual's self-esteem

cannot help but be affected, as personal definition often results from how people defend

their differences. Pride eventually consumes those who perceive themselves as set apart

from others because they often believe that they were born into a life of privilege.[314]

Competition abounds, therefore, preventing solidarity with others and this serves

to increase the loneliness of individuals. Ironically, loneliness eclipses compassion

because people are quite distanced from one another. It is recognized, through the failures

of many, that people cannot give unconditional love, so fear and frustration eventually

take over. Hostility toward others mounts, preventing hospitality, and competition

continues to fuel the domination of others. Apprehension emerges instead of love and the

loneliness becomes very deep and hidden.

It may be assumed that there are several arguments for the inevitability of

competition but well-known author, Alfie Kohn, states, "The inevitability of competition

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[313] Nouwen, et al., *Compassion,* 19.
[314] Nouwen, et al., *Compassion,* 19.

is either tacitly assumed or simply asserted as if it were obvious."[315] Authors that support

its inevitability include Roger Caillois and Johan Huizinga.[316] Both believe that all

humans are innately competitive. Another, Harvey Rubin, states, "Competition is the

inevitable fact of life."[317]

Sports psychologists Thomas Tutko and William Bruns would disagree, however,

drawing their conclusions from long–term experiences with athletes. In their book,

Winning is Everything and Other American Myths, they state,

> Competition is a learned phenomena...people are not born with a motivation to
> win or to be competitive. We inherit a potential for a degree of activity, and we all
> have the instinct to survive. But the will to win comes through training and the
> influences of one's family and environment. As the song in *South Pacific* says,
> 'you've got to be carefully taught.'[318]

This information provides a great deal of insight concerning Nouwen's emphasis on the

distinction between competition and compassion.

Nouwen derives his meaning for compassion from translating its Latin words, *pati*

cum, 'to suffer with.'[319] He understands that compassion asks people to "go where it

hurts, to enter places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish."[320] It

presents a challenge to those who would care to embody its depths, for it entails

empathizing with those who are broken and lonely. It involves becoming weak with those

who are weak, "vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless."[321]

There is recognition that all are suffering because of the effects of sin. Nouwen adds,

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[315] Kohn, *No Contest: The Case Against Competition,* 16.
[316] See Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games,* 2001. Also, Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play–Element in Culture,* 1971.
[317] Ruben, *Competing—Understanding and Winning the Strategic Games We All Play,* ix.
[318] Tutko and Bruns, *Winning is Everything and Other American Myths,* 53.
[319] Nouwen, et al., *Compassion,* 3.
[320] Nouwen, et al., *Compassion,* 4.
[321] Nouwen, et al., *Compassion,* 4.

It is not a bending toward the underprivileged from a privileged position; it is not a reaching out from on high to those who are less fortunate below; it is not a gesture of sympathy or pity for those who fail to make it in the upward pull...On the contrary, compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there.[322]

Nouwen concludes, "Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human."[323] It involves so much more than acts of kindness or a tender heart. He understands that the incarnation, God with us, Emmanuel involves primarily being with people.[324] Christ had to die for every highly competitive individual, seeking an ideal, as well as for those who suffer incredible loneliness because of exclusion and, therefore, compassion involves recognizing the community of humankind.

This is almost beyond the perception of a person indwelling the first loneliness with a 'false self.' Instead of living in downward mobility to engage with others, as Christ exhibited in his ministry to the poor and oppressed, there is the tendency to strive toward upward mobility in all of life's endeavors. Messianic expectations of others continue to thrive with little thought for the possible loneliness of another. The result is that compassionate action is often undermined in the popular quest for individual freedom.

Engaging in competition is much more appealing to many than living lives of compassion toward others but, according to Nouwen, this is not the Christian view. Nouwen argues that Jesus said, "You must be compassionate just as your heavenly father is compassionate" (Luke 6:36), believing that the compassion of God, lived out through

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[322] Nouwen, et al., *Compassion*, 29.
[323] Nouwen, et al., *Compassion*, 4.
[324] Nouwen, "Parting Words: A Conversation with Henri Nouwen," 7–24.

believers, will actually enable humanity to grow into its fullness.[325]

The problem that many Christians have lies in denying that there is a 'false self' and an ever-present loneliness. Even an interpretation of scripture can appear so idealistic that it feels unattainable to the Christian, leaving a feeling of worthlessness and failure. Christians have high expectations of others and continue to strive in an attempt to achieve an ideal. Nouwen, however, was called by God into a place of solitude and he became aware of his lonely situation through the competitive influences of contemporary society. In times of solitude and prayer, he began to understand the need to forgive other people for not being able to be a perfect image of God for him. The need became apparent in Nouwen's journey to reach out to the innermost self and deal with the restless senses as Augustine had encouraged. Nouwen also understood that others were not really being loved by him and that all of his attention was being focused on the self. It was evident that this loneliness prevented the creation of valuable space for another.[326]

According to Nouwen, if any progress was to be made in the spiritual life, confrontation had to be made with the 'crying loneliness'[327] and he realized that he needed solitude of the heart rather than just an environmental quietness. He recognized that fear could prevent an encounter with the first loneliness and healing was possible only in solidarity with the pain.[328] Nouwen also realized that the road to true conversion is the road from loneliness to solitude. This initiated a subtle move into the second loneliness.

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[325] Nouwen, et al, *Compassion*, 7.
[326] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 72.
[327] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 43.
[328] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 43.

The Second Loneliness

The second loneliness involves a paradigmatic shift in the reconstruction of

meaning as it involves more than a spiritual encounter. It is realized that there had been a

false sense of self, that others were being judged and unloved, and that the Holy Spirit

was not being followed carefully within the first loneliness. The first loneliness

challenged the Christian to outgrow the aloneness with faith and hope. This revelation

has elicited confrontation as well as conversion. The Spirit is now at work calling the

individual to a place of encounter and place while a true home and intimacy with Christ is

being discovered. This second loneliness is perceived through an experience of intimacy

with God and is realized as being greater than feelings and thoughts can capture. It must

be embraced in love. Nouwen understands the first and second loneliness as two forms of

blindness. He sees the first loneliness as a result of not having enough light and the

second loneliness as a result of two much light.[329]

Experiencing this second loneliness, according to Nouwen, entails "walking alone

with Jesus with unmet needs, but trusting that he is enough."[330] Nouwen claimed that this

is only possible through a deep cultivation of solitude and he understood that the shift is

due to the working of the Holy Spirit. Solitude is now being defined by Nouwen "as

being alone with God."[331] In this solitude, unlimited space is created for others because a

person is emptied of the false self and an understanding is reached that all are equally

gifted in God's sight. No one dominates, opposes, or excludes. In this solitude, people

find themselves vulnerable, naked, and dependent on the love of God for existence. The

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[329] Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, July 30.
[330] Nouwen, *Home Tonight*, 46.
[331] Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 4.

community of humankind is realized and the human heart becomes a place of encounter with God rather than the comfort zone of self-assertion. It does not involve striving for an ideal but life in Christ simply becomes reality. The false self is placed on the altar of consecration and inclusion of others replaces the secret hiding places of idols. Nouwen said, "An enemy is only our enemy as long as we have something to defend."[332] It is realized that absolute surrender to God's cruciform love is essential.

The solitude of the second loneliness, according to Nouwen, involves a 'reaching out' to God through the Spirit-filled exercising of spiritual disciplines, thus causing the solitude to deepen and mature. Nouwen also borrowed from many of the desert mystics to substantiate his claims. For example, in the story of St. Antony, told by Athanasius, Nouwen realized that "solitude is the furnace in which this transformation takes place."[333] The false self is dependent on the responses of the culture or milieu, but in solitude there is a dependency on God. With this in mind, however, there is still the need for human expression and emotion.

The experience of solitude is not a vain attempt to achieve an ideal, or to be sinless, but involves the ceasing of self-referenced strife and the opening of the heart. It is not created by human strength but is afforded by the Spirit of God. It does not imply a freedom from suffering but an engagement with the same and does not involve a changed life as much as an 'exchanged life.' It involves life in the Spirit of the living God; a place of confrontation and appraisal, repentance and consecration, forgiveness and restoration.

Thomas Merton, a well-known Trappist monk of the twentieth century, also had a profound effect on the life of Nouwen. Merton understood that the Christian life is "either

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[332] Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 31.
[333] Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 8.

all spiritual or not spiritual at all."[334] He believed that a person cannot serve two masters

and said, "Your life is shaped by the end you live for. You are made in the image of what

you desire."[335] Being aware that human emotion is necessary when engaging with others,

Merton concluded that it was impossible to love God, if people could not be responded to

with affection. God chose to love people through the human heart of Jesus, who is also

God, so there must be a respect for "temperament, character, and emotion and for

everything that makes us human."[336]

Merton thought that the practice of the spiritual disciplines was the solution and

the means by which a person draws near to God. He believed that the purpose of

contemplation was to empty oneself in order that God may become the true God of the

person.[337] Nouwen agreed and saw the need to create a space for others in the experience

of solitude. This would necessitate an understanding of poverty.

Luke 10:4 speaks of the necessity of poverty in ministry to others. Poverty of

mind calls believers to an educated ignorance, while poverty of heart allows for open

hearts, free from apprehension. Nouwen writes, "when our heart is filled with prejudice,

worry, jealousy, there is little room for a stranger."[338] He continues,

> When we are willing to detach ourselves from making our own limited experience
> the criterion for our approach to others, we may be able to see that life is greater
> than our life… we can receive the experiences of others as a gift to us. Johannes
> Metz described this disposition when he wrote, "We must forget ourselves in
> order to let the other person approach us. We often keep the other person down,
> and only see what we want to see, then we never really encounter the mysterious
> secret of his being. Failing to risk the poverty of encounter, we indulge in a new

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[334] Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, 49.
[335] Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, 49.
[336] Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, 13.
[337] Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*, 30.
[338] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 75.

form of self–assertion and pay the price for it: loneliness." [339]

The need to control others is often motivated by fear but abiding in Christ causes

a believer to leave the house of fear and inhabit the house of love. Prayer is the vehicle

which enables life with an open heart. Nouwen writes,

> To die to our neighbors is to stop judging them, to stop evaluating them, and thus
> become compassionate. Compassion can never co-exist with judgment because
> judgment creates the distance, the distinction, which prevents us from really being
> with the other. [340]

Nouwen realized that most of life is spent in endless activity which is never

assessed for its value. He said, "We simply go along with the many 'musts' and 'oughts'

that have been handed on to us, and we live with them as if they were authentic

translations of the gospel of our Lord." [341] The false self which is filled with compulsion,

encourages self-centeredness, but solitude makes people aware of their hidden hostilities

and inborn loneliness. In solitude, the false self is changed into the new self of Jesus

Christ. In this true self, real ministry flows and the power of the gospel message is

realized.

Nouwen asserted that the practice and experience of solitude provides an

opportunity toward becoming "molded into a commitment to transform society." [342]

Jeffrey Haddon, however, did not agree with Nouwen. He stated that inwardness can lead

to privatization, anti-authoritarianism, anti-institutionalism, self-centeredness, and an

increased desire for material comfort. [343] Nouwen understood, however, that prayer is the

axis of existence enabling the solitude of heart to give birth to compassion and introduce

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[339] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 76. The quote from Metz was taken from his book, *Poverty of Spirit*, 44
[340] Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 35.
[341] Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 10.
[342] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 29.
[343] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 29.

the believer to the 'true self.' Solitude that is filled with prayer becomes a place of reckoning with sin and finding communion with God and others. Solitude becomes a place of true repentance, finding forgiveness, releasing fear, embracing others, experiencing community, and being 'home' in God. [344] Solitude that is filled with prayer is necessary for the realization of the true self and, if the true self is not realized, it is difficult to understand how the Christian life could be lived.

Parker Palmer understands that prayer develops a spirituality of relatedness. He says,

> ...prayer is our capacity to enter into that vast community of life in which self and other, human and non-human, visible and invisible, are intricately intertwined. While my senses discriminate and my mind dissects, my prayer acknowledges and recreates the unity of life. In prayer, I no longer set myself apart from others and the world, manipulating them to meet my needs. Instead, I reach for relationship, allow myself to feel the tuggings of mutuality and responsibility, and take my place in community by knowing the transcendent center that connects it all. [345]

Just as Jesus spent time with his Father to know his will, all Christians need the solitude of heart to discern God's wisdom, guidance, and direction. In this way Christians experience both the community of humankind and the community of divine relational fellowship.

Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche Community, who was used of God to encourage Nouwen's cultivation of solitude, relates that his own experience of communion with God and others revealed a great deal about his false self. He said,

> I discovered something which I had never confronted before, that there were immense forces of darkness and hatred within my own heart. At particular moments of fatigue or stress, I saw forces of hate rising up inside me, and the capacity to hurt someone who was weak and who was provoking me! That, I

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[344] Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 29.
[345] Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known*, 11.

think, was what caused me the most pain: to discover who I really am, and to realize that maybe I did not want to know who I really was! I did not want to admit all the garbage inside me. And then I had to decide whether I would just continue to pretend and throw myself into hyperactivity, projects where I could forget all the garbage and prove to others how good I was. Elitism is the sickness of us all. We all want to be on the winning team…the worst enemy is inside our own hearts not outside![346]

These revelations are not possible without the cultivation of a prayer life. Prayer undergirds all reaching out, exposing the need for solitude of the heart. Nouwen said, "…a spiritual life without prayer is like the gospel without Christ."[347] He concluded, "Prayer, therefore, is God's breathing in us, by which we become part of the intimacy of God's inner life and by which we are born anew."[348] It asks for effort but must be received as a gift. It enables seeing beyond a person's mortal existence, thus destroying the illusion of immortality.

Life in the Spirit is recognized, therefore, as a constant movement between the poles of loneliness and solitude, hostility and hospitality, and illusion and prayer.[349] These movements are not separated clearly and are faced consistently throughout a person's life. As the first loneliness is faced with its accompanying hostility and illusions, solitude, hospitality and prayer become building blocks concerning the vision of a person's life. Nouwen says, "Often it is the dark forest that makes us speak about the open field."[350] In others words, new life is being born out of the suffering of the old. A contemplative person's narrative, therefore, faces meaning reconstruction on a continuous basis. The mystery of self-transformation and authentic growth is a continual process.

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[346] Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, 19.
[347] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 87.
[348] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 89.
[349] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 11.
[350] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 11.

Nouwen understood that when Jesus instructed his followers to take up their cross and follow him, he was instructing all believers to reach beyond their sinful condition and to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Nouwen said, "Every time we search anxiously for another human being who can break the chains of our loneliness, and every time we build new defenses to protect our life as an inalienable property, we find ourselves caught in that illusion of immortality."[351] We tend to create gods out of the false self. Hence, God must be recognized as the source of all intimacy to avoid becoming drowned in a pool of sentimentality or violence. The journey from illusion to prayer, therefore, involves "moving from the human shelter to the house of God."[352]

God

In the solitude of the second loneliness, God is recognized ultimately as the source of all love. Nouwen said, "In prayer, God's presence is never separated from his absence and God's absence is never separated from his presence."[353] In brokenness and humility, before God, the 'true self' is found. In the second loneliness there is still the residue of loneliness but God becomes the center of a person's life.[354] A true home is found in the 'womb of God' and this loneliness is not like the first. It does not have to be outgrown with faith and love, but must be embraced.[355] It is the place of true conversion and the discovery of true self-identity.

There is Eucharistic communion that may not require words, but communion which is constant and fluid, expressing openly the mystery of God's total self-giving

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[351] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 82.
[352] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 83.
[353] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 90.
[354] Nouwen, *Home Tonight*, 42.
[355] Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, July 30.

love. Nouwen says, "In the Eucharist, Jesus gives all. The bread is not simply a sign of his desire to become our food; the cup is not just a sign of his willingness to be our drink. Bread and wine become his body and the blood in the giving."[356] In Nouwen's thought this communion creates community because Christ lives within a believer's heart. It entails becoming like Jesus and ushers believers into the Kingdom where believers no longer belong to a world that excludes and judges; they belong to Christ.[357] Nouwen said,

> Communion makes us look at each other and speak to each other, not about the latest news, but about him who walked with us. We discover each other as people who belong together because each of us now belongs to him. We are alone, because he disappeared from our sight, but we are together because each of us is in communion with him and so has become one body through him.[358]

God has never held back and that is the mystery of the Incarnation.[359] Nouwen comprehends God as a mystery and beyond comprehension but he believes that, through loving God and others, a person can experience more of God.[360] This encapsulates the entire purpose of human existence: to love God and to do his will. When a person, through the practice of the spiritual disciplines, begins to conceptualize the transcendence and immanence of God, his mysterious nature is revealed.[361] Nouwen says,

> God cannot be understood; he cannot be grasped by the human mind. The truth escapes our human capacities. The only way to come close to it is by a constant emphasis on the limitations of our human capacities to "have" or "hold" the truth. We can neither explain God nor his presence in history. As soon as we identify God with any specific event or situation, we play God and distort the truth. We only can be faithful in our affirmation that God has not deserted us but calls us in the middle of all the unexplainable absurdities of life. It is very important to be deeply aware of this. There is a great and subtle temptation to suggest to myself or others where God is working and where not, when he is present and when not, but

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[356] Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 68.
[357] Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 74–75.
[358] Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 75.
[359] Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 68.
[360] Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 43.
[361] Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 43.

nobody, no Christian, no priest, no monk, has any "special" knowledge about God. God cannot be limited by any human concept or prediction. He is greater than our mind and heart and perfectly free to reveal himself where and when he wants.[362]

Nouwen also believed in the omnipresence of God. He affirmed that the name of God is 'love' and that this love is demonstrated to all human beings, binding them together through human weakness. He was convinced that God is present in all suffering and loves everyone in total freedom.[363] It was also his contention that any person can have a relationship with God through prayer and upon realizing the representation of Jesus in the scriptures; Jesus will be perceived as the visible presence of the invisible God.[364]

Nouwen did not believe in half-hearted Christianity but understood that Jesus "asks for a single-minded commitment to God and God alone."[365] He also understood that Jesus relates perfectly to the human condition of loneliness and exclusion and delivers people from suffering.[366] God lives with people through Christ, suffers with them, and dies with them.[367] Is this not the heart of community?

Nouwen perceived Christ as the descending God, living a life of downward mobility. He realized that the way that Jesus loved the poor and oppressed was the way of compassion and new life.[368] Jesus did not engage in competition but emptied himself by becoming human and is forever suffering with the excluded and lonely even though he appears hidden.[369]

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[362] Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary*, 137.
[363] Nouwen, *A Letter of Consolation*, 55.
[364] Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 78.
[365] Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary*, 31.
[366] Nouwen, *Letters to Marc about Jesus*, 11, 14.
[367] Nouwen, *Letters to Marc about Jesus*, 33.
[368] Nouwen, *Letters to Marc about Jesus*, 41, 47.
[369] Nouwen, *Gracias!* 29, 31.

Jesus is also the Word of God bringing redemption to all of humankind. [370] His

mission is to bring humanity into the community of the divine Trinity. This is

accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit, who is responsible for the changing

of peoples' lives, allowing people to enter the life of the eternal community of love. [371]

Salvation is, therefore, by grace alone and without the Holy Spirit no one can live the

Christian life. [372]

Nouwen acknowledged throughout his writing that living a spiritual life involves

understanding that every person is a beloved child of God. [373] It was his understanding that

the compassion of God and the security that this entails has the potential to be realized by

listening to God's voice. Through the discipline of prayer, God may be understood to be

greater than an individual's heart and mind. For example, Jesus was spoken to by his

Father, when he was being baptized in the Jordan, and heard the words, "You are my

Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). Nouwen believed that Jesus

was being reminded of his true identity. [374] He, therefore, believed that when Christians

understand that they are also God's beloved, they will start demonstrating greater

compassion toward people and surrender their need to compete. Nouwen stated, "Prayer,

then, is listening to that voice—to the one who calls you the beloved. It is to constantly

go back to the truth of who we are and claim it for ourselves." [375]

In this second loneliness, there is a willingness to learn and an open, teachable

spirit. The false self is recognized for its deceptive qualities and the need for forgiveness

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[370] Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 60–61.
[371] Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, 49, 50, 53.
[372] Nouwen, *A Cry for Mercy*, 115.
[373] Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary*, 128, 174, 175.
[374] Nouwen, "Parting Words," 8.
[375] Nouwen, "Parting Words," 10.

is understood. Concerning forgiveness, Nouwen recognized the need to emulate the compassion of God by surrendering the ongoing quest to achieve worldly ideals and by realizing that all people, regardless of ability, are of great value in the sight of God. He says, "Forgiveness means that I am continually willing to forgive the other person for not being God—for not fulfilling all my needs. I too must ask forgiveness for not being able to fulfill other people's needs."[376]

Nouwen understood that the human heart longs for total communion with God but that people are incapable of giving what is craved. He realized, however, that it is common for people to be hurt and offended because of another's ideal. People have seemingly insurmountable expectations of others and long for perfection and so forgiveness is essential between people for not being able to become everything that the other desires.[377] This is crucial for the development of a pastoral theology of community, There must be an embrace of imperfection and a willingness to accept that life can be disordered. Christians need to reach out to others with charity without expecting anything in return.

Nouwen believed that many people are angry because others can offer only limited expressions of an unlimited love. This is evident in some of the narratives of exclusion. Nouwen says, "God's love is unlimited but people's love is not,"[378] realizing that any entering into communion with others will always be riddled with frustrations and disappointments. He said, however, that for this reason, "forgiveness becomes the word

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[376] Nouwen, "Parting Words," 11–12.
[377] Nouwen, "Parting Words," 11–12.
[378] Nouwen, "Parting Words," 11–12.

for love in human context."[379]

Nouwen's work is, therefore, a valuable contribution to the community crisis of the North American evangelical church because it offers hope. Having explored his core assumptions about God, self, and others, and his understanding of first and second loneliness, it is clear that Nouwen has provided a spirituality of relatedness in community for confronting the harsh reality of exclusion in the church through a shared journey of faith concerning the inward, outward, and upward. In a shared spiritual journey, community is realized as reconstruction of meaning takes place concerning self, others, and God. It is hoped that by realizing the richness and value of this spiritual journey that those who have experienced alienation will gradually find new insight and revelation concerning God's love and his view of community and that the church will make space for those it has excluded, realizing the heart of communion.

Nouwen's Pastoral Theological Approach

Pastoral theology may be described as having no distinct disciplinary boundaries and as 'all periphery with no center' but the narrative approach of Henri Nouwen to pastoral theology has added greatly toward capturing the heart of this discipline.[380] Nouwen's ministry to the excluded is filled with the spirituality of presence which continues to draw people closer to God. For this reason, Nouwen has brought the discipline of pastoral theology 'home.' His teaching on finding a true home in God, while living in the reality of loneliness contributes greatly toward understanding that a pastoral theology of community is necessary for the inclusion of all Christians.

Nouwen's ministry to the excluded has focused primarily in helping people

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[379] Nouwen, "Parting Words," 11–12.
[380] Pattison and Lynch, "Pastoral and Practical Theology," 414.

rediscover the Eucharistic and communal life of the Church. His calling involved being used of the Holy Spirit to draw people back to an intimacy with Christ and the genius of his work involved speaking to people as if they already knew Christ. Nouwen welcomed them into the mystery of God's love and being, while offering no judgment or condemnation.

The loneliness he shared was never construed as something outside of the scope of God's love. No stigma was ever attached to it and he used this universal experience to break through the resistance and fear indwelling the human heart. He demonstrated the love of God at work in peoples' lives when they are least aware, confirming through his teaching, writing, and interaction, the inclusion of all people in God's communal love. It has become obvious that a pastoral theology of community must draw from a deeper spirituality concerning the condition of being human, in relationship with self, others, and God.

This final chapter, therefore, will turn to the construction of a pastoral theology of community. At its core, pastoral theological method roots the reframing of theological understanding in the concrete experiences of persons in the church. Therefore, as the argument unfolds, the thesis will revisit some of the key insights of the narratives of exclusion explored in chapter three. This, in turn, will modify and expand the theological basis for authentic community giving rise to the practices that will be called forth in the church. Such practices or strategies will inform the future ministry of the church. It is believed that a pastoral theology of community is critical for the inclusion of all Christians. Articulating this will be the final aim of this concluding chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

A PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF COMMUNITY

A pastoral theology of community will close the gap between what 'is' and what 'ought to be.' The reality for many persons is that, despite efforts to cultivate a sense of belonging, there is an abiding experience of rejection and exclusion. The challenge of the narratives of exclusion explored in this thesis calls for a fuller sense of reconciliation as a deeply embedded reality in the church. Having drawn from research in social psychology, sociology, and theology, this chapter will argue for a pastoral theology of community that is capable of encouraging the inclusion of all Christians in the North American evangelical church. Such a pastoral theological approach requires an integration of what has gone before, pulling together key insights which inform ministry itself. The ministry of the church to the excluded will be kept in view as fresh insights are developed and conclusions drawn. In this chapter, five core or foundational insights will be developed into a reframed pastoral theology of community. Each of these informs and gives concrete direction to the church in its ministry of inclusion concerning all Christians.

The first foundational insight involves the realization that exclusion is a harsh, yet hidden reality within the church.

Exclusion—A Hidden Reality

The reality of exclusion in the church requires the deliberate and focused attention of its members. As has been realized through the examination of the narratives, 'difference' creates a barrier to the inclusion of many who come to faith communities. People are excluded because of age, health, disability, status, race, gender etc. Even

newcomers to the church often receive little recognition after the initial welcome. The inclusion/exclusion continuum is operational and Christians are understood only to be 'in' if they join a small group or make a commitment of support. Somehow the essence of being God's people who are 'called out' of the world has been diminished.

A pastoral theology of community seeks, therefore, to illuminate the hidden experience of loneliness, isolation and even rejection of many who sit in the pews of congregations in the North American evangelical church. In most cases this requires envisioning an approach to ministry itself as a way of seeing. 'Seeing' a person necessitates becoming open to the possibility that, while a person may be present in the congregation, they may experience alienation and loneliness in their experience of the community of God. A pastoral theology of community, therefore, begins with this new perception. The attentive church looks more closely at the narrative of the persons who come for belonging, not only to the community itself, but also to a reconciled life with God in this fellowship of Christians.

Kathy Funk Wiebe, a recent widow, called herself an "incomplete social unit." [381] She lost her sense of place and belonging when her husband died. Her sense of loss was overwhelming and only exacerbated further by being excluded by church members due to her change in marital status causing her to be very aware of an "unconscious ostracism" operating within the church.[382]

The church has adopted many of society's attitudes and habits and may not even be aware of how these habits exclude people. This is a serious problem and requires, at the outset, that the church become more deeply aware of the impact of culture in shaping

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[381] Wiebe, *Alone: A Search for Joy*, 41.
[382] Wiebe, *Alone: A Search for Joy*, 53.

its values. The calling of the church as God's people is to be filled with love one for another. The failure to live this life of love must be acknowledged as something of a community crisis within the church. Something has happened to the church's ability to discern its divine call to be the gospel witness to the world. When the church operates like a well-oiled institution rather than a representation of the body of Christ, it loses its concrete power as an authentic community of grace. As mentioned pertaining to the narratives of social exclusion, the church has become a 'blurred image 'of the body of Christ because it has identified itself as much by those it has excluded as by its representation of Christ on earth.

All Christians were alienated from God prior to coming to Christ. In Christ believers are reconciled to God and yet often they continue to maintain individualized and private lives. The church must cultivate a shared vulnerability and brokenness recognizing that previous alienation has been replaced with a shared journey of the grace of God. A pastoral theology of community points to this shared beginning—the moment of received grace as the basis for true fellowship in Christ.

People find meaning and purpose in their lives through relationships with other people as well as with God. When people are excluded lives begin to lose meaning, purpose and direction. Feelings of alienation and loneliness only expose the lack of genuine community in the church and the long term effects of the exclusion are detrimental to health and well being. The narrative of the homeless woman demonstrated someone experiencing the long–term effects of exclusion.[383] She says,

> No one really cares if I die today or tomorrow because they are so consumed with making money, having power and control, and even if I died today...people won't

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[383] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 21.

care…But one thing is for sure, sitting here all alone, cold and desperate to find a little bit of meaning to my life, I realize that really there isn't any.[384]

This woman perceives that her life has absolutely no meaning. As Zadro and Williams suggested, her alienation may be caused by negative personal qualities or people may just be afraid of her.[385] She is poor, homeless, forsaken, cold, lost, and alone. People who once knew her may be apprehensive to approach her because of her present living conditions and may exclude her because of feeling threatened.[386] This narrative may come across as extreme but the point being made here is that her desperate cry was not heard by the church. In her search for significance, she found none.

Pastors are busy, churches are getting larger, and people are not seeing others. The excluded are falling through the cracks of the North American evangelical church. They are becoming forgotten. In many cases the church tries to solve the need to belong by creating programs where closeness will be cultivated but this is not the solution. Community cannot be manufactured by programs. In I John 3:16–18, Christians are commanded to love in deed and in truth. The crucial beginning for a pastoral theology of community, therefore, is to cultivate a new way of seeing. So much of the reality of the exclusion is hidden that it must be brought out into the open as the church seeks, in concrete and practical ways, to live a life of love through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ laid down his life and, therefore, community in Christ calls out the same sacrificial love. It always costs something to place the needs of others above personal needs. In many cases the effort required to alleviate the loneliness and sense of personal alienation can be met with simple acts of helping. However, if the church does not develop

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[384] Hill, "Finding Refuge in Writing," A15.
[385] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 25.
[386] Williams and Zadro, "Ostracism: The Indiscriminate Early Detection System," 27.

concrete ways of attending sensitively to others Christians may find that their oversight

forms the basis of an unintended exclusion.

Ministry to the excluded requires, therefore, an awakening or an opening of the

eyes to truly 'see' those who come to the church for fellowship with God and others.

Looking beyond the surface is a pastoral skill that must be cultivated by the congregation

at large. This in turn, requires attentiveness to the community that God is making which

leads to the second key insight for a pastoral theology of community, namely, rethinking

the concept of community itself.

Re-Thinking Community as a Concept

The concept of community itself requires re-thinking and fresh understanding to

break down the barriers that have been experienced by the excluded. Community is not

just a social gathering of people with common interests and goals. According to Karl

Barth, "A community that is awake and conscious of its commission and task in the

world will of necessity be a theologically interested community."[387] It is mission-based,

empowered by the Spirit of God to change dehumanizing structures within society and

within the human heart. True community, therefore, comes from God and enables an

understanding of togetherness that is based in Christ.

Community on earth is founded on God's grace but it will always be imperfect. It

will always comprise both the spiritual and emotional as Bonhoeffer discovered.

Embracing and bearing that imperfection will allow community in solidarity with Christ

to be understood.

God chose to become one amongst humanity (John 1:14). Jesus walked among

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[387] Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, 40–41.

people and took all sin upon himself to effect forgiveness and reconciliation (Isa 53: 5; 1

Peter 2:24). Christ alone is the basis of true Christian community. It can never be

idealized or manufactured. Bonhoeffer states,

> What persons are in themselves as Christians, in their inwardness and piety,
> cannot constitute the basis of our community, which is determined by what those
> persons are in terms of Christ…The more genuine and deeper our community
> becomes, the more everything else between us will recede, and the more clearly
> and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is
> alive between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we
> really do have one another. We have one another completely and for all eternity.[388]

Problems occur when Christians believe that genuine community is possible

outside of Christ. Community outside of Christ can only become self-centered, knowing

nothing about serving others. It is dependent upon the actions of others, their

attentiveness and concern for each other. Expectation is high and when people do not

supply the level of ministry that is expected, people often seek other groups or gatherings.

In many cases what they are seeking is a place to belong. Bonhoeffer comments on the

reorientation required for us to comprehend the true basis of Christian community when

he writes:

> Self-centered love makes itself an end in itself. It turns itself into an achievement,
> an idol it worships, to which it must subject everything. It cares for, cultivates,
> and loves itself and nothing else in the world. Spiritual love, however, comes
> from Jesus Christ; it serves him alone. It knows that it has no direct access to
> other persons. Christ stands between me and others. I do not know in advance
> what love of others means on the basis of the general idea of love that grows out
> of my emotional desires. All this may instead be hatred and the worst kind of
> selfishness in the eyes of Christ. Only Christ in his Word tells me what love is.
> Contrary to all my own opinions and convictions, Jesus Christ will tell me what
> love for my brothers and sisters really looks like.[389]

The narrative of Nancy Eiesland describes her frustrations of feeling excluded

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[388] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 34.
[389] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 43.

during a communion service. Where she should have felt the welcome and embrace of

community in Christ as the emblems were distributed, she felt stigmatized and alone. She

saw the Eucharist transformed from a corporate communal experience to a solitary one

for her, "...from a sacralization of Christ's broken body to a stigmatization of my

disabled body."[390]

Bruce T. Morrill claims that there has been a move toward thinking of the

sacraments as relational events, rather than as mere objects dispensing grace.[391] Catholic

systematic theologian, Kenan Osborne, reflects on the sacraments saying,

> Sacramentality cannot be presented in an atemporalized and essentialized way.
> Whenever this is attempted, sacramentality ceases to be principally and
> primordially the action of God and becomes a form of intellectual ideology. Every
> essentialization and objectification of sacramentality has the inner capacity of
> being manipulated and controlled by finite factors. If, on the other hand,
> sacramentality is God's action within a thoroughly temporalized and essentialized
> event, then all essentialized, and therefore abstract and generalized presentations
> of sacramentality, are seen in their hermeneutical impotence.[392]

Andrea Beiler and Luise Schottroff assert Holy Communion points to the

presence of God among people and throughout the world as well as providing a

resurrection meal.[393] They contend that the Eucharistic life is one filled with conflict and

that disciples of Jesus participate in resurrection in a fragmentary way. There is constant

yearning for the eschatological community in which the resurrected Christ reveals his

body. In Rom 8: 22–23 the Apostle Paul said, "We know that the whole creation has been

groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have

the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of

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[390] Eiesland, "Encountering the disabled God," 6.
[391] Morrill, "Theory and Practice of the Body in Liturgy Today," 1.
[392] Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World*, 73–74.
[393] Bieler and Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, and Resurrection*, 5.

our bodies."

A pastoral theology of community, therefore, reconsiders the fundamental perspective of Christian community itself. The word community may be overused. Sometimes it is referring to a sense of belonging; other times to a neighborhood; still other times the word community refers to a type of 'fitting in' to a particular group. In this sense a pastoral theology of community requires a reconstruction of the idea of community itself. At the core of this redefinition is perhaps the imperfect but unique calling of Christians to participate together in the communion that is created by God through Christ. The experience of the rejected or isolated is taken up into the new reality of life in Christ. While the experiences of this authentic community will be fragmented and imperfect, the true focus of authentic Christian community will deepen our life together. This leads to a third conclusion which calls for a reformulation of the basis of community for the Christian life.

The Basis of Community for Christians

Reconciliation with God is the basis for a deeper communion with other believers in a common fellowship. Christ has made all Christians one. In Rom 12: 5 Paul states, "...so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another." Inclusion in Christ is the essence of our communion with one another whether it is acknowledged or not. True Christian community, therefore, articulates that the church is called to lead and teach its members to become who they already are in Christ. This implies that the members of the church enact this theological certainty by being actively open and hospitable to one another, thus living out their identity in Christ while participating in community.

What this means is that exclusion is recognized as a grave offense not only against another believer but also against the body of Christ. Exclusion represents a denial of Christ's saving work on the cross and calls for confession, repentance, and forgiveness. If people are not loved and embraced through Christ, those who suffer alienation and loneliness will eventually end up without narratives of resistance. They will simply lose hope if they have no one who will listen. Jean Vanier relates an interesting experience concerning a visit to a psychiatric hospital,

> I once visited a psychiatric hospital that was a kind of warehouse of human misery. Hundreds of children with severe disabilities were lying, neglected, on their cots. There was a deadly silence. Not one of them was crying. When they realize that nobody cares, that nobody will answer them, children no longer cry. We cry out only when there is hope that someone may hear us.[394]

As Nouwen suggests, expectations of others exist within the human heart causing a desire to exclude those who do not meet those expectations. This exposes a lack of discernment of the body of Christ. The body of Christ is not being recognized as encompassing all who believe; but this is why Christ died and rose from the dead. John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Consequently, a pastoral theology of community implies a pastoral means of encouraging relatedness by incorporating personal experience with theological understanding of alienation and reconciliation to enable greater realization of the oneness of the body of Christ.

A pastoral theology of community calls for sustained interest in practices that will effectively strengthen our reconciliation with God and one another. At the core this requires an orientation to the fundamental reconciliation that we ourselves have received

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[394] Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 9.

from God. However, there are practical implications for the church as well. Reconciling action is at the heart of the mission of the church. The church must find ways to live out its ministry of reconciliation which ultimately is rooted in God's own reconciling love.

Persons who experience hurt, rejection, alienation and loneliness are often frustrated in their encounter with the church and require a reorientation to God's first love and the love that comes from God. How can the church, as this reconciling community of God, renew its practices of love? This is essentially a core question of pastoral theology. This thesis has explored the many ways in which persons find themselves disadvantaged by their life situation which leads them to conclude that they are forgotten, alone, and rejected. The reorientation required is a new found sense of the church as the reconciled community of God. This basis of reconciliation which is rooted in Christ himself is foundational. This leads to a further concluding insight of a pastoral theology of community, namely that the experience of true community is a shared journey in Christ.

Community as a Shared Journey

Experiences of loneliness, however profound, require new understanding of the spiritual life as a shared journey. Society is filled with structures that make living together in unity difficult but a shared communion of struggle creates solidarity with the sacred privilege of being dependent upon God. O'Connor states, "…genuine community is the highest achievement of humankind."[395] Community represents the body of Christ as persons in relation, depicted in the Holy Trinity, and it is always in flux. It moves through various stages of redemptive growth concerning the inward, outward, and upward movement toward deeper revelation of self, others, and God. A pastoral theology of

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[395] O'Connor, *The New Community*, 1.

community portrays a constant inward and outward pilgrimage toward understanding full identity 'in Christ' and realizes the efficacy of this identification when confronting practices of exclusion.

No one should experience exclusion within a church. Exclusion undermines everything that the church stands for. Jesus ministered to the excluded throughout his ministry on earth and invited the excluded to inaugurate his kingdom. Dennis Schürter relates that Jesus' desire was to reverse the structures of society. He placed himself at the center of community for God's people and gathered around him those excluded by society to demonstrate the focal point of his kingdom.[396] The 'out group,' therefore, has become the 'in group' in Christ and journeying together is meant to be a shared experience.

A pastoral theology of community requires a means of understanding the types of exclusion and must respond with key strategies for the movement towards 'maximum inclusion.'[397] This thesis has argued for understanding at least four key types of exclusion: relational brokenness, spiritual disruption, social ostracism, and self-alienation. Each of these types of exclusion have their own features and each, in turn, requires a ministry response that allows persons to move from the experiences of alienation, rejection, isolation and abandonment towards experiences of belonging, inclusion, friendship and solidarity. The ministry of the church to the excluded requires entry into the suffering of others.

The reorienting of ministry as a 'shared journey' toward God is a core dimension of a pastoral theology of community. Henri Nouwen frames this, in part, as the shift from

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[396] Schürter, "Jesus' Ministry with People with Disabilities," 33–47.
[397] Leary, "Responses to Social Exclusion," 221–29.

loneliness to solitude. The church, therefore, ought to convey in its various ministries, an orientation toward communion with God as a particular kind of solidarity – one that finds its basis in Christ and one that is expressed in a variety of ministries that enter into the types of exclusion which people are going through.

Consequently, ministry encouraging greater inclusion will be multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. Each type of exclusion requires further reflection in order to enumerate the ways in which the church must express its solidarity in the shared journey toward wholeness, toward communion, and ultimately toward a deeper experience of God. This leads to a final concluding word for this thesis concerning strategies for inclusive practices in the church.

Strategies for Inclusionary Practices in the Church

Attempts to mediate the effects of exclusion require that strategies go beyond the symptoms to the root of exclusion and the practices that are complicit with it. The personal narrative accounts that have been examined in this thesis provide the starting point to determine the ways in which exclusion and inclusion operate in people's lives. Ultimately this calls for a creative church response—one that identifies the various types of exclusion and that thinks theologically about how best to respond. A pastoral theology of community requires a nuanced response pattern for inclusion, thus reversing the effects of rejection and alienation so common in the accounts rehearsed.

The true center of hope for becoming a community of inclusion is in the reconciling nature of God's inclusive love. Elizabeth O'Connor says that the community is made authentic by drinking out of the wells of living water.[398] These wells are

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[398] O'Connor, *The New Community*, 117.

discovered in many diverse places but the living water itself is Christ. What practices will reinforce this central encounter with Christ? To begin with, there must be a renewal of the practice of the priesthood of all believers. Everyone in the church is involved in ministry to others and all Christians, as members of the body of Christ, have the responsibility to facilitate the kind of hospitality and care that will overcome the debilitating experiences of exclusion. The church's communal experience is both through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. Any ministry to other believers is through the power of the Holy Spirit who enables the establishment of authentic community. The Spirit works in and through the lives of people and any sense of belonging to one another is solely because of being 'in Christ.' According to Bonhoeffer, believers need other Christians to speak into their lives with the Word of God. He says, "The Christ in their own hearts is weaker than the Christ in the word of other Christians."[399]

Secondly, ministry requires the giving of 'self.'[400] Henri Nouwen understood that believers can be very unaware of themselves, when they lose an intimacy with Christ.[401] He asserted that the self actually is able to receive its meaning when it is in true relationship with God. In other words, "we can be most ourselves when most like God."[402] Nouwen states, "I am hidden in God and I have to find myself in that relationship."[403] How our own sense of belonging to God is related to the ministry of reconciliation and belonging is a key element in a pastoral theology of community. We are not called to help people simply to feel a sense of social belonging, but rather we are

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[399] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 32.
[400] Nouwen, *Gracias!*, 85.
[401] Nouwen, "Spiritual Direction," 402.
[402] Nouwen, *Lifesigns*, 26.
[403] Newby and Newby, *Between Peril and Promise*, 40.

called to graft them in to the body of Christ by helping them to declare their own sense of true home in God. This shift from social ministry to spiritual fellowship is part of what will be required if the church is to be effective in its ministry of inclusion.

Charles Gerkin assists in our understanding of this by articulating the concepts of centripetal and centrifugal forces in the framing of church ministry. He suggests that the centripetal model involves a congregation receiving its impetus and motivation primarily from a central pastoral leader. The focus of the leader-centered church is on gathering the community around the charism of a leader rather than experiencing the true sense of what it means to be a redemptive community. The centripetal model provides an inward benefit as the felt needs of participants to belong can often be met in this way. However, this approach extends a very limited perception of persons related to one another.[404]

Gerkin contends, by contrast, that the model of church best suited for the cultivation of true community ministry is one that is centrifugal. This model concentrates on congregants becoming oriented to their role as 'the people of God' while engaging in a variety of communal relationships both within and outside of the church congregation. Engaging these multiple relationships, in Gerkin's model, allows for the integration of theology and the experience of living in a world that God is reconciling to himself. Gerkin asserts that many of the social and behavioral sciences can contribute to an understanding of the issues in ministry to the excluded and he recommends that Christians make sense of the inner world of individuals and their corresponding community life through narratives.[405]

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[404] Gerkin, *Prophetic Pastoral Practice*, 116–42.
[405] Gerkin, *Prophetic Pastoral Practice*, 116–42.

In the same way, this thesis has explored the importance of narratives of exclusion as the basis for rethinking the focus of authentic Christian community. The centrifugal approach looks outward rather than inward. It seeks to identify, at the margins, the central calling of the church as a community that is awake and attentive to the hidden reality of exclusion. When the church is no longer a church for the excluded, there is loss of spiritual identity. Nouwen said,

> It gets caught up in disagreements, jealousy, power games, and pettiness. He adds the Apostle Paul's words in 1 Cor 12:24–25, 'God has composed the body so that greater dignity is given to the parts which were without it and so that there may not be disagreements inside the body but each part may be equally concerned for all the others.' This is true vision.[406]

The Christian life in community is a witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This approach to ministry appreciates the inter-connectiveness of all of life taking into consideration the negative social forces which often contribute to the suffering of the excluded. It encourages 'compassionate resistance' to the fragmenting and destructive forces of exclusionary practices while aligning with the Spirit of God to bring healing and reconciliation.[407] According to Nouwen, McNeill, and Morrison this entails an understanding of compassion that is filled with the notion of shared journey.

> It is not a bending toward the underprivileged from a privileged position; it is not a reaching out from on high to those who are less fortunate below; it is not a

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[406] Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, October 11.

[407] Bonnie Miller-McLemore supports this concept of ministry and believes that it is more inclusive than the therapeutic model of Seward Hiltner. Frijot Capra also extends her concept of inter-connectedness by suggesting that the 'web of life' is to be recognized. These notions are fine if care is not extracted from the individual needing it. Christ does not call masses to come to him as if the individual is of little importance (1 Cor 12: 20–25). Christ's ministry is both individual and corporate and this must remain the essence of a pastoral theology of community. It does not promote a corporate ideal which cannot be lived. If it encourages a 'Walmart effect' by offering an all–encompassing remedy to problems, many will remain in their suffering. In other words, it may have benefits but may overlook the exclusion and suffering it causes. Henri Nouwen's contention that the most personal is the most universal is believed to be a more effective outlook. See Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern, "Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology," 77–94; Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology*, 20; Capra, *The Web of Life*, 8–10; and Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 42.

gesture of sympathy or pity for those who fail to make it in the upward pull...On the contrary, compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there. [408]

It draws from the over-arching meta-narrative of God which is able to speak into the suffering of loneliness and to modify the experience of loneliness at its core. Those who comprise the body of Christ are meant to live this true sense of authentic communion. Nouwen understands this to mean that the church is bread for the world— taken, blessed, broken and given.[409] This describes the call to discipleship. In Luke 9: 23 Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." This requires humility, effort, commitment and an appreciation of communal solidarity. A pastoral theology of community, therefore, appreciates the relatedness of all Christians while participating humbly in the mission of God in the world. Furthermore, it encourages 'seeing' people and being willing to work toward the inclusion of all believers.

It would be reasonable to ask how 'seeing' people could become reality. The present community is fragmented and a 'togetherness' that is being portrayed in many church communities is not lived in reality. This is a direct result of sin and as Lossky pointed out, sin establishes limits which prevent knowledge about each other. Persons are known only through individuals and as individuals rather than as persons.[410] People become objects which are then placed into mental categories for assessment and review. If a person is classed as 'different' or 'abnormal' they are not given the same value as others.

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[408] Nouwen, et al., *Compassion*, 29.
[409] Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 48.
[410] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 123.

Congregations often think they have authentic community because of a 'welcome center,' 'free mugs,' particular groups, or maybe even a ramp for those with disabilities, but none of 'these things' form the essence of true community. 'These things' may help someone get in the door and to feel an initial welcome, but they do not describe authentic community. Strategies in the church to address the problems of exclusion involve more than categorizing people in an attempt to 'fix' them. This is what perpetuates exclusion. As demonstrated in the spiritual journey proposed by Henri Nouwen, it is essential that believers become self-aware, realizing their own propensity to exclude others as well as themselves. Without proper assessment of personal relationship with God, Christians never appreciate the value of complete dependence on God. It is possible that some Christians could believe that they are on a much higher spiritual plane than others. This may encourage a tendency to look at those who feel excluded and judge them for having an insufficient spiritual life or an introverted personality. Self-importance, therefore, keeps Christians who perpetuate exclusion from admitting that they are just as alienated, lonely, weak, and vulnerable.

Authentic community is not simply a projected ideal or a goal to be sought after but it describes the consequence of people devoting themselves to being Spirit-filled followers of Jesus Christ. In Acts 2 no one set out to build or create authentic community. They followed Christ and, because they devoted themselves to following him, the quality of their communal life together is called 'authentic' only by the church today. What was truly authentic was their God-given ability to abide in Christ and to allow the Spirit of God to direct them. As a result of their surrender to the Lordship of Christ and their

willingness to remain in him, all people were included. 'Difference' was not a problem in their community.

In Luke 14: 12–24 Jesus taught a parable demonstrating that all have been welcomed to the table of the Lord. All are invited to come and dine and the only way of being excluded from God's table is by way of personal choice. This welcome to the table of the Lord represents both a present and an eschatological view of authentic community. The yearning for this community, as evident in the narratives that were shared, is a common experience in the lives of the excluded. It was clear in their narratives of resistance that they were demonstrating anticipation and hope in the deep structure of knowing and being, commensurate with human beings created by God.[411]

This anticipation is also evident in the parable of the Great Banquet. The host is angered only by the response of those who wish to exclude themselves from the banquet. It is worthy to note, however, that the meal is open to visitors and is understood to be both current and futuristic in nature. Darrell L. Bock says,

> Jesus' current kingdom offer is in view here, an offer that culminates in the meal of God's blessing (Luke 14:24). Jesus does not postpone the banquet or withdraw the meal; he gets a new audience. The time of blessing is now and extends into the future. The already and the not yet merge in the decision about Jesus. One can accept or reject the invitation, but in either case, the party is coming and it will not be rescheduled or postponed.[412]

It was God's choice that the invitation to come and dine be extended to everyone. He excluded no one, demonstrating that every person has to make a conscious choice

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[411] This innate anticipation is conceived well in Wolfhart Pannenberg's proleptic structure of reality. It is evident that he viewed the church as a proleptically universal community. He understood all of reality to be structured in anticipation and, therefore, believed and that people knowingly live in this anticipation along with the entirety of creation. See, Pannenberg's, *Jesus God and Man*, 185–86; and "Der Neue Mensch," 140–41.

[412] Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1275.

whether to exclude others or to be excluded. It is possible, therefore, that certain practices

will help shape community and thus encourage inclusion and welcome.

Practices should help contour understanding concerning the present, realized

possibility for greater inclusion while also pointing toward the idyllic eschatological view

of table fellowship. Avoiding the trap of utopianism, these practices should help shape a

clearer understanding of authentic community by taking down some of the barriers

preventing inclusion. Practices are not exercised to do things for people for the sake of

fulfilling their felt needs but are more concerned with love, justice and mercy. Craig

Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass understand practices to mean "doing things together in light

of and in response to God," rather than just carrying out simple acts.[413] Practices involve

self-giving love because hardships and temptations never disappear in everyday life.

Dykstra and Bass say,

> Jesus gathered disciples, with whom he healed and taught, ate and sang, and
> prayed and died, while immersed in Jewish communal life and walking Roman
> roads. After Jesus died disciples continued to gather together and celebrate the
> presence of the risen Christ.[414]

Dykstra and Bass elaborate further saying that practices are understood to be a "specific

way of engaging in a dynamic that exists within the Christian life itself."[415] They contend

that coming to faith in Christ means entrance into a new life that is actually life-giving.

What this implies is that the life to be lived "is joined to the life and love of Christ."[416]

They add, "Referring to Christian practices means that there is something normative and

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[413] Dykstra and Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," 16.
[414] Dykstra and Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," 16.
[415] Dykstra and Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," 16.
[416] Dykstra and Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," 15.

theological in mind."[417]

Early Christian practices were exercised as people responded to the presence of

God in their lives—their deepest source. Common faith emanated from their knowledge

of God in Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul, practices such as

sharing possessions, praying together, helping one another, and testifying about Christ

involved being immersed in the ordinariness of life as well as the spiritual.

The integration of the spiritual and practical is possible but only as God's leading

and direction is sought. Practices should be a natural extension of God's love and mercy

for all. Amos Yong emphasizes that the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost and that

this symbolizes the accessible extent of God's abundant hospitality "for all who are far

off" (Acts 2:39). What Yong is trying to explain is that the mission of God goes beyond

the mere enlargement of the church and is more concerned with the entirety of the

kingdom of God.[418] Dykstra and Bass state,

> Christian practices address needs that are basic to human existence as such, and
> they do so in ways that reflect God's purposes for humankind. When they
> participate in such practices, Christian people are taking part in God's work of
> creation and new creation and thereby growing into a deeper knowledge of God
> and of creation.[419]

Amy Plantinga Pauw asserts certain basic beliefs are prerequisite for practices to

contribute toward the coherency of the life of faith. She refers to the author of Hebrews

stating, "whoever would approach God must believe that he exists and that he rewards

those who seek him" (Heb 11:6).[420] Christians, therefore, need to discern the Spirit's

presence and engage in appropriate practices in concert with the hospitable God by

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[417] Dykstra and Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," 19.
[418] Yong, *Hospitality & the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor*, 126–27.
[419] Dykstra and Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," 21.
[420] Plantinga Pauw, "Attending to the Gaps between Beliefs and Practices," 40.

embodying Christ's incarnational weakness and brokenness.[421] This will enable the Spirit

of God to create community. This is community which Nouwen describes as where

"humility and glory touch."[422] Practices, in their attempt to draw from both theology and

experience will always be carried out imperfectly, but may emerge as a result of the

leading of the Spirit of God as a church embarks on a shared spiritual journey of faith.

Some of these practices could include:

Creating Space for One Another through Narrative

Listening to the narratives of others may prove invaluable concerning the shaping

of community. Jesus often used narrative in his teaching and much of scripture is

structured in story form. The narratives of the lost coin and the lost sheep in Luke 15: 1–

10 demonstrate Jesus' teaching concerning the value of every person. It reads,

> Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the
> Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes
> sinners and eats with them.' So he told them this parable: 'Which one of you,
> having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in
> the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has
> found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he
> calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I
> have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in
> heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety–nine righteous persons who
> need no repentance. 'Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of
> them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds
> it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying,
> 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost. Just so, I tell you, there
> is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Allowing people to tell their stories of personal triumphs and struggles with life, God,

and faith will help Christians receive new insights and evaluate where they themselves

actually are in their journey with God. People can be afforded opportunity to speak freely

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[421] Yong, *Hospitality & the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor*, 132.
[422] Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, May 3.

about their need to belong and their yearning for community.

Having had the opportunity to read the published narratives included in this thesis reinforces the teaching value of narrative. Stories construed as teaching narratives inform how community may be strengthened and shaped. The shared narratives have had the capability of affecting the reader, such as in the case where Karen Funk Weibe shared about the unconscious ostracism that she experienced in addition to her grief. It is easy to understand how this personal account could affect the way churches respond to widows. Also, envisioning the torture that Jim experienced after a divorce, while hearing his story, informs the church regarding the level of care that is needed when divorce occurs.

Don S. Browning contends that care for another has often been misunderstood. He says,

> There is a tendency to see care as a set of specific acts that one does for another person, or as a set of scientific truths that are applied, or even as a matter of simple 'love' or 'concern' or 'feeling' for another. This simple view fails to realize that whatever care is, it must take a point of departure from a culture and feed back into that culture, or seek to create an alternative culture.[423]

When realizing the power that narratives possess to teach the church about community and culture, it is also evident that justice and social change become elements which comprise authentic community. So many have fallen through the cracks of the North American evangelical church so personal narratives need to be shared to inform the church concerning what is needed in both the church and outlying community.

Opportunities for conducting marathons of sharing and support, for both congregants and the outlying community members, filled with attentive listening, respect, and opportunity will prove beneficial. Voicing personal narratives may also prove to

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[423] Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*, 71.

dispel stigma concerning difference. Voices of the elderly, widowed, divorced, abused, disabled etc. increase the chance for a congregation to be understood as engaged in a shared journey of faith. As movement continues from the false self to the true self through prayer and solitude, there is realization that all Christians are one in Christ.

Recognizing the Priesthood of all Believers

A grass-roots or ground-up approach to church rather than top-down, recognizes the priesthood of all believers and is more likely to be gender, class, race, and ability sensitive, as it may sanction a more holistic view of community. Recognizing the priesthood of all believers means that every Christian is understood to be in the process of becoming equipped for ministry. All Christians are becoming equipped but are also equipping others for ministry at the same time in their communal identity. In 1 Cor 12, Paul spoke about all members of the body having a ministry and function. This did not imply that all were called to the same function but all were called to minister. There was no hierarchy.

Practices that shape an understanding of yielding and inviting

Yielding to the Holy Spirit and inviting him to create community is necessary for yielding and inviting to occur between one another. Individualism will become dispelled as the fullness of God's presence brings healing and wholeness to people's lives and transforms life together in community. Praying together allows the lifting of burdens and the sharing of common faith. Conditions of the heart are revealed, as people are willing to wait in God's presence, and are enabled to see into the reality of the lives of others. This is where it is realized that wounds are to be shared and that no one is perfect. This is where there is rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep (Rom

12:15).

Only Christ can knit hearts together when 'difference' has created problems. When this is realized, love for a homeless woman, who finds no meaning in her life, is free-flowing. The love of Christ enables the religious or legalistic, who desired to avoid an encounter with suffering, to become good Samaritans (Luke 10:25–37). When the love of Christ is realized in the midst of fragmentation, those who have left the faith, such as in the case of Bart Ehrman, receive the invitation of an open door to return. Ministry is also extended from the community of faith in a congregation to the workplace where Helen, Alice, and Jason need to hear the gospel message and discover true identity in Christ. People who have been marginalized because of gender, race or class are welcomed into ministry and fellowship. Yielding to the Holy Spirit and inviting his presence allows his joy and peace to fill the hearts of Christians. There is a shared brokenness but there is also a shared love and joy in the presence of the Lord.

Practices that shape an understanding of solidarity

In a very practical sense valuing the opinions and suggestions of each other communicates acceptance and belonging. Affording people the opportunity to speak or share, or to express themselves in whatever way they are able, demonstrates that no one is of greater importance than another. Something as simple as finding out that seniors are having a difficult time getting out of their cars in the parking lot, can alert the church to provide assistance. Also, encouraging people to offer drives to and from church to those forced to rely on buses or taxis can go along way to helping people feel valued.

When newcomers arrive, a brief history of the church could be explained and tours could be offered that would help them feel included and welcomed. Learning the

locations of the washrooms, exits, nursery, library, offices, and prayer room can make a

significant difference in a newcomer's first impressions. Efforts could also be made to

help them connect with others who live in close proximity or invitations extended so they

may participate in various communal events. A common meal in the church may also

serve to encourage solidarity. As Christians are able to feast at the Lord's Table both now

and in eternity, all have opportunity to enjoy the presence of each other as life is

celebrated together 'in Christ.'

Practices that Shape Community Concerning Spirituality

Focus is needed on the relational, interpersonal, and communal aspects of church

life if community is to become an experienced reality. According to Nouwen, the true,

authentic self, is discovered when true home is found in Christ. However, this also means

that contemporary understandings of spirituality in pastoral theology, require insight from

many different disciplines. For example, Biblical studies, psychology, theology, history,

and pastoral experience, are all valuable in the process of Christian growth and

development. Michael Downing contends,

> human and spiritual development are not opposing, competing dynamics, but are
> rather interrelated and complementary. The authentic self is one which is given by
> nature and developed by grace and Spirit. Such development requires
> commitment to ongoing self-scrutiny and willingness to risk and change. But this
> self-scrutiny extends beyond the province of the individual to include a mature
> critical consciousness vis-a-vis the social-symbolic order with its dominant
> ideology. Without such critical consciousness there is a tendency to overlook the
> truth that any authentic Christian spirituality is intrinsically relational, social and,
> indeed, political.[424]

What this signifies is that because spirituality is concerned with the work of the

Holy Spirit in the lives of people, it should be recognized that the practice of spirituality,

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[424] Downey, "Understanding Christian Spirituality," 276.

in the shaping of community, involves a constant integration between faith and action. The active life and contemplative life need to merge within the church. Downey asserts there is a deeper recognition today that prayer and action are rooted in one source, the human person. This does not mean that the person is responsible for creating community but it demonstrates personal responsibility toward others. Galatians 5:16–17 states, "Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. Nouwen described this well in his description of the spiritual journey.

Christ creates community, as his people are willing to live in step with the Spirit. Downey describes living in the Spirit saying, "It is the practice of the gospel through which persons and communities do the truth in love freely, and in so doing enable others to do the truth in love freely, thereby participating more fully in the mystery of Christ who is contemplated in Christian prayer."[425]

Spirituality also shapes community by encouraging engagement with the struggle for peace and justice in both church and society. Community cannot avoid being shaped by the experiences of persons at the margins within the church. The narratives have revealed that alienation and loneliness plague the aged, racial minorities, those living with disabilities, the divorced, the abused, the widowed, depressed, and the homeless etc. Downey asserts that the experiences of such persons, and all who have become invisible and powerless in the church and society, have become an indispensable source for

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[425] Downey, "Understanding Christian Spirituality," 276.

reflection on the nature of authentic Christian experience and praxis.[426]

Retreats are a valuable aspect of the Christian life of the church. Time spent together in reflection and prayer will undoubtedly influence a church concerning action toward others. In Mark 11:17 Jesus said, "...Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?'..." Realizing that the church is a communal house of prayer can have far–reaching effects. As focus is placed upon prayer, the work of the Spirit, and how Christians may abide in Christ, there will be communal growth concerning faith and hope. Not only can prayer and serving others help build relationship with God, through the Spirit, they can be both enabling and empowering instilling a healthy view of community. Meeting together to pray for one another and having the freedom to ask for prayer will deepen the spiritual climate. Communal prayer may result in the greater inclusion of people suffering depression or experiencing a 'dark night of the soul.' As the spiritual life deepens and matures, community is shaped and strengthened.

Practices that Shape Community concerning Involvement/Inclusion

Inclusion implies acceptance and belonging. This entails that all congregants are recognized to be on a shared journey of faith. This does not imply that all is to be perfect because community is realized in actuality to be a mixture of the spiritual and emotional as Bonhoeffer described. Christians recognize that an idealized community awaits future completion and yet difference can be celebrated rather than stigmatized or feared in this present realized community. Practical measures may be taken which enhance the inclusion of people who have experienced alienation leading to loneliness because all need to feel welcomed. Involvement and inclusion means that honor and grace is

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[426] Downey, "Understanding Christian Spirituality," 276.

extended to those excluded previously. People need to be lifted up rather than put down, considered rather than abandoned. Life is to be celebrated together.

Practices that can encourage involvement and inclusion can have a profound impact on the elderly, the divorced, widowed, people living with disabilities, and for those with special needs. The issue of seniors feeling invisible could be addressed openly with teaching concerning the stigmatization of the elderly. Also, divorce and widowhood could be understood through seminars and by allowing those who have lived these experiences to share their struggles and how God has helped them in their journey.

Regarding those living with disabilities, Nancy Eiesland expressed frustration and stigmatization in her narrative of an experience surrounding a communion service. She was not able to approach the communion rail to receive the Eucharist like everyone else so it would be of great advantage to implement ramps which could provide accessibility and greater inclusion. However, having people living with disability treated with understanding and respect, rather than just meeting the need for accessibility, promotes greater inclusion, acceptance, and involvement. Hearing the story of Rachel Esdaille should convince the church that greater sensitivity and education is needed to dispel fear concerning disability and to help congregants experience solidarity and growth. Realizing that Jesus honored the marginalized by demonstrating their involvement in the inauguration of his kingdom encourages practices of servanthood that will help shape community.

In Luke 14:12–14 Jesus said,

> When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the

lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

Practices that can Shape Our Liturgy and Language

Ronald D. Witherup states, "...language is a living dynamic force in human existence. The way we say things, shaped by the words and expressions we use, does make a difference. Language not only reflects attitudes, but it also helps to create the reality around us."[427] A church can become more sensitive concerning its use of liturgy and language. As mentioned under the type of exclusion known as 'social exclusion,' one female congregant was affected deeply by the constant focus on male references in the liturgy. She was made to feel that women did not have equal status and actually wrote about it at the end of a service. Her comments gave voice to years of frustration experienced by women in a patriarchal establishment.

Regarding language churches also need to alter previous practices deemed to be inclusive. For example, 'All rise,' being stated from the pulpit, is not appropriate for those who cannot stand up and, advertising 'The Family Picnic,' actually excludes singles. 'Couples' gatherings should not be emphasized when a congregation has several never married, divorced, and widowed persons.

Jean Vanier describes community as a body in which all of its members belong to one another. He says that this feeling of belonging does not originate from flesh and blood but by being called of God.[428] Authentic community can never be created or manufactured by Christians but as Christians yield to God and invite his Spirit to minister, walls of division come down. This does not imply that Christians are exempt

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[427] Witherup, *A Liturgist's Guide to Inclusive Language*, 8.
[428] Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 49.

from all efforts to nurture community. Merold Westphal contends that "to listen and to

hear—these are task words, not achievement words."[429] In the formation of community

the narratives of the excluded may actually have the power to interrupt the lethargy and

comfort of the North American evangelical church and enable Christians to hear the

voice of God in the narratives of the suffering. It is essential to remember Bonhoeffer's

words, "The exclusion of the weak and insignificant, the seemingly useless people, from

everyday Christian life in community may actually mean the exclusion of Christ; for in

the poor sister or brother, Christ is knocking at the door."[430] By the grace of God a

pastoral theology of community may prove to be more than capable of encouraging the

inclusion of all Christians in the North American evangelical church.

Exclusion and the Focus of Future Research

It has been recognized throughout this research that exclusion represents complex

issues. Examining the life-world concept of Schütz, the social-psychological perspectives

of Zadro and Williams, the narratives of the excluded, and the pastoral response of Henri

Nouwen, has revealed that exclusion is not static but dynamic and fluid, invoking a great

deal of suffering. It represents a process rather than a state calling for further examination

of its dimensions which may change over time. A pastoral theology of community

describes a new way of seeing others but focusing on a developmental analysis of

exclusion over time as spiritual journey is shared may actually prove to further enhance

inclusion within community, as it will expose a dire need to return to Christ with one's

whole being. Christians are not all in the same place spiritually and narratives need to be

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[429] Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?: Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 155.
[430] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 45, 46.

heard from those who have been excluding others as well as from the excluded. Several

questions need to be addressed as well. These may include, "Does the experience of

being excluded change throughout the experience of shared spiritual journey?" "Does this

represent a unique experience for each Christian?" "How does each stage of the spiritual

journey affect the next?" "How does shared spiritual journey affect the gaps and

distances created by the inequality experienced when being excluded?" These questions

need to be answered as research continues in the hope of achieving greater understanding

concerning the dynamics of exclusion and its influence on community. It is hoped that

further research will move toward a more realistic experience of authentic community for

all Christians.

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