DOWNWARD MOBILITY AND THE URBAN CHURCH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF HENRI NOUWEN'S VISION AND EXPERIENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S DOWNWARD PATH

by

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ABSTRACT

"Downward Mobility and the Urban Church:
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Upon returning from serving overseas amongst the urban poor in Papua New Guinea, I questioned the paucity of Canadian Reformed churches (the federation of churches that retains my credentials) in the inner cities of urban Canada, as well as the apparent mobility drift of churches from urban centres to more rural or suburban locales.

These questions came to the fore when I commenced a church plant with sixty starting members (many middle-class) in a lower socioeconomic community in east Hamilton (McQuesten). The socioeconomic disparity between those who chose to be part of the church plant and the majority of people in McQuesten demanded some intentional reflection, which planted the seeds for this phenomenological research project.

Desiring to approach these questions phenomenologically, I was drawn to the work of the Catholic thinker Henri Nouwen. Although Nouwen was not an evangelical church planter, he was a prolific writer who shared his existential journey from a distinguished position at Harvard University to L'Arche Daybreak, a care home for people with disabilities in Toronto. Was Nouwen's experience and vision of downward mobility

generative for those engaged in church planting in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods in urban Canada? To address this question, I studied four themes rooted in Nouwen's corpus: home, time, wealth, and power. This investigation took place through extant literature and twenty interviews with missional leaders serving in predominantly lower socio-economic urban centres across Canada. Although I was able to answer the research question in the affirmative, Nouwen's works are critically analyzed and the themes are actively engaged through the interviews, providing readers with the ability to examine their own journeys into greater intimacy with Christ and greater compassion for the marginalized.

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Having completed this dissertation, I feel I may not have followed the biblical injunction to count the costs before I began. I thank God that these costs were met in sometimes surprising and sundry ways.

To begin, this project would not have been possible without the financial support of a number of donors. To list each of them over a seven year span begs the risk of forgetting one. There were many and their generosity is greatly appreciated.

I am also extremely grateful for the twenty missional leaders who willingly participated in this study and sacrificed their time to be interviewed. Their contributions to this project added both depth and a kind of catholicity to church planting in Canada's urban core. I am also thankful for the leadership at Mercy church where I pastor for giving me the opportunity and space to write. Of course, I am thankful for the people who read over my dissertation, suggested books and articles, edited my work, and planted fresh ideas in my mind. Particular thanks goes to two aspiring academics, Micah Oosterhoff and Karilyn Van Barneveld, without whom this project would not be where it is now. I truly appreciate the support of Drs. Kelvin Mutter, Arjan de Visser, Bill De Jong and Steve Foster, Pastor Eric Onderwater, and my father-in-law, Tom Zietsma. Their counsel, encouragement, critiques, and edits were fecund and allowed me to think more critically about the methodology and theology evidenced in this dissertation.

Of course, both my primary and secondary readers, Drs. Lee Beach and Chris Land from MDC, deserve special thanks. They were both kind and yet astute in their

critiques, and this helped me draw better conclusions. Lee in particular spent hours helping me develop my research focus with many starts and stops, all of which he bore with great patience. Chris refocused my proposal towards the four major themes that became generative throughout the project. Any outstanding errors and conclusions that could have been stated more clearly are, of course, the fault of this writer and not his readers.

In the end, no-one was more patient with me and helpful in bearing my stress load better than my dear wife, Nadia. She was and is a constant encouragement to me both in formal ministry and in this dissertation project. Nadia, along with our five children—Jono, Karlyn, Caleb, Ben, and Ava—endured my countless, "I need to go work on my doctorate" comments with grace and generosity. My heart is full because of them. Finally, I thank my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ, who answered the countless prayers towards seeing this project to its completion. Without his gracious hand upon me, this project would have remained a passing idea.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CanRC: Canadian Reformed Churches in Canada

GE: General Electric

GTHA: Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area

IPA: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

LSE: Lower Socioeconomic

MDC: McMaster Divinity College

MREB: McMaster Research Ethics Board

PBR: Practice-Based Research

PLR: Practice-Led Research

PNG: Papua New Guinea

SES: Socioeconomic Status

TA: Thematic Analysis

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Writing this dissertation on downward mobility and the urban church began during my tenure as a missionary in PNG. This Melanesian Island nation, with roughly eight-hundred different people groups living in a tenuous but dynamic relationship, was our home for almost twelve years (2005–2017). Since the country's inception in 1975, local and ostensibly nationalized corruption, unviable infrastructure, and unmet educational standards have wracked the nation, designating PNG as a poor and developing country.[1] Our lived experience as missionaries in this beautiful but economically impoverished nation provided the soil and planted the seeds which blossomed into my doctoral interests.

The poverty we witnessed in PNG was as extreme as our ministry was challenging, forcing us to confront the injustices associated with poverty. As a gospel-preaching missionary, I was called to minister to people groups living in settlements or shanty towns that bounded the city of Lae, the second largest city in PNG. The majority of the inhabitants lived in abject poverty, surviving on less than six American dollars per day.[2] Such poverty resulted in various pathologies, including persistent illnesses, higher youth mortality, reduced education and the accompanying limited work opportunities,

[1] The country-wide GDP in 2022 was approximately $2620 USD per citizen over the age of majority. See "GDP per capita, current prices." In comparison, Canada's GDP per person in 2022 was approximately $54,966 USD. See "Canada GDP Per Capita 1960–2023."

[2] Although it is difficult to find an exact number to represent the poverty levels in the settlements in PNG's largest cities, the country-wide GDP in 2021, as noted above, is $2620 USD per capita— a salary of $8.00 USD per person. However, in my experience, most families had one employed person per family (unit) of some 3–5 people. Their income averaged around Kina 3.50 per hour. If the average work week was forty hours per week, this equalled K20 per day (after tax). In today's rates, this equates to about $5.40 USD per household per day, as the exchange rate is $.27 USD to 1 Kina.

higher proclivities to substance abuse (especially alcohol), and a shortage in proper accommodations. All this resulted in increased marginalisation and powerlessness. Serving in PNG as a so-called "privileged missionary," I was forced to confront a number of existential questions surrounding the upward mobility and perceived material and social privileges of myself and my family, as well as the stagnant or downwardly mobile existence typifying many of the urban poor to whom we were ministering.[3] This crystalized into one driving question: *how do materially-privileged missionaries serve empathetically and fruitfully in an impoverished urban area?*[4]

This existential question led to an unresolved tension in my heart to decipher how I should live and minister God's grace as the so-called "righteous rich."[5] Although I could not find a simple antidote to bridge the economic disparities between our perceived privilege and the underprivileged poor we came to serve, our ministry in PNG exposed the need to address this tension through faithful Christ-centred ministry. I asked: How does following Christ order our engagement with the marginalised, the powerless, the neglected, and those who fit the designation of urban poor?

Returning to Canada, I retained my credentials as a pastor within the Canadian Reformed Federation of Churches.[6] Blessings Christian Church, a member of this federation, commissioned me to plant a church in east Hamilton. We focused on the neighbourhood of McQuesten, in part because of its identity as *terra incognita* within east Hamilton.[7] This neighbourhood is bounded by the Red Hill Valley to the east, Barton

[3] These themes will be fleshed out in the body of this paper.
[4] Bonk (*Missions and Money*, 45–59) addresses the relational costs of affluence in ministry.
[5] Bonk (*Missions and Money*, 109–33) addresses this phenomenon thoroughly.
[6] For more information about the Canadian Reformed Churches in Canada, visit www.canrc.org.
[7] Richard Harris argues that since 1945 the Niagara Escarpment helped cement the mental maps of Hamiltonians to this day so that no matter where people live residents of neighbourhoods draw a sharp line

Street to the north, Queenston Street to the south, and Parkdale Ave to the west, and is considered a poor or lower-socio economic neighbourhood amongst approximately two-hundred Hamilton neighbourhoods. Although there are vast differences between living in the settlements of PNG and living in apartment buildings and government-subsidised housing in east Hamilton, the common denominator between Lae and East Hamilton is poverty and its concomitant issues.[8] For example, between 2006–2013, forty-nine percent of McQuesten residents lived in poverty, compared to eighteen percent for the city of Hamilton overall.[9] Thirty-one percent of McQuesten's population are children (under twenty years of age) and almost fifty percent of them live below the poverty line. Connected to this, forty percent of homes in McQuesten are classified as lone-parent homes, compared to twenty-three percent city-wide.[10] McQuesten's educational standards are among the worst in the city, with only four percent of the population holding a post-secondary degree or diploma.[11] By some standards, the McQuesten community could be considered a "neglected community" (although such language is not always helpful, as it can stigmatise a community).[12] In this research, I will refer to this community and the

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between upper and lower city. This negative view of the downtown and adjacent neighbourhoods in lower Hamilton form the perception that it is a terra incognita. See Harris et al., "A City on a Cusp," 17.

[8] The government of Canada does not have an official definition of poverty. A family is considered low-income if the family devotes a large share (20 percentage points more than an average family) to basic necessities, food, shelter and clothing, if the family is unable to buy specific and needed goods and services in its community, or, if the family's income is below 50 percent of the median household income. In 2013, the poverty rate in Canada was almost 13 percent. See "Towards a Poverty Reduction Strategy," 2022. In 2018 the official poverty line across fifty regions was approximately $20,000 for singles and $37, 500 for a family of four. See Corak, "Canada's Official Poverty Line: What is it?"

[9] This information is unfortunately dated and Statistics Canada has no recent surveys with the same corresponding data for McQuesten neighbourhood although Statistics Canada has 2022 data for Ward 4 which comprises some nine neighbourhoods. See Appendix 1 for Ward 4 demographics and socio-economic statistics.

[10] Dunn, "McQuesten-Profile-March-2015," 1–25.

[11] Dunn, "McQuesten-Profile-March-2015," 1–25.

[12] McConnell (*Church in Hard Places*, 65) argues that the approach to poverty can often be paternalistic, dismissive, and condescending. I am aware of the importance of not stigmatising people or communities by negative descriptors. Alison Kreckman encourages writers to avoid deficit-based language for socioeconomic status. Describing people only with negative words like "struggling," "underprivileged,"

people living in such communities with the terms “lower socioeconomic” and “lower socioeconomic status.”

As we consider the socio-economic context of the McQuesten neighbourhood, it may be helpful to define what the term socioeconomic status (SES) means and how it will function in this project. SES is best defined as a combined measure of a person’s or family’s social and economic position in relation to others in the community.[13] One’s SES typically describes education, income, financial security, living conditions, resources and opportunities afforded to people within society. For example, people with a lower socioeconomic status generally have less access to financial, educational, social, and health resources compared with those with a higher SES.[14] As a result, the likelihood of health issues, chronic health conditions, and possible disabilities increases. Aggregated ratios indicate that people from lower socioeconomic communities also experience higher than average harmful home exposures compared to people from higher socioeconomic communities.[15] Although defining people and communities as lower or higher SES according to gross income may mask important poverty and wealth indicators, for the sake of this study I will employ this benchmark for determining socioeconomic status.[16] For example, a family of four in Hamilton with a household income of approximately $40,000 or less per annum falls within a lower SES category in Canada.[17]

“at risk” can stigmatize individuals and fail to recognize the larger systems that create problems. See Kreckman, “Socioeconomic Status.”

[13] Baker, “Socioeconomic status, definition,” 2210–14.

[14] National Cancer Institute, “Socioeconomic Status.”

[15] Kreckmann, “Socioeconomic Status.”

[16] The American Psychological Association (APA) uses the term “low-income and economic marginalisation” in their guidelines to establish common terminology that includes both limited financial resources and marginalisation related to social class. See Kreckmann, “Socioeconomic Status.”

[17] “Dimensions of Poverty Hub,” 2023.

Subsequently, I practise my ministry of church-planting in a lower socioeconomic community which serves as the context for this practice-led research thesis. As a church planter, I was commissioned to plant a church (Mercy Christian Church) and lead some sixty Blessings church members to assist in this spiritual enterprise. Space does not allow for an explanation as to the magnitude of this sixty-person membership transfer, but having these sixty members did increase the need to ensure everyone understood the vision and missional objectives of Mercy in the McQuesten community. To that end, drafting Mercy's vision statement and missional objectives led me to see the need for a reflective study on my practice of ministry through a practice-led research project answering the problem of how we, as a middle-class church, can minister effectively to a lower SES neighbourhood in east Hamilton. How do we ensure our programs, promotional material, style of teaching, discipleship, aesthetics, and conversations do not contribute to the gap between higher and lower SES members within the church community?[18]

Thus far, I have briefly sketched a general framework for my particular research interests in downward mobility. However, there are three converging variables that further explain my research interests. The first concerns my personal socioeconomic status and living arrangements. My family, along with almost all those who desired to join the church plant in east Hamilton, were not originally from McQuesten or a lower socioeconomic demographic. From a sociological perspective, this means that our lived experiences are not shaped by a downwardly mobile path but an upwardly mobile one.[19] Anecdotally, those who chose to join Mercy church were relatively financially secure,

[18] Moberg, "Does Social Class Shape the Church?" 112.
[19] The meaning of these terms will be more clearly defined in the literature review.

living above the lower SES range of $40,000 per annum per family of four, and consequently falling within the demographic of middle-class wage earners.

As in PNG, this reality forced me to consider how to effectively minister to a community characterised by lower SES, where marginalisation, disempowerment, and even abject loneliness are defining characteristics.[20] In his more recent book, *Our Kids: The American Dream*, Robert Putnam, quoting Ivaylo Petev, argues that as Americans disengage and retreat to relative social isolation, this "constitutes a trend that, even if common to individuals of all classes, affects members of the lower classes disproportionally, ultimately reinforcing the difference between social class."[21] Putnam concludes that although evidence is too limited for a final verdict on the impact of social isolation on a community, it seems that one class experiences a far greater impact from these negative factors than other classes.[22]

To begin bridging this socio-economic divide, our family of seven (myself, my wife and our five children) decided to move into the McQuesten community to practise what may be called a "ministry of presence."[23] We began to understand the value and experience the blessing and joy of living in proximity to the area we seek to reach with the gospel; consequently, we have encouraged members of Mercy Christian Church to do the same.[24] However, this invitation has only been embraced by a few. Although there are

[20] For example, the American sociologist Robert Putnam (*Bowling Alone*, 335) argues that since modern society encourages belief in personal control and autonomy more than a commitment to duty and common enterprises, the fallout of this ardent personal autonomy leads to growing social isolation.

[21] Ivaylo Petev, quoted in Putnam, *Our Kids*, 211.

[22] Putnam, *Our Kids*, 211.

[23] John Perkins, the American pastor and civil rights activist, contends that wherever the church is present, the presence of God should be felt through its members. See Perkins, *Beyond Charity*, 18.

[24] Unfortunately, we could not find a home directly in the McQuesten neighbourhood, even after more than seven attempts and a deposit on a home that was revoked. We were able to find a home, however, that borders the McQuesten neighbourhood.

a number of attending variables contributing to this, including size of family and type or place of work, at times I have had to confront a subtle kind of residential segregation. Richard Harris and others argue in "A City on the Cusp: Neighbourhood Change in Hamilton," that Hamilton has appeared to conform to the American urban stereotype of inner-city (and adjacent) poverty and suburban affluence.[25] Many Hamiltonians hold a negative view of the downtown and adjacent neighbors in lower Hamilton as *terra incognita*; many are happy to keep it that way.[26] In my ministry's praxis, I experienced this unaccommodating view as friends on the escarpment shared openly that they rarely venture into lower Hamilton—especially central or northeast Hamilton—on account of their feelings of compromised safety and the visual indicators of poverty (e.g., street-involved people). The impact of this residential segregation and prejudice may yet affect the members of Mercy Christian Church.

The second reality concerns the federation (read: denomination) that holds my credentials as a pastor, and the unintentional praxis of these federated churches to plant or establish churches away from the inner city.[27] This concern consists of two parts. First, it struck me upon my return from PNG that the Federation of Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) did not seem to have a strong ecclesial presence in urban Canada, specifically the urban core. There were only a few churches— two or three out of approximately sixty-eight churches—that were considered inner-city churches (that is, churches located in said catchment areas that have a clear vision and passion to reach those who are

[25] Harris et al., "A City on the Cusp," iii.
[26] Harris et al., "A City on the Cusp," 17.
[27] The use of the phrase *inner-city* does not necessarily refer to the geographic center of the city. An inner city can be defined as an impoverished area in which there may be increased government activity or control, but little activity by the private investor or the private sector. See Claerbaut, *Urban Ministries*, 35.

economically marginalized in urban Canada). The remaining churches, spanning four provinces (including British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario), are rural or suburban churches.[28]

The churches of the Federation of Canadian Reformed Churches seem to have followed a general trend since the federation's inception in the early 1950s.[29] The trend has generally seen churches move from the city to the suburbs, and then on to small towns or rural areas.[30] The reason for these changes, arguably, was that as believers moved from the city to rural communities, the need for a more local presence was explored. Subsequently, local churches were planted in these rural catchment areas as congregational numbers grew and a sufficient number of men stood up to serve as elders and deacons.[31] However, it is noteworthy that while the de-urbanization of the Canadian Reformed Federation of churches took place, Canada was concomitantly becoming more urbanized. In fact, today Canada is ranked as one of the most urbanized countries in the world.[32]

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[28] Visscher, *Yearbook 2018*, 1–220. According to Harvey Conn, an American church planter and seminary professor, this is not simply a Canadian Reformed issue, but an evangelical one. Writing in 1994, he notes that demographics indicate that the highest number of evangelical churches exist in nonurban areas. He writes, "Demographics indicate that the highest number of evangelical churches exist in nonurban areas. We mention this as a point of concern. Where are the evangelical churches in this urbanizing world? Why does the city suffer from evangelical absenteeism?" See Conn, *The American City and the Evangelical Church*, 142. Cam Harder ("New Shoots From Old Roots," 49) notes, however, that the majority of metropolitan churches exist in socio-economic areas most appropriately called segregated middle-class neighbourhoods often realized by a relatively large building surrounded by ample parking.

[29] For more information about the Canadian Reformed Churches in Canada, visit www.canrc.org.

[30] Ray Joslin's research is based out of London. England. He provides a few reasons for the exodus of Christians from the inner-city including disparaging views about living in the inner-city to less desirable residential areas or more attractive areas in suburbia or in rural areas. See Joslin, *Urban Harvest*, 222–23.

[31] The Canadian Reformed Churches are complementarian in their leadership structures, and thus only have male headship for the church offices including minister, elder and deacon.

[32] The degree of urbanization in Canada went from 69 percent in 1960 to 81 percent in 2023. See "Canada: Degree of Urbanization." and "Canada Goes Urban."

This led me to the writings of the late missiologist, Harvie Conn, who served as professor of missions at Westminster Philadelphia Seminary in Pennsylvania during the 1970–1990s. Conn explored this trend within various denominations in the mid-seventies, and felt that this reality called for a reversing shift for Christians from a rural to an urban mindset. His argument followed a certain logic: an urban world required not a rural or suburban theological and missiological education, but a theology with the city at the centre "that teaches people to move easily from the books to the barrios."[33] Another missionary and author, Lesslie Newbigin, had a similar thought upon his return to Britain from India. He asked: "What would be involved in a missionary encounter between the gospel and the whole way of perceiving, thinking, and living that we call 'modern Western culture?'"[34] Presented with the Canadian Reformed current ecclesial presence in rural Canada, I saw the need to answer Newbigin's question in connection to the call to reach our inner cities for Christ, and in particular, to reach the McQuesten neighbourhood in east Hamilton.

A second part of my concern about a weak ecclesial presence in urban Canada is the apparent growth in financial solvency amongst CanRC members since the federation's inception. Without engaging in a longitudinal study of income disparity among Canadian Reformed Church members between 1950 and 2017 (the year I returned from PNG), I can attest that the anecdotal evidence confirms this truth. In broad strokes, the Dutch working-class immigrants of the 1950s spawned two generations of middle-class wage earners with disposable incomes that far outperformed the purchasing power

[33]Gornik, "The Legacy of Harvie M. Conn." Conn argues as well that 90 percent of barriers to reaching cities are not in the city at all; they are our structures inside the church. See Conn, *The Urban Face of Mission*, 41.

[34] Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 1.

that their parents or grandparents knew. Evidently, homes became larger, cars nicer, vacations more exotic, and acreage more coveted and secured. This in turn may have spawned a new middle-class reality of living away from the city and enjoying the blessing of larger acreage. Adopting the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor's terminology, there is an upwardly mobile "social imaginary" that exists within the denomination today.[35]

This reality became of particular importance for my practice of ministry in east Hamilton. As mentioned, I was commissioned to plant a church in the McQuesten neighbourhood and thus realised I needed to outline a vision for being a church in a lower socio-economic community in an urban city with a large number of middle-class members who lived outside McQuesten. Although my primary practice of ministry involves preaching and teaching, leading, and training leaders, it became crucial for me to consider my practice of ministry through another lens: the spiritual lens of taking the path of downward mobility in order to effectively reach a lower SES area with the gospel.

To that end, I chose to interact with four themes that I hope can serve to facilitate a more downward vision for inner-city ministry. These themes are home, time, wealth, and power. I will address the reasons and value of these themes below by reflecting on Henri Nouwen's *role* in steering me to them. I contend that the four themes are significant areas of Christian discipleship—functioning as loci of downward mobility—yet are not typically addressed by those writing from a missional perspective. Therefore, I believe these themes provide a place of creative circumspection for those engaged in church planting in an urban core. For example, how one understands *home* greatly

[35] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171–72.

influences their understanding of what it means to have a missional presence in a city and to be active with Christian hospitality. Similarly, one's view of *time* impacts one's ability to connect with those on the margins who might be controlled by time. Both *wealth* and *power*, which may be used for the cause of Christ and the building of his church, can also have a debilitating impact on church planting if not properly understood and leveraged for Christ's kingdom. Indeed, if Putnam can argue from a sociological worldview that the upwardly mobile pursuits of success in work, vacations, capital investments, and professional careers, for example, all continue to widen this growing gap between the classes, then this question can be asked: What about the intersection between the classes on a spiritual level?[36] Put another way, if the church experiences a certain blinding power around this supposed social imaginary (which one might call the American dream), how should she address this in the context of our marginalized communities in urban Canada? If left unattended, what will be the impact on church planting work and the spread of the gospel amongst the marginalized groups within urban centres?[37]

The church is given a prophetic and universal appeal from Jesus in Matt 28:18: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." This appeal transcends national, provincial and even city boundaries, identifying both urban and rural dwellers as recipients of the gospel. Furthermore, Jesus commences his ministry in Luke 4:18–19 with an appeal to Isaiah 61:1–2 reminding us that he was "anointed . . . to proclaim good news to the poor . . . to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the

[36] See Putnam, *Our Kids*, 164.

[37] Willard (*The Great Omission*, 5–6) summarizes this truth well: "The first goal set for the early church was to use his all-encompassing power and authority to make disciples—from all nations. That made clear a world-historical project [that]. . . the Christian church of the first centuries resulted from following this plan for church growth—a result hard to improve upon." Willard argues that the Western church has been plagued by two omissions: the omitting of making disciples and the enrolment of these non-disciples as Christ's students. See Willard, *The Great Omission*, 6.

blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." His heart for the marginalized defined his preaching ministry, and this should not escape our notice as church planters. Jesus reminds us in Matt 11:16 that "The poor will always be with you," and James presents the antidote to this reality when he calls the church "to look after orphans, and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (Jas 1:28). Furthermore, Isa 58:6–7 states that the LORD delights in proper fasting because "it loosens the chains of injustice, and unties the cords of the yoke . . . (and provides opportunity to) share your food with the hungry, and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter." Finally, one of the exhortations of the gospel-life is to practice hospitality[38] and thereby to shine a light in this dark world.[39] As these and many other biblical passages demonstrate, the church cannot withdraw from those living in neglected urban centres, but is called to reach them with the life saving gospel both through word and action.

The third reality concerns my doctoral studies at MDC. While beginning ministry in Hamilton, I was completing doctoral coursework at MDC. One course in particular, the "Pastoral Theology of Henri Nouwen," began to reshape how I engaged with the concept of urban ministry. Nouwen's writings and lived experience as an academic-cum-caregiver at L'Arche (hereafter: Daybreak), a Toronto home where people with developmental disabilities live with assistance, were generative in my life and ministry. Nouwen articulated, with authenticity and humble self-awareness, his passion to walk in deeper faithfulness to Christ by following Christ's downward path as he moved from Harvard to Daybreak. Although some have questioned whether Nouwen was maximizing

[38] See Rom 12:13; Titus 1:7–8; Heb 13:1–2; and 1 Pet 4:9–11.
[39] See Phil 2:15 and Matt 5:14.

or undermining his God-given gifts as he followed this ostensibly downward path, I appreciated Nouwen's vulnerability, authenticity, and passion for sharing his existential journey serving the marginalized in Toronto.[40]

Nouwen's downwardly mobile pursuit to pursue Christ in compassionate community with the weak sparked my interest in his writings. A driving impulse was whether his works, and especially his life, could inflame and help develop a new approach to ministry in lower socioeconomic communities. Through coursework and deeper readings into Nouwen's life, I wondered whether Nouwen's life and works could be useful for developing both a theory *and* a praxis for bringing the gospel to lower socioeconomic communities. Three reasons coalesced.

First, Nouwen could offer praxis-related value to my church planting work in east Hamilton as someone who, although a well-established, middle-class Harvard professor, chose to address the brokenness he experienced in himself by leaving his tenured position to serve people with disabilities at Daybreak.[41] He picked up pen and paper to share this downwardly mobile journey. His writings, as "living documents" of his life, could serve as a source of inspiration for church planters and Christian ministry in the inner city.[42]

Second, and in that same vein, Nouwen's existential struggles—especially as a wounded healer—could generate self-reflection for those wondering what it means to follow Christ, share the good news of the gospel, and care for the poor and marginalized

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[40] These questions were asked during informal discussions prior to writing this thesis and then echoed by some of the participants whom I interviewed. To be sure, Nouwen continued to exercise these more public gifts through writing and countless speaking engagements. Over two million copies of his books have been sold and translated into twenty-two different languages.

[41]It should be noted that of the many authors writing on church planting, only Tom Bennardo (*The Honest Guide to Church Planting*, 35) has a single reference to Nouwen, quoting from *The Wounded Healer*, 87.

[42] Karickal, "From Professional Functioning," 214.

in the urban core.[43] In that light, it should be noted that Nouwen was not influenced by a colonial ideology that might see the practice of downward mobility as a means to pull people up into an upwardly mobile lifestyle: that is, to have them rise above their class.[44] Rather, Nouwen invites the church to walk and suffer with people without power and with disabilities, realizing that they may never "rise above" their standard of living.[45] For Nouwen, a more downwardly mobile approach to life can serve as a means to build community with those who suffer and are disadvantaged. That is not to say that Nouwen was content to leave people in their poverty, powerlessness, and brokenness. Rather, his philosophy of mission is best captured in this approach: to serve the poor is not to give food to them, per se (although that may be needed), but to walk with them in their deprivation so that both parties leave satisfied because they shared together what each possessed.[46] Nouwen desires to allow Christ to do his work of redemption by sharing space with the disadvantaged.

Third, Nouwen confronts the religion of upward mobility, which few other missional authors seem prepared to do.[47] He does so by presenting downward mobility as the paradox of the gospel. He echoes the Puritan Prayer, *The Valley of Vision*, which grapples with this dichotomy of the gospel: "Let me learn by paradox that the way down

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[43] In 1988, Nouwen had an emotional collapse due to the deterioration of a close friendship; this sparked a deep personal crisis, which led to depression. Although he healed from this dark night of the soul and the deep anguish if brought, this experience shaped his life and ministry profoundly and warranted Nouwen the title of the wounded healer. See Ford, *Wounded Prophet*,169. Although Nouwen entitled one of his books *The Wounded Healer* (1972), in which he encourages ministers to see their wounds as a source of healing for others, it would be many years later that he experienced these wounds himself.

[44] See Nouwen, *A Cry for Mercy*, 35–45.

[45] Of course, this is not a universal reality as some can and even should be encouraged to rise above their standard of living. Some of the interviewees address this fact. However, Nouwen is arguing that we cannot assume this 'rise above' can happen and should not make that our modus operandi for serving those living in lower SE communities.

[46] Nouwen, *A Cry for Mercy*, 39.

[47] This will be further developed in the literature review.

is the way up, that to be low is to be high . . . that to have nothing is to possess all . . . to give is to receive."[48] Although Nouwen does not quote this prayer, he seeks to embody its message and apply the paradox to Christian living. For example, he calls himself the wounded healer and the serious clown, he addresses the idea of finding a home through displacement, practices a ministry of presence through solitude, finds wealth through simplicity, and identifies power in powerlessness. For Nouwen, the paradox of the Christian life finds its source in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Scriptures enjoin believers that "anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all (Mark 9:35)," "those who exalt themselves will be humbled" (Matt 23:12) and "whoever loses his life will save it" (Mark 8:35). Nouwen sees this portrayed in the incarnation and self-emptying nature of Christ who, although he possessed heaven, emptied himself of his "wealth" and became like one of us; even worse, Christ became a slave in order to rescue poor sinners (Phil 2:6–7).[49] In sum, Nouwen's use of paradox in connection to downward mobility allows him to confront the pathologies around upward mobility: that is, the emptiness of the shameless pursuit of material things and the fullness found in embracing the way of the selfless Christ.[50] I suggest that Nouwen's downward mobility, in imitation of Christ, helps inoculate believers against the temptations that can surround upwardly mobile pursuits, especially surrounding the emergent themes of home, time, wealth, and power, which will be discussed throughout the body of this project.

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[48] Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*, *xxiv*.
[49] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 10.
[50] See Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 108, 115.

Having come to an assurance of Nouwen's contributions to my study, especially as they relate to home, time, wealth, and power, I decided to formally conduct a qualitative research project putting Nouwen, downward mobility, and church planters in conversation. However, Nouwen's personal relationship to downward mobility is complicated. Nouwen never claimed to be the perfect exemplar for following Christ on a downwardly mobile path but recognized within himself a tenacious pull towards upward mobility.[51] Nouwen's strengths lay in writing, speaking, and communication on this theme rather than fully embracing the downwardly mobile lifestyle. *In the Name of Jesus,* Nouwen's reflection on Christian leadership published in 1989, points to the temptations of Jesus as being rooted in the desire to be relevant, popular, and powerful.[52] Perhaps his decision to summarize them in this fashion reflect on his own temptation for relevancy, popularity, and even power, something that his writing brought him. While serving at Daybreak, Nouwen reflected upon the three temptations, possibly recognizing that his effectiveness as a widely invited speaker or communicator had a limiting effect on his ability to pursue a pure downwardly mobile life.[53]

Phenomenology was the strongest angle from which to approach the qualitative research methodology of my project for two reasons. First, because of Nouwen's vulnerability and openness in sharing his lived experience and existential burdens with the reader; and second, because Nouwen marries the objective realities of his ministry with the subjective ones. For example, Nouwen's objective departure from Harvard Divinity School to serve at Daybreak was precipitated by a subjective, existential longing

[51] See Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 7, 17.
[52] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 19–25.
[53] De Vinck, *Nouwen Then*, 23.

to address the void in his soul.[54] He writes that while at Harvard his prayer life became encumbered and weak, he felt isolated from those around him, and his mood became depressed, sulky, and bitter.[55] Nouwen's ministerial insights came through self-understanding, which he achieved through a self-applied phenomenological quest. Nouwen also reasoned that what he understood about himself could be applied to others, since he believed the adage that "what is most personal is also the most universal."[56] Further, Nouwen understood that phenomenology searches for the meaning of an experience rather than its explanation. As the phenomenologist Max Van Manen points out, one's personal experience with a certain phenomenon is the "ego-logical starting point for phenomenological research."[57] As a self-identified wounded healer, Nouwen was able to ground his experience within the Christian faith and employ that for the instruction of others.[58] This is not to say Nouwen is a perfect phenomenological study on the theme of downward mobility and the urban church, but through his personal struggles, he becomes God's instrument in ways that I believe are generative for the Reformed and evangelical church today.

In sum, engaging Nouwen as a conversation partner within my qualitative research doctorate is meant to enlighten my ministry of church planting and serving as a pastor in a lower socio-economic neighbourhood in lower north-east Hamilton. As a biblically Reformed minister, this study is meant to assist me and those of my congregation who are in a position to pursue downward mobility to become more

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[54] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 3.
[55] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 3.
[56] From Carl Rogers' dictum (*On Becoming a Person*, 26) reads as follows: "What is most personal is most general." See Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 14; Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 10.
[57] Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 54.
[58] See Dreyer, "Beyond Psychology," 719.

effective in reaching the McQuesten community with the gospel and in living as Christ-like exemplars of this gospel. These goals are confronted by the challenge of Mercy Christian Church's membership, as the majority of our members are highly mobile and middle-class, which forms a monoculture congregation starkly distinct from the multiethnic, financially impoverished religiously variegated and post-Christian McQuesten community we seek to reach.

Research Question

To summarize, my doctoral project is a phenomenological study on downward mobility and church planting in lower socio-economic areas of urban Canada that engages the life and writings of Henri Nouwen. The research question this dissertation will address is as follows: *Is Nouwen's experience and vision of downward mobility generative for those engaged in church planting in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods in urban Canada?* Although my qualitative research interviews generated a number of new themes, as will be seen in the body of this research project, the four above-noted themes (home, time, wealth, and power) will provide the initial framework for my interviews. Finally, although this thesis project is directed towards an audience of pastors, elders, and other ministry-staff with leadership capacity, it is also meant to transcend any age or leadership demographic and serve the wider Christian community seeking to be part of Christ's church planting work in urban centres.[59]

[59] Karickal ("From Professional Functioning to Personal Confession," 2) notes that at the beginning Nouwen wrote primarily for the clerics and ministers, but his later works were more general and aimed at every Christian. On account of the Second Vatican Council, which taught that every Christian has a share in the mission of the church, Nouwen began to stress the 'commonness' rather than the 'otherness' of the priests with the people. See also Pope Paul VI, *PRESBYTERORUM ORDINIS*, 2.2. Nouwen was present during the opening ceremony of the Council.

A few clarifying comments are still necessary. The first surrounds the four themes that make up the body of my research (home, time, wealth, and power). As noted, these are rather atypical discussion points for gospel ministry, whether in urban centres or otherwise. I chose the themes for two reasons. First, they aptly align with a practice-led research paper focused on church planting in marginalized urban centres. The application of each of these themes, as will be shown, has more impact on the progress of the gospel and the planting of an urban church than we may first realize. This is because the themes have an a priori existential reality embedded in each of them that can either obstruct the message of the gospel and the saving work of Jesus Christ or, if properly valued and embraced, enhance the beauty and importance of the gospel to those on the margins. Whether we realize it or not, how we understand our home, time, wealth, and power is either a barrier or a blessing to gospel-centred ministry in lower SES communities. Secondly, they are embedded in Nouwen's literary corpus. Nouwen viewed home, time, wealth, and power as inseparably linked to the downwardly mobile path of loving, serving, and reaching the marginalized with the hope of Jesus Christ. Nouwen found a home at Daybreak, which he did not experience at Havard; he struggled to reckon with the control that time had over him and explored the concepts of "wasting time" and "timelessness" as the paradoxical antidote to his time problem;[60] he witnessed the damaging impact of consumerism lived out by those hungering for an upwardly mobile life; [61] and finally, he wrote about the impact that power, if not properly checked by the powerlessness of Christ, has on walking with the powerless.[62]

[60] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 11.
[61] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 108, 115.
[62] Nouwen, *Path of Power*, 18.

The second point of clarity surrounds the type and method of this study. This project is grounded in the broad field of practical theology. Simply put, practical theology is a comprehensive way of doing theological reflection within the context of lived theological and ecclesiological experiences. In their book, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research,* John Swinton and Harriet Mowat connect practical theology to qualitative research by arguing that engaging in practical theology provides one with a theological interpretation through a particular methodological lens (e.g., phenomenological lens).[63] They conclude that this kind of study is also meant to provide critical theological reflection on the practices of the church.[64] That is, as the church interacts with the practices of the world to develop faithful participation in God's redemptive practices, it engages in practical theology.

If practical theology is the broad field of study, providing a critical theological reflection of both the life of the individual (the living human document) and the body of believers (the church), practice-led research (PLR) is the vehicle that drives this study forward. In "Inquiring Through Practice," Carol Gary argues that PLR is rooted in one practice where one can expect questions, problems, and challenges to be formed in connection to the needs of the practitioners (e.g. church planters).[65] Therefore, she argues, whatever research methodology is employed should be familiar to the practitioner, as it should serve to seek to enhance the practice(s) of whatever is being studied.

The final point of clarity surrounds the qualitative research methodology. Researching church planting as a practice of ministry within the context of a PLR

[63] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 36.
[64] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 6.
[65] See Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 44.

allowed me to choose phenomenology as a qualitative research methodology. The challenge of a phenomenological study, however, is to find the purity of the essence, or the *epoche,* of the experience of the participant(s).[66] The phenomenological pursuit as it relates to the phenomena of church planting in a lower socioeconomic community became a challenge for two reasons. First, my research question does not easily lend itself to exposing the single essence or *epoche* of church planting in lower-SES areas. Rather, the experiences of people living in this income bracket are variegated and possibly too numerous to count. How can the singular *epoche* or experience surrounding downward mobility, evangelizing the lost, moving into a lower socio-economic community, striving to live a simple life, empowering the powerless or practicing a ministry of presence, and so forth, be identified? In sum, providing a singular *epoche* for such a wide breadth of engagements with the community defies a simple phenomenological pursuit. Second, in testing whether Nouwen's model for downward mobility is generative for the church today, the data transcends the world of "pure" phenomenology to include such things as opinions, descriptors, and ideas, which are typically outside the umbrella of a phenomenological research paper. Indeed, phenomenological interview questions are meant to be limited to experiences and therefore should not include opinions, perceptions, or personal perspectives on the topic.[67] However, I did not exclude these insights or descriptors from my data analysis. Rather, the emerging themes became additional points of interest in how church planters were engaging with the themes of downward and upward mobility. These points will be analyzed in Chapter Four.

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[66] See Cox, *Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion*, 20.
[67] Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 4.

Understanding the iterative nature of a phenomenological study while accommodating opinions and descriptors from my interviewees led me to adopt two methods of data interpretation that will work together reciprocally in this research project. The first is an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the second is Thematic Analysis (TA). Although IPA has received some criticism for not clearly embracing the need to find *essence* and conflating two qualitative research methodologies with case studies, it is still widely seen as an effective phenomenological tool for analyzing and interpreting data, and for that reason is employed in this project.[68] On the other hand, TA is an umbrella approach that covers fields such as phenomenology as well as narrative study, grounded research, case study, and others. The benefits of TA will be outlined in the research project; it will complement the IPA method of interpretation and allow for a reflective process to occur that is generative in analyzing and processing the data from the twenty interviews of this project.

The Way Forward

In the following chapters, a brief review of articles by social theorists on the definition of upward and downward mobility, along with a practical application of these concepts, will be provided. This will lead into a detailed exploration of the use of phenomenology as my qualitative research methodology and the use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and Thematic Analysis as my methods of interpretation. In Chapter Four, the data procured through the interviews will be analyzed using both methods of interpretation. These will generate important observations and demonstrate the need for theological

[68] Van Manen, "Rebuttal Rejoinder: Present IPA," 12.

reflection, which will be completed in the following chapter. In Chapter Five, I will seek to demonstrate that the themes of home, time, wealth, and power (as well as new themes derived from the interviews and Nouwen as an exemplary figure) serve to expand one's understanding of what it means to minister more effectively in lower socioeconomic communities of urban Canada. To close off Chapter Five, a corresponding spiritual discipline will be identified for each of the four major themes; these will serve as possible antidotes to the upwardly mobile pull that may captivate the hearts of leaders and members alike.[69] In my Conclusion, I will explore practical ways to reach marginalized groups in the urban core and discuss our *raison d'être* for ministering to them. The Conclusion will also expose the need for more research on the marginalized themselves, as their voices are silent in this paper.

[69] The question of whether Nouwen lived up to his own vision of downward mobility will be briefly discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

For Henri Nouwen, one of the gospel's paradoxes is that genuine freedom and purpose in life come from following the downward way of Christ, which Nouwen calls downward mobility.[1] Positively, this downward way is defined as conforming one's life to the pattern of the self-emptying Christ, who calls his church to selfless, simple, and humble lives for the sake of others. Negatively, the downward way is to resist the upward pull for wealth, relevance, and power.[2] Nouwen argues that the voices calling us to upward mobility are completely absent from the gospel and are self-evidently inimical to downward mobility. Two points are germane to the following discussion. First, by adopting terms from social theory, Nouwen introduces a spiritual ethic to terms that do not typically entail morality. Second, although theological meaning can be attached to the terms, their actual use is absent in Scripture and rare in missional literature, and in particular the authors reviewed in this chapter: Basil the Great, John Calvin, Michael Goheen, Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, Tim Keller, and David Fitch.[3]

[1] Nouwen, *The Selfless Way of Christ*, 30.

[2] Durback, *Seeds of Hope*, 6.

[3] Here are some of the following missional authors that neither engage directly with Nouwen or his use of the terms upward or downward mobility, although those themes may be cloaked in other terms: Guder, *Missional Church;* Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age*; Hyde and Lems, *Planting, Watering, Growing*; Pathak and Runyon, *The Art of Neighboring*. Wells' *Incarnational Mission* has no reference to Nouwen, who has written extensively on what it means to practice a ministry of presence. However, Tom Bennardo (*The Honest Guide to Church Planting*, 35) has a single reference to Nouwen's *The Wounded Healer*.

In this chapter, I will begin by briefly reviewing secular social theorists and their understanding of upward and downward mobility. Then, I will exegete Nouwen's life and writings through a phenomenological lens in order to ascertain how he applied his downwardly mobile orientation to the four sub-themes of home, time, wealth, and power. Finally, I will examine missional voices that have engaged some of Nouwen's insights concerning downward mobility without adopting this terminology.

Social Theory: Downward and Upward Mobility

Most secular theorists frame upward and downward mobility in the context of *social* mobility; this upward and downward social mobility is situated in the context of economic and sociological categories. For example, Walter Müller and Reinhard Pollak, in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, summarize the categories as "the movement in time of individuals, families and other social units between positions of varying advantage within the . . . social stratification of a society."[4] They see the change in these respective units as determinative for defining upward or downward social mobility. Gregory Clark agrees, arguing that upward and downward social mobility can also measure intergenerational movement and its correlation to the income, wealth, and occupational status of parents and children.[5] In short, social mobility is the lived realities of individuals or families experienced within a social stratification.

Academic research on social mobility and its projection on lower, middle, and upper-class mobility began to emerge in the United States in the 1950s. [6] A decade or two

[4] Müller and Pollac, "Mobility, Social," 640–46.
[5] Clark, "The Son Also Rises," 21.
[6] Hout, "A Summary of What We Know," 28.

later, national mobility studies emerged (1967, 1978) which are said to have provided a deeper understanding of the mobility phenomenon.[7] Two things can be noted about this research in connection with Nouwen. First, at the time (circa 1970) when Nouwen co-opted the terms upward and downward mobility, the focus of the sociological research was primarily on economic growth and productivity. In his article, "A Summary of What We Know About Social Mobility," the sociologist Michael Hout argues that since the 1960s "moving up" depended more on economic growth than opportunities or fairness.[8] This push to succeed economically was encapsulated in the adage "the pursuit of the American Dream."[9]

One such story captures this upward pursuit. John Welch Jr., who served as the CEO of General Electric (GE) from 1981–2001, gave a speech in 1990 entitled "Restoring Upward Mobility."[10] He celebrated the ingenuity of the GE plant in Cincinnati for its mentorship and training program for students from a local high school. The purpose of the program was to restore upwardly mobile goals for these students.[11] This school, which in 1985 sent only three students to college from a total of 305 graduates, sent seventy-three in 1990 with the same number of graduates. Embracing this success meant challenging other companies to adopt this model of mentoring students. Welch noted that what works for the youth is a combination of a little money and a lot of commitment in order to provide social and upward economic ability.[12]

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[7] Hout, "A Summary of What We Know," 34.
[8] Hout, "A Summary of What We Know," 28.
[9] Corak, "Income Inequality, Equity of Opportunity," 99.
[10] Welch, "Restoring Upward Mobility," 38.
[11] Welch, "Restoring Upward Mobility," 39.
[12] Welch, "Restoring Upward Mobility," 40.

Second, at the time Nouwen was writing on downward mobility, contemporary voices in the world of sociology began to be more circumspect about who could aspire to social upward mobility. One such voice was the sociologist Michael Hout, who argued that the question "Who is moving up in America?" was, in fact, wrong.[13] It made more sense to ask to what extent the conditions and circumstances of early life constrained success in adulthood.[14] By focusing on conditions and circumstances of early life, Hout draws attention to a person's social origin. This accomplishes three things. First, it highlights the parent(s) of the subject's social origin. Second, it characterizes and understands the conditions and circumstances of early life (birth, weight, parental earnings, family size, neighbourhood poverty, etc.) in connection to mobility. Third, it avoids confusion about whether mobility is progress.[15] Focusing on origins eliminates the fixation on differences and side issues related to upward and downward mobility.[16] Hout postulates that popular references like "rags-to-riches" or the "pursuit of the American dream" imply upward mobility even when one's mobility may not be quantifiable.[17] Hout's push to consider social origins to enlighten sociologists' understanding of social mobility (whether upward or downward) did not seem to factor into Nouwen's application of these words and their meaning.

Notwithstanding the perceived lacuna in Nouwen's understanding of social mobility, what is of interest for this research project is whether there is an ethical dimension to upward and downward movement. Is it inherently good to move up the

[13] Hout, "A Summary of What We Know," 28; Corak, "Income Inequality," 99.
[14] Hout, "A Summary of What We Know," 28
[15] Hout, "A Summary of What We Know," 29. NB all three points are found on page 29.
[16] Hout, "A Summary of What We Know," 35.
[17] Hout, "A Summary of What We Know," 29.

sociological ladder, or vice-versa? Although the question is contested, arguably most social theorists recognize the social good one might experience by becoming upwardly mobile.[18] For example, the upward socially mobile path enables people to live freer, more socially-connected lives. The argument is simple: If upward mobility increases factors that lead to human flourishing, then downward mobility does the opposite. Therefore, upward mobility is to be preferred. Although dissenting voices have argued that downward mobility could increase compassion and collective identity, the predominant position among most sociologists is that choosing a path of downward mobility is not the expected, preferred, or even valued movement in society.[19]

The language of social mobility is embedded within a broad field that lies beyond the scope of this paper. However, as stated, Nouwen self-consciously co-opted these terms from secular social theorists and subsequently imported new meanings and value judgments into them. For Nouwen, the downwardly mobile way is what Christ bids Christians to follow on account of his humble birth, life, and death. Nouwen states that "downward mobility is the divine way, the way of the cross, the way of Christ,"[20] since it is how God's Kingdom moves: from God to humans, manifested in Jesus.[21] Conversely, Nouwen argues that upward mobility is often—although not always—connected to our natural sinful penchant for more of everything (wealth, power, and status) and therefore can captivate our hearts as an idol.[22] For Nouwen, this is compounded by the current highly-competitive society in the Western world, which validates the upward pull as

[18] Matthys, "Cultural Capital, Identity and Social Mobility," 87.
[19] Worsthorne, "A Universe of Hospital Patients," 38; Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 5.
[20] Nouwen, *The Selfless Christ*, 39.
[21] Beumer, *A Restless Seeking*, 125.
[22] Nouwen, *The Selfless Christ*, 26.

admirable at the cost of a Christ-like concern for the weak and marginalized.[23] Thus, Nouwen argues that upward or downward mobility either enhances or diminishes Christ's vision to create a compassionate community of followers. To understand how Nouwen applied these sociological terms in spiritual categories, we must understand the context in which Nouwen engaged them and how he rooted these themes within the gospel narrative.[24]

Nouwen's Existential Engagement with Downward Mobility

In early 1982, a number of years before Nouwen left to serve at Daybreak,[25] he and two other priests, Donald McNeill and Douglas Morrison (who held professorships at Notre Dame and The Catholic University, respectively), met several times to discuss their callings in light of Christ's life and ministry.[26] Their time together was the catalyst for the book *Compassion: A Reflection on a Christian Life.*[27] What bound these men together was more than their shared priestly vocations: it was their existential experience of disquieted and spiritually dry lives in academia. Notably, all three attributed their spiritual dryness to their upwardly mobile and competitive spirit, stating: "our primary

[23] Nouwen et al., *Compassion,* 5.

[24] Karickal (*From Professional Functioning to Personal Confession*, 5) writes that Nouwen is a sharp observer in his pastoral psychological insights. Furthermore Nouwen is guided by mentors and the *Holy Bible*, and does not quote contemporary authors. He is a spiritual writer with a pastor's heart.

[25] L'Arche is a world-wide network of over one hundred communities in over thirty countries that takes care of people with intellectual disabilities. It was founded in 1964 by Pere Thomas Philippe and Jean Vanier in a village called Trosly-Breuil, ninety-seven kilometers north of Paris, France. Their Charter states: "Whatever their gifts or limitations, all people are bound together in a common humanity." In a divided world L'Arche wants to be a sign of hope. At L'Arche ,the handicapped are named "core members" because they do not merely receive help, but are contributors. Those who care for them are called "assistants" who live with them after the model of Jesus, God with us. Notably, Nouwen conveyed in his lectures and writings that these core members have gifts of love and wisdom to offer. See Karickal, "From Professional Functioning to Personal Confession," 18. The L'Arche chapter in Toronto was the same DayBreak that Nouwen dedicated his later life to.

[26] Nouwen et al. *Compassion,* xiii–xvi.

[27] Nouwen et al. *Compassion,* 1–137.

frame of reference remains competition . . . in which we are deeply immersed."[28] They illustrated this point by addressing a question concerning their personal identity. When they asked themselves "Who am I?" they concluded that when put to the powers of this world (like school officials or professors, church representatives, and so forth), the answer was simply: "I am the difference I make."[29] Putting words to this shared internal struggle allowed them to reflect on the meaning of a downwardly mobile Saviour and to question their penchant for upward mobility.

For Nouwen, McNeill, and Morrison, the definition of compassion carries a richly relational meaning: "to suffer with someone."[30] Throughout Christ's ministry we learn that Jesus was filled with compassion and thus helped others, even sharing in their pain.[31] Therefore, when we show compassion we are walking in solidarity with a God who is willing to enter into our problems, burdens, questions, and struggles (cf. Phil 2:5–8). This leads to another question: Should we avoid showing compassion because we wish to avoid suffering? Or, does the downward path of Jesus Christ disturb us because we cannot envision ourselves apart from an upwardly mobile trajectory, where suffering is minimal?[32]

Nouwen, McNeill, and Morrison seek to answer this question by drawing out the pathologies of competition as fuel for an upwardly mobile life. The authors argue that as we seek to forge our own identities, we can easily identify ourselves by the trophies and distinctions we have won. However, being defined by our abilities, degrees, and diplomas

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[28] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 7, 17.
[29] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 17.
[30] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 3.
[31] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*,16.
[32] Nouwen et at., *Compassion*, 25.

can separate us from the people we are called by Jesus to love and serve.[33] Contrarily, the gospel introduces compassion without the tinge of competition. The paradox of God's compassion is that God can be compassionate because he is wholly other than we are. In short, "God can be fully compassionate because there can be no comparison between us, and thus God is in no way in competition with us."[34] God pursued the downward way not to compete with us but to suffer with us in our weaknesses, and ultimately to redeem us.

Nouwen, having co-authored *Compassion*: *A Reflection on the Christian Life*, took the opportunity to reflect more deeply on his struggle to follow the downward path of Christ. Nouwen shared a phenomenological reality in this struggle. He was refreshingly honest about the relentless existential pull to the upwardly mobile lifestyle, or what he calls the religion of upward mobility.[35] He summarized this pull simply by saying that "everything in me wants to move upward."[36] "Middle-class comfort, status, and the applause of others beguiled my soul," he writes and this made him desperately unhappy.[37] In the book *In The Name of Jesus*, written in 1983 while Nouwen was still at Harvard Divinity School, he penned these words:

> As I entered into my fifties and was able to realize the unlikelihood of doubling my years, I came face to face with the simple question: "Did becoming older bring me closer to Christ?" After twenty-five years of priesthood, I found myself praying poorly, somewhat isolated from other people, and very much preoccupied with burning issues I woke up one day with the realization that I was living in a very dark place and that the term 'burnout' was a convenient psychological translation for a spiritual death.[38]

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[33] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 18.
[34] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 18.
[35] Nouwen, *The Selfless Christ*, 8–9.
[36] Nouwen, *Road to DayBreak*, 154.
[37] Nouwen, *Road to DayBreak*, 154.
[38] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 10.

This was echoed in his journal, *Daybreak,* which was published in 1989. Reflecting upon his time at Harvard, Nouwen wrote: "Gradually I discovered that Harvard was not the place where I was called to follow Jesus in a more radical way; I was not really happy there, found myself somewhat sulky and complaining, and never felt fully accepted by the faculty or students."[39] For Nouwen, the antidote to the empty feelings experienced at Harvard and his struggle with upward mobility's pull was a move to radically follow Jesus. He was convinced that Jesus was calling him "to let go and seek deeper faithfulness." In other words, he was to let go of a life sustained by competition, self-aggrandizement, career orientation, and a spirit of ambition.[40]

This conviction commenced Nouwen's journey from Harvard to Daybreak, which actually commenced in Peru. Nouwen felt called to minister to the poor in Lima, as this path seemed to best echo Christ's ministry (cf. Luke 4:18–19). However, Nouwen soon realized he could not work effectively in Lima. In the first place, he dealt with what he called existential loneliness, and he longed for deep companionship which was unattainable for him there.[41] Second, his friends told him he was more useful in the North than in the South, since his "ability to speak and write was more useful among university students than among the poor."[42] These converging and conflicting realities ultimately led Nouwen back to Harvard and then to further introspection.[43]

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[39] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 3.
[40] Nouwen, *The Selfless Christ*, 9; see also Durback, *Seeds of Hope*, 6.
[41] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 10–11.
[42] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 10.
[43] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 11.

Back at Harvard, Nouwen felt that his desperation, loneliness, and need for affection were in fact God's way of prompting him to follow the downward path of Jesus. Nouwen articulated these feelings, saying:

> After only a few weeks away from the competitive, career-oriented life at Harvard Divinity School I wanted to cry out loudly to my colleagues and students: 'Do not serve Harvard, but God and his beloved Jesus Christ, and speak words of hope to those who suffer from loneliness, depression and spiritual poverty.' Yet I myself have come to the painful discovery that when I am chained by ambition it is hard for me to see those chained by poverty.[44]

He went on to say:

> The outer voice kept saying, "You can do so much good here [at Harvard]. People need you!" The inner voice kept saying, "What good is it to preach the Gospel to others while losing your own soul?" Finally, I realized that my increasing inner darkness, my feelings of being rejected by some of my students, colleagues, friends, and even God, my inordinate need for affirmation and affection, and my deep sense of not belonging were *clear signs* that I was not following the way of God's Spirit.[45]

At the same time, his inner proclivity for upward mobility intensified his struggle. Elsewhere Nouwen wrote: "So much in me seeks to influence, power, success, and popularity. But when I enter into true, deep communion with Jesus . . . that is the small way that leads to real peace and joy."[46] In short, Nouwen's desire to follow the selfless Christ obediently was intrinsically spiritual; yet, at the same time it was mixed with emotional desires, loneliness, and ennui.

These feelings were compounded by the voices of Nouwen's parents. Karickal argues that Nouwen was profoundly shaped by his parents, but in conflicting ways.[47] As

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[44] Durback, *Seeds of Hope*, 29.
[45] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 28.
[46] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 122.
[47] Karickal ("From Professional Functioning," 11) makes this point in his dissertation, though he draws from other authors. See also La Noue, *The Spiritual Legacy of Henri Nouwen*, 14; Glaser, *Henri's Mantel*, 65–66.

the eldest son of four children, when Nouwen listened to his father's voice he heard the call to fearless independence: "Show me that you can make it in this world; be an independent person and compete with others."[48] In contrast, his mother would gently remind him that no matter what he did with his life, he was not to lose contact with Jesus.[49] Karickal argues that the father-son relationship began to lead Nouwen on an upwardly mobile trajectory and a professional career as a psychologist. However, his mother's voice continued to resonate in his mind and heart and eventually won his allegiance, causing Nouwen to reconsider the downward path that led him from Harvard to Daybreak.[50]

Arguably, Nouwen's journey could also be considered a case study in phenomenology. Gillespie rightly draws the phenomenological connection between Nouwen's physical move to Daybreak and the existential reality behind it. He argues that Nouwen wanted others to join his experience of the adventure of his life learning from it, loving through it, and even laughing about it together with others.[51] Indeed, Nouwen's ability to be self-reflective and communicate his reflections was born out of a deep understanding of himself. However, he saw the value in sharing this self-reflection due to his belief that "what is most personal is most universal."[52] It seemed this was a guiding light for Nouwen as he shared his experiences.

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[48] Karickal, *"*From Professional Functioning," 11.

[49] Karickal, "From Professional Functioning," 19. Nouwen's mother once said to him: "Henri, whatever you are going to do, even if you don't do anything very interesting in the eyes of the world, be sure you stay close to the heart of Jesus; be sure you stay close to the love of God." Ford (*The Wounded Prophet*, 113) also writes that "too much academic competition, too little intimacy, and the lack of community, possibly the discrepancy between what Nouwen really was and the enormous praise he got from the students, made him uneasy to teach there."

[50] La Noue, *The Spiritual Legacy of Henri Nouwen*, 14.

[51] Gillespie, "Similarities and Differences," 49.

[52] Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, 26.

Not surprisingly, Nouwen also engaged the writings of phenomenologists and admitted that few philosophers had as much influence in his thinking as Martin Heidegger.[53] In particular, Nouwen was inspired by the foundational pillars of Heidegger's thought, which articulated the dialectic between *Sein* (being) and *Dasein* (being there). Although a thorough explanation of these two concepts within their primary *Sitz im Leben* is beyond the scope of this study, for Nouwen, Heidegger's *Sein und Dasein* provided a means to understand lived experience through a spiritual lens.[54] Nouwen saw *Sein* as "being" or even "what I am," apart from one's spiritual connection to Christ. Nouwen argued that one's *Sein* could be analyzed by means of secular psychological competency. However, this is not the same with *Dasien*, which, for Nouwen, was both "being what I ought to be" and "a new way of being in the world without being of it."[55] The spiritual dimension of *Dasein* as "being in the world but not of it" provided Nouwen with the tools to be self-reflective and gave him the space to share those reflections universally.[56]

To that end, it seems Nouwen suggests that there is a *Dasien* connection to downward mobility and a *Sein* connection to upward mobility. In a four-page article entitled "The Selfless Way of Christ: Downward Mobility as Christian Vocation," Nouwen states that the "story of our salvation stands radically over and against the philosophy of upward mobility [since] . . . following Jesus on the downward road means

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[53] Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak*, 53. Nouwen does admit that he never studied Heidegger directly. However, he defends that many of the philosophers, psychologists, and theologians who formed his thinking were deeply influenced by Heidegger. He mentions Walgrave, Binswanger, and Rahner. See Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak*, 51–53.

[54] Gillispie ("Similarities and Differences," 105–21) argues that empiricists often dismiss any spirituality in Heidegger's terms. This is contested.

[55] Gillespie, "Similarities and Differences," 118.

[56] Gillespie, "Similarities and Differences," 117.

entering into a new life, the life of the Spirit of Jesus himself."[57] This is the radical claim that the gospel puts on believers, which for Nouwen "is being what I ought to be." Conversely, a pursuit for upward mobility is joining what society values more than anything, since society views upward mobility as intrinsically good and the failure to achieve upward mobility as a failure of life.[58] For Nouwen, this would suggest that the unspiritual *Sein* is operating without the *Dasein.*

Having come to a clearer understanding of Christ's downwardly mobile life, Nouwen penned *The Selfless Way of Christ: Downward Mobility and the Spiritual Life.* In this short book, Nouwen continued to grapple with one's true identity in Christ. Ultimately, he draws three conclusions. First, God's unconditional acceptance of believers as his beloved children should set them free from the pathologies around upward mobility, especially the compulsion to be seen, praised, and admired.[59] Second, the way of downward mobility becomes the Christian's way "because one is transformed into living Christ by his Spirit."[60] Third, the upwardly mobile life as an end in itself should be resisted, since believers share in the ministry of Jesus, who himself faithfully resisted any proclivity for an upwardly mobile life on the believers' behalf.[61]

Nouwen developed these conclusions by applying them to Jesus' wilderness temptations. The devil's temptations were existential threats to the downward call of the gospel, first for Christ and then for his followers. In resisting the first temptation by not turning the stones into bread, Jesus resisted the universal pull to be relevant and the lie

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[57] Nouwen, "The Selfless Way of the Christ," 12–13.
[58] Nouwen, "The Selfless Way of the Christ," 14.
[59] Nouwen, *The Selfless Christ*, 58.
[60] Nouwen spells this out further (*The Selfless Christ*, 28) by writing: "The spiritual life is the life of the Spirit of Christ in us, a life that sets us free to be strong while weak, to be rich while poor, to be on the downward way of salvation while living in the midst of an upwardly mobile society."
[61] Nouwen, *The Selfless Christ*, 70.

that one is what one produces."[62] Second, in the temptation to jump from the temple and be rescued by angels, Jesus resisted a push for the spectacular; this incorporates the idea that people are determined by their statistics or by the applause of others.[63] Third, in the temptation to bow his knee to the devil and worship him, Jesus resisted the push for power and influence.[64] Each of these temptations, in Nouwen's eyes, are really manifestations of the upwardly mobile pull, which ultimately are distractions from the heart of God for the plight of the weak and marginalized. Christ's passion was to proclaim "good news to the poor . . . freedom for prisoners and recovery sight for the blind, [and] to set the oppressed free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4:18–19). Evidently, Nouwen views Christ's mission in this world as the antidote to the upwardly mobile religion.

It is important to note that as Nouwen developed his understanding of what it meant to follow the downward way of Christ, he did not denigrate ambition or success. Rather, he argued that what made the United States (the land he called home for some twenty years) great was the enormous efforts, ambitions, and hopes of many men and women, which constituted America's best heritage.[65] However, Nouwen argued that good ambition and progress are something different than an uncontrolled drive for upward mobility, where making it to the top is the only goal and in which ambition becomes self-serving.[66]

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[62] Nouwen, *The Selfless Christ*, 49–50.
[63] Nouwen, *The Selfless Christ*, 54.
[64] Nouwen, *The Selfless Christ*, 60–61.
[65] Nouwen, *Downward Mobility* (Unpublished Manuscript), 13.
[66] Karickal, "From Professional Functioning to Personal Confession," 22.

Social Mobility and Church Planting

Having addressed the complexity around Nouwen's personal existential understanding of downward and upward mobility, I will widen the lens to apply them to four different contexts that relate to church planting: home, time, wealth, and power. As mentioned in the introduction, these themes provide a helpful and important interface between theology and practice. To enhance my practice of ministry, I want to engage with themes that might affect ministry either in a positive or negative way in lower socio-economic communities of urban Canada. Second, and equally important, these themes were generative to Nouwen's theology surrounding downward mobility. Had Nouwen not engaged with these themes throughout his corpus, I may never have thought of them as important to my practice of ministry. In the end, each of these themes and more could have been chosen to help us to put into practice what it means to follow a downwardly mobile Saviour, while at the same time exposing some of the barriers that may be keeping us from effective ministry amongst the marginalized in urban centres.

Home

Nouwen's theology of home in the context of following a downwardly mobile Saviour is helpful for the urban church. Nouwen understood that when the church follows the downward way of Christ, it is able to hear the voices of the weak, the poor, and the broken, and also to attend to these voices in a concrete community. Nouwen believed that where one finds a community, one invariably finds a home.[67] At Daybreak, he found a community that cared about him, and thus the home he had been looking for. He wrote: "Daybreak was not just a home with good people, but a home . . . in the body of my

[67] Nouwen, *Adam*,127.

community, in the body of the church, yes, in the body of God."[68] For Nouwen, home was a place to assuage the pain of loneliness and insecurity.

In this context, Nouwen argued that the home must be available to others through hospitality. In "Hospitality Frees Guests," Nouwen states: "If the first character of the spiritual life is the continuing movement from loneliness to solitude, its second characteristic is the movement by which hostility can be converted into hospitality."[69] Nouwen articulates the definition of hospitality: "It is the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend."[70] Equally, it is a place for healing, relationships, and the formation of a recreating community."[71] Nuancing that reality, Nouwen further argues that hospitality in the home is not practiced to change people, but to create a space where the heart can experience change, a redemptive change.[72]

At the same time, experiencing home and experiencing displacement are complementary realities.[73] As Nouwen grappled with the downward and displaced way of Christ, he realized that displacement and home are intrinsically and paradoxically connected. As a place of compassion, home requires displacement to "counteract the tendency to become settled in a false comfort and forget the fundamentally unsettled position that we share with all people."[74] According to Nouwen, Christ's incarnation is the preeminent example of divine displacement; through it, God displaced himself to experience the full weight of the human condition.[75] Therefore, displacement is not an

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[68] Nouwen, *Adam*, 127.
[69] Nouwen, "Hospitality Frees Guests," 11.
[70] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 71.
[71] Nouwen, "Hospitality Free Guests," 11.
[72] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 71.
[73] Choosing displacement for Jesus' sake and choosing community or a home in the name of Jesus appear to Nouwen as two aspects of the same choice. See Nouwen, *Daybreak*, 225.
[74] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 64.
[75] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 65.

end in itself, but a process of participating in the mystery of "being with," or living a kind of *Dasein,* since the whole incarnation (God-With-Us) is, first of all, about being with people.[76]

Time

The theme of time in the context of downward mobility addresses the question of being humbly present in the lives of the people being ministered to. For Nouwen, the fundamental issue in modern living is that the upwardly mobile pull keeps people too busy for others.[77] Nouwen argued that being busy has become a status symbol, contending that when people say "I guess you are busy, as usual," the recipient of these comments receives them as a compliment or badge of honour.[78] The corollary is that we gain self-importance simply by being busy.[79] The antidote to this issue requires a downwardly mobile view of time or busyness—a certain letting go, and seeking to be present with people; Nouwen calls this the ministry of presence. In *¡Gracias! A Latin American Journal*, Nouwen captured the beauty of being present with others to form a community, writing:

> More and more, the desire grows in me simply to walk around, greet people, enter their homes, sit on their doorsteps, play ball . . . and be known as someone who wants to live with them. It is a privilege to have the time to practice this simple ministry of presence. Still, it is not as simple as it seems. My own desire to be useful, to do something significant, or to be part of some impressive project is so strong that soon my time is taken up by meetings, conferences, study groups, and workshops that prevent me from walking the streets . . .But I wonder more and more if the first thing should be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell

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[76] Jones, *Henri Nouwen: Writings*,112. One could argue that Nouwen is challenging the church to a lifestyle of discipleship where voluntary displacement is deemed inevitable. See Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 64.

[77] Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 40.

[78] Nouwen, *Making All Things New*,11.

[79] Nouwen, *Making All Things New*, 11.

> your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them, but truly love them.[80]

When Nouwen moved to Daybreak he learned that people offer something very precious to one another simply by being present with one another.[81] He went so far as to suggest that even in silence a community can exist, as a community involves communing together in shared space and time. Indeed, love can be communicated simply by being present.[82]

Nouwen illustrates this point in three ways. First, drawing on his experience at Daybreak, Nouwen realized that the non-competitive Adam, with his mental disabilities, with whom he lived perpetually, invited him to "waste some time" with him. This sense of timelessness was life-changing for Nouwen, as it forced him to be present with Adam, to be blessed by rich communion, and to open his ears so he could hear the gentle invitation of Christ to dwell with him.[83] Second, Nouwen realized that pursuing this downward path and remaining present with Christ was paradoxically rooted in solitude, as it takes a surrendering of time to practice solitude. To that end, Nouwen saw solitude as the furnace of transformation; the absence of solitude causes one to remain a victim of society and to live the illusion of the false self.[84] Third, Nouwen argued that being present is also connected to one's prayer life. In fact, through one's intimate time with God one develops greater intimacy with people. "It is in the silence of prayer that we indeed can touch the heart of the human suffering to which we want to minister," he wrote.[85]

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[80] Nouwen, *¡Gracias!*, 147–48.
[81] La Noue, *On the Spiritual Legacy of Henri Nouwen*, 124.
[82] La Noue, *On the Spiritual Legacy of Henri Nouwen*, 124.
[83] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 11.
[84] Nouwen, *Way of the Heart*, 11.
[85] Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 51.

Wealth

Nouwen's writings on wealth expose the ills of consumerism, which he defines as making upward mobility itself a religion.[86] In this religion, success and the accumulation of more things signify God's presence and blessing, while a lack of either denotes the presence of sin.[87] Consumerism feeds the notion that accumulating more is intrinsically better, possibly because it increases security, prestige, enjoyment, and the ability to "find oneself."[88] Nouwen was deeply concerned by the power of consumerism in the physical and spiritual lives of his family and friends in the Netherlands. While making the transition to Daybreak, Nouwen travelled to his homeland to seek the blessing of the Catholic orderlies there and to visit his family. While in the Netherlands, Nouwen saw two powerful suppressants to a vibrant spiritual life—secularism and prosperity—and both, he argued, left little space for God. He concluded that what he saw were distracted people "caught up in too much of everything."[89] Nouwen, however, saw the invitation to go to Daybreak as an invitation to enter the path of downward mobility by letting go of "things," and in turn he was able to have a prophetic voice back to communities driven by upward mobility.

Nouwen was careful to not project a false image of his own struggle with consumerism. He stated: "When my sense of self depends on what I can acquire, greed flares up, and when my desires are frustrated, I am angry."[90] Thus, greed and anger are the brother and sister of a false self, fabricated by the social compulsions of the *Sein* of an

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[86] Nouwen, *Selfless Way of Christ*, 26.
[87] Nouwen, *Selfless Way of Christ*, 27.
[88] Hayes, *Provision for the Poor*, 589.
[89] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 108, 115.
[90] Nouwen, *Way of the Heart*, 10.

unredeemed world.[91] Nouwen's antidote to consumerism and greed was "simplicity." Although Nouwen did not use simplicity as a referent for the downwardly mobile life, this term encapsulates the meaning of following the incarnate Saviour. That is to say, when one is gripped by the religion of upward mobility, one needs to answer this question: How do I conform my mind and heart to the mind and heart of the self-emptying Christ?[92] Is it not by simply living and choosing simplicity over wealth? Nouwen longed for a simple and quiet life where psychology and spirituality met with prayer, contemplation, and a heart of service. Furthermore, when one loses sight of the *unum necessarium* of life —Christ and his kingdom—invariably there follows a desire for upward mobility. Nouwen's antidote was calling the middle and upper classes to a radical and other-focused understanding of wealth.

Power

The theme of power and its inverse—powerlessness—also shaped Nouwen's views. Nouwen's theology of power can be cast in two different lights. The first light is to see power simply within the context of an egregious hunger for more of it, which is rooted in one's sinful proclivity towards control, influence, relevance, popularity, and applause. This is an upwardly mobile pursuit, as the higher one climbs on this ladder of power, the more vainglory one desires to receive.[93] However, the second light is to see power in weakness as one might see light in darkness or resurrection in death.[94]

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[91] Nouwen, *Way of the Heart*, 10.
[92] Nouwen, *Selfless Way of Christ*, 69.
[93] Nouwen, *Show Me the Way*, 89.
[94] Jonas, *Henri Nouwen*, xxv.

Nouwen addresses the first aspect of power by exposing the inherent dangers in looking for these attributes, arguing that "the long history of the church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led."[95] The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness inform Nouwen's understanding of power. Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness with power by holding out the illusionary hope of more relevance, great spectacularism, and indeed, universal control. Jesus resisted this power to show believers, amongst other things, how to resist the devil's lures for this insatiable desire.

Thus, for Nouwen, the second aspect of power is preferable. There is power in powerlessness if it is apprehended by faith in the ministry of the selfless Christ. He writes: "Jesus did not come in power and might. Rather, he came dressed in weakness."[96] For this reason, the core of the Christian message is that God did not reveal himself as the powerful and unapproachable "other." Rather, in Jesus the powerless God appeared to "unmask the illusion of power, to disarm the prince of darkness who rules the world, and to bring the divided human race to a new unity."[97] As we follow the downward way of Christ, we learn that through powerlessness we can enter into solidarity with our fellow human beings, form a community with the weak, and thus reveal the healing, guiding, and sustaining mercy of God.[98]

Nouwen illustrated this truth when writing to his sister about her daughter, who was diagnosed with a disability. He writes: "We have never had a 'weak' person among us. We are all hardworking, ambitious and successful people who seldom have had to

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[95] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 60.
[96] Nouwen, *Adam*, 30.
[97] Nouwen, *Path of Power*, 18.
[98] Nouwen, *Selfless Way of Christ*, 63.

experience powerlessness. Now Laura enters and tells us a totally new story: a story of weakness, brokenness, vulnerability, and total dependency. Laura, who always will be a child, will teach us the way of Christ as no one will ever be able to do."[99] Nouwen realized that unless we grasp Christ's powerlessness, we will always pursue power over Christ.

Missional Literature

Having engaged with Nouwen's view of downward mobility and the four themes of home, time, wealth, and power, we now move to missional church writers on the same themes. Do these authors provide new knowledge in connection to this general theme of downward mobility and the four sub-themes under discussion? Or, do they provide corrections to Nouwen's position on downward mobility? To answer these questions, I will move through the literature chronologically, beginning with a short summary of two historical figures before focusing on the contemporary missional movement.

Basil the Great

Throughout the history of the church, there have been many practitioners of downward mobility, such as Basil the Great, Francis of Assisi, John Calvin, and so forth. The fourth-century orthodox church father, Basil of Caesarea (331–378), was said to have challenged the clergy of his day not to be tempted by wealth or the comparatively easy life of a priest. He believed that the love and retention of money would impede the call of the gospel to love one's neighbour as oneself, since the more one abounds in wealth the more

[99] Nouwen, *¡Gracias!*, 15.

there may demonstrate a lack of love.[100] Basil's social vision for the church, like Nouwen, was characterized by a commitment to simplicity.

John Calvin

The sixteenth-century theologian and reformer, John Calvin (1509–1564), also wrote a helpful book on the abovementioned themes, entitled *Calvin's Little Book on the Christian Life.* In it, Calvin presses the need for self-denial, arguing that people naturally have a frenzied desire—even an infinite eagerness—to pursue wealth, honour, intrigue, and power, which lead to a life of luxury and splendour.[101] For Calvin, the antidote is clearly to reorder one's thinking about these things, and not to think of any kind of prosperity apart from the blessing of God; one's safety and confidence must be found in him alone.[102]

The connection to Nouwen is this: the way of the cross is not the way of an ordinary pursuit of wealth and honour, or worse—intrigue—but the way of self-denial that embraces the way of simplicity. The difference between Nouwen and Calvin and Basil is that the latter two do not challenge the reader to pursue self-denial by following the downward path of the incarnate Saviour. Rather they generalize the Scriptural teachings on this godly lifestyle without directly calling believers to a life of imitation of the selfless Christ, as Nouwen does.

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[100] Basil, *On Social Justice*, 49.

[101] Calvin, *Calvin's Little Book on the Christian Life*, 14.

[102] Calvin, *Calvin's Little Book on the Christian Life*, 17. Calvin's hermeneutical method emphasized *brevitas et facilitas* (brevity and simplicity).

Michael Goheen

In *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story,* Michael Goheen does not adopt the terminology of upward or downward mobility, but he does engage the sub-themes of home, wealth, and power. Goheen considers the Christian's view of home through the advancement of God's Kingdom and one's surrender to a new life in Jesus.[103] This abandonment to Jesus includes one's home and family; it also requires one to set aside all other responsibilities for the sake of God's Kingdom (Luke 9:57–62). That is, one must be willing to love Jesus more than any other person or thing, including one's personal possessions and home.[104] Goheen views the New Testament diaspora as the new Israel being sent into the world, leaving their land and place of origin, and in a sense becoming homeless—but on a mission in the world.[105] This is how he summarizes this truth: "as eschatological Israel is sent to live among the nations, and the peoples of the world begin to take their place in Israel's life and history, God's people will take a new form. With their new home among the nations and cultures of the world, this diaspora people will no longer be defined by geography or ethnic heritage or sociopolitical unity."[106]

This understanding of the Kingdom's summon translates also into one's perceived understanding of wealth, and in particular, consumerism. Here Goheen embodies a Nouwenian critique of the religion of consumerism (for Nouwen, upward mobility) as he confronts the ills of globalization. Goheen postulates that globalization and the injustices in the global market have produced great wealth in the West; when this is coupled with

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[103] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 34.
[104] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 86.
[105] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 116.
[106] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 116.

the rejection of an overarching worldview (as is true of postmodernism), wealth is joined by a radical loss of meaning.[107] This union creates the kind of consumerism that is the most powerful religious movement of the current day.[108] With its plethora of goods and services, consumerist culture bids us to retreat into entertainment and to seek distractions through new and novel forms of technology, which serve as means to buy a way out of one's empty and disillusioned life.[109] The antidote to the religion of consumerism is living in a community identified through Christian generosity and simplicity, what Goheen terms a "contrast community." Goheen states: "A contrast community will be a community of generosity and simplicity (of 'enough') in a consumer world."[110]

Christians should understand that a life of simplicity will run counter to the increasingly consumer-driven lifestyle of Western culture. Goheen wonders whether Christians can "offer the good news of a generous God if their lives look little different than their contemporaries."[111] Adopting a kind of Nouwenian approach to following the downward way of Christ, Goheen extends this truth, urging that "In a culture that is turned in on itself, the Christian community must follow Jesus, who offered his whole life as one of selfless service. A life of sacrificial giving consumed with the needs of others would offer a powerful witness to the world."[112]

Furthermore, Goheen argues that it was through weakness that Christ's Kingdom came into power. He points out that the Kingdom of God does not come with military power (as many Jews expected), but with weakness.[113] Jesus sent out his disciples

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[107] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 14.
[108] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 14.
[109] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 210.
[110] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 209.
[111] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 209.
[112] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 209.
[113] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 99.

defenseless, as lambs among wolves. They came with good news of peace, and their symbolic attire served to illustrate their message.[114] However, unlike Nouwen, Goheen repeatedly stresses the power that belonged to Jesus. Where Nouwen defends the powerless of Christ as a means to minister to the powerless in society, Goheen argues the Kingdom of God came in power and that Jesus, as King over this Kingdom, continued to demonstrate that power. For Goheen, Jesus came to proclaim that God is acting in power—already now in the present—to restore his rule over creation.[115] This rule was sealed and confirmed through the blood of the new covenant poured out on the cross. This is the salvific power of the Kingdom of God.

Where Goheen and Nouwen differ most is in their view of the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom reality fills the pages of Goheen's book and sets the stage for engaging the themes discussed above. Of note is Goheen's understanding of the power of Christ. Although Jesus came in power, it is through a demonstration of his willingness to give up the power that he became powerful. The paradox of the cross is that a powerful one (Goheen's emphasis) becomes powerless (Nouwen's emphasis) in order to usher in the Kingdom of power—the Kingdom of the glorious Son. Goheen may provide a corrective to the immanence of Christ's presence on the cross as the powerless one that Nouwen clearly articulates. Meanwhile, Nouwen serves as a corrective to leaning too heavily on the transcendence of the all-powerful Christ at the cost of his immanence and humanity.

[114] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 99.
[115] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 78.

Tim Chester & Steve Timmis

Another helpful resource for church planters is Tim Chester and Steve Timmis' book *Total Church.* Although these authors do not engage the nomenclature of upward or downward mobility, they do address these themes very briefly in the context of building a compassionate community. They state that the "Bible shows that we are communal creatures, made to be lovers of God and others."[116] Understood in that reality, our identity as part of the human family is found in the broader community of humanity, but our identity as Christians is found in Christ's new community, which Chester and Timmis call a "community of light."[117] What distinguishes the qualities of this community of light is its ability to love the poor. The church that embraces the poor realizes the need for inclusion to replace exclusion, the need for a place where they matter to replace their powerlessness, and the need to be welcomed to replace their marginalization.[118]

Chester and Timmis then address the pathologies that detract from one's love for the poor. They ask this penetrating question: Why are Christians focused on the wealthy and the position of power rather than the poor?[119] Or, "By *not* nullifying status, intellect, and wealth, have Christians valued these things too highly and so nullified the message of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified'" (1 Cor 2:2)?[120] Chester and Timmis briefly extrapolate on the ministry of Jesus. They argue that he prioritized the marginalized and spent time with the despised. Again, they question that if Jesus had time for the poor, the needy, the addicted, and the broken, and he made *them* (not the professional classes) his priority—

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[116] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 40.
[117] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 50.
[118] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 80.
[119] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 82–84.
[120] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 84.

what does this tell us about the nature of building compassionate communities for Christ?[121]

Chester and Timmis present a Nouwenian vision for the marginalized and poor in our cities and question whether the church is truly a community of light to these particular demographics. Although they do not parse out their views on the four themes of my project (home, time, wealth, and power), their understanding of being a community of light intersects with Nouwen's vision to be present with the marginalized by embracing the downward way of Christ.

Timothy Keller

Timothy Keller's book *Center Church: Doing Balanced Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City,* which is highly popular among church planters, challenges the church to the Nouwenian aspiration of walking with the powerless and administering grace to the poor and weak. Believing that God sent his son Jesus, the embodiment of the true mission of God in the salvation of the lost, Keller stresses this point: "This creates a new kind of servant community with people who live out an entirely alternate way of being human."[122] Although Keller does not directly support Nouwen's argument that downward mobility is indispensable for building a Christian community with the marginalized, he does expose the sin endemic of upward mobility that militates against the ability to create this kind of community. He argues that "racial and class superiority, accrual of money and power at the expense of others, and yearning for popularity and recognition,

[121] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 73.
[122] Keller, *Center Church*, 45.

represent the opposite of the gospel mindset."[123] Indeed, for a Christian community to exist, it needs to be protected from these pathologies.

Keller engages the themes of home, time, wealth, and power in variegated ways. Regarding the theme of home, Keller articulates how we should view our homes in light of the exilic themes found in Scripture.[124] For example, the Apostle Peter encourages the church to remember their identity in Christ and live as "foreigners and exiles" in this world (1 Pet 2:11). The author to the Hebrews echoes that reality and commends to the church their "forebearers in the faith" who admitted "that they were foreigners and strangers on earth" (Heb 11:13). Keller concludes that the concept and promise of a true home for the "foreigner and stranger" helps steer us from any number of false views of home and subsequent idolatry.[125] Although Keller does not engage the value of displacement as Nouwen does—that is, to counteract the tendency to become settled in a false sense of comfort—he does challenge the reader to a countercultural reality when it comes to our homes and the communities we build within them.[126] These communities—as extensions to our homes—are to be accepting of those without faith and serve as a place that is not culturally alien to the lost and hurting. At the same time, this home-community dynamic should serve as a declaration and expression of the gospel, Keller defends.[127]

The themes of time and power are scarcely touched in Keller's writings. Under the theme of power, Keller does note, however, that "we are not to gravitate only toward

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[123] Although Keller (*Center Church*, 46) does not use the phrase upward mobility in this context, he paints the picture clearly of the chief saboteur of a compassionate community. It is a community that is represented by those who are not on mission and do not have Gospel faith.

[124] Keller, *Center Church*, 80.

[125] Keller, *Center Church*, 83.

[126] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 64.

[127] Keller, *Center Church*, 323.

people who are attractive, connected, and powerful."[128] In reality, our presence with those who are unattractive, unconnected, and powerless is part of Christ's economy of salvation. Second, Keller draws our attention to the need to build a compassionate Christian community. In 2012, Keller argued that there were millions of newcomers entering North American cities who were more open to the gospel in their new context.[129] Many of these immigrants needed help and support to face the moral, economic, emotional, and spiritual pressures of city life. Some of these comprise the urban poor. Keller's approach to helping the poor in our cities is threefold. First, the church must work with the poor as a mark of the church's validity—a good deed—that may lead to the unredeemed worshipping God (Matt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:12). Second, Keller notes that it is misguided for Christians to feel pity for the city, and it is harmful for Christians to think of themselves as the city's "Saviour." Rather, their relationship with the poor has to be a consciously reciprocal one. The church needs the poor to fill out its own understanding of God and his grace, just as the poor need the church for their spiritual and even material needs.[130] Third, the church needs to reorient its wealth and power toward the needs of the poor and the city instead of keeping it to itself. An urban church needs to minister to the poor and to the professional class and, in fact, the church's commitment to the poor is a testimony to the cultural elites which supports the validity of the gospel message.[131]

Keller takes aim at the sins that surround the accumulation of wealth in his book *Counterfeit Gods.* He addresses the spiritual morbidity of greed, arguing that greed can hide itself from its victim because money so easily blinds the heart. Subsequently, of the

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[128] Keller, *Center Church*, 315.
[129] Keller, *Center Church*, 161.
[130] Keller, *Center Church*, 168.
[131] Keller, *Center Church*, 162.

seven deadly sins, greed is the least bothersome for people, which in turn keeps them from confessing this sin.[132] Keller fleshes this out within the context of what we might call the lure of middle-class living. He states that people tend to live within their own socioeconomic bracket and once they find their neighbourhood, send their children to its schools, and participate in its social life, comparison with others begins to feed their heart with greed. Keller notes that people tend not to compare themselves to the rest of the world but to those in their own income bracket.[133] This is a slippery slope; once comparison begins, the heart begins to look with envy at those who have more.

Of note is Keller's antidote to the problem of greed. He does not adopt Nouwen's approach, which challenges the congregation to follow the downward way of the incarnate Christ who became poor for its sake. He does argue, however, that the church needs to deepen its understanding of Christ's salvific work. He writes: "Jesus, the God-Man, had infinite wealth, but if he had held on to it, we would have died in our spiritual poverty. That was the choice—if he stayed rich, we would die poor. If he died poor, we could become rich."[134] Since Christ made the selfless choice for the sake of the church, Keller argues, the church needs to realize that the antidote to greed is found in Christ's decision to become poor for his people.[135] Therefore, what breaks the power of money over us is not just a redoubled effort to follow the example of Christ, but a more comprehensive realization of what we have in Christ so we may then live out that Spirit-filled change for His sake.[136] Consequently, Keller does not directly encourage simplicity

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[132] Keller (*Counterfeit Gods*, 52) recounts that he once gave seven talks on the seven deadly sins and the lowest attendance was on the topic of greed.

[133] Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 52.

[134] Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 67.

[135] Keller, *Center Church*, 68.

[136] Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 68.

as a *modus operandi* for Christians, but he does encourage a deepened understanding of the salvation proffered in Christ, as this should lead those struggling with greed into a more Christ-centered approach to living. An example of this is found in the gospel narrative and the story of the rich young ruler whom Jesus challenges to give up everything to follow him. He knew outward obedience to the law of God but was unable to make this commitment to follow and be centred fully in Christ alone because of his great wealth, and so we learn he walked away sad (cf. Mark 10:17–27). One might say that outward image was exposed by the inward god of greed and wealth.

Evidently, Keller's books *Center Church* and *Counterfeit Gods* are helpful resources for church planters. In the end, *Center Church* does not spend much time focusing on the relational side of compassion — what it means to walk with the poor, or even better, to suffer with the poor. Rather, Keller remains descriptive (describing what is currently taking place in the church) rather than taking a more prescriptive approach to help the church see its penchant for upward mobility. Put another way, Keller is apt at presenting the need to reach the city. However, Nouwen's suggestion that the motivation for ministry must be rooted in the selflessness of Christ provides a more compelling account of how to reach the city.[137]

David Fitch

One of the strongest voices for church planting and ministry centers is David Fitch. Fitch has authored a number of missional books, most notably the comprehensive *Faithful Presence.* This book questions the church's effectiveness in building community and being faithfully present in urban centres. Fitch, like Nouwen, is largely focused on

[137] Nouwen, *The Selfless Christ*, 7–93.

Christ's incarnational presence in the world, which is made manifest as the church actively serves. Christ's reign over the whole world is made visible through the living church.[138] Fitch's concern, however, is that the church can quickly enter maintenance mode when it becomes overly comfortable in society or aligns itself with the power and structure of the world and demonstrates no concern with those outside of Christ.[139] The fruit of a maintenance mode church, Fitch argues, is power preserved at all costs, which causes members to adopt a misplaced focus away from the hurting, the poor, and the victims of injustice.[140]

In order to keep the church alive and to "open space for God's presence in Christ to become real," Fitch argues that there are seven disciplines that the church must foster.[141] These include the Lord's Table, reconciliation, proclaiming the gospel, presence with the "least of these" (the poor and marginalized), presence with children, the fivefold ministry, and Kingdom prayer.[142] He states: "These disciplines are always about more than just me . . . they form a community in and around his fullness. They are intensely social."[143] Since these disciplines inhabit an incarnational posture of humility and vulnerability while submitting to Jesus, space is opened for his presence, both in the local church and then in the broader world.[144]

Fitch's general thesis is that when the church seeks and embraces the reconciling presence of God, it can be present with others. In connection to the theme of home and displacement, Fitch sees the home as a place where Christ's presence can and should be

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[138] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 26–29.
[139] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 31.
[140] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 36.
[141] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 29.
[142] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 32.
[143] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 29.
[144] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 171.

felt. A home is a place for community, fellowship, love, and conversation, and a place where hospitality is practiced. His image of the dotted circle demonstrates that fellowship should be porous: that is, the home should be open to strangers.[145] As Fitch recalls, Christ entered the homes of the marginalized, the publicans, and the sinners.[146] Thus, the home is to be leveraged so that Christ's presence may be known and experienced by those who inhabit it and for those who enter from outside. Notably, Fitch does not engage any of Nouwen's perspectives on displacement, and the transitory nature of home is not addressed in *Faithful Presence.*

However, Fitch does take a Nouwenian approach to the theme of time; he presses the need to be present "with" someone in order to experience the presence of Christ. He argues that as opposed to looking for projects, we ought to be with people in and around our lives long enough to listen and become friends, partners in life.[147] If we are able to be present with people in that way, we can "give the opportunity to offer who we are and what we have become in Christ," without forcing it we can establish friendship and support for what God may be doing in their lives.[148] He goes on to state that the challenge laid upon the church is for her to be present with the "least of these" as part of everyday life.[149] He argues that the church makes its biggest impact when it practices actively being with the poor and resists turning the poor into a program.[150]

Fitch does not have a lot to say about wealth and simplicity in his book, although indirectly he considers the pathologies that upset a Christian's incarnational presence.

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[145] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 146.
[146] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 50.
[147] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 90.
[148] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 91.
[149] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 102.
[150] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 120.

Some of those pathologies are greed, covetousness, and strife. The church, he opines, should be a place of refuge and healing, rather than a place of success and power, competition, ambition, and striving, a place where the kingdom of God is breaking in.[151] Without using the nomenclature of upward mobility, Fitch reflects on its power and argues that if Christians place their identity in the success of their careers, their economic status, the things they own or consume, or even the success of their children, they will not see their lives shaped under the lordship of Christ.[152] Rather, it takes hearing the good news regularly to live in the reality that Jesus is Lord and working all things for his mission, so that believers' minds can be formed and their imaginations shaped to live a hope-filled reality.[153]

Fitch also engages the concept of power in *Faithful Presence*. His basic premise is that power only comes with submission, as it is delegated from God. In other words, no one truly "owns" power; rather people merely exercise God's power or abuse what he has delegated to them.[154] Therefore, in submission to his power—which was ultimately demonstrated on the cross—there is space for him to work. Drawing the connection to Christ's charge to the disciples to wash each other's feet, Fitch argues that those who carry the most power must submit first, just as Christ did in the foot washing, as this submission opens up Christ's reign and presence in the world.[155] This submission also gives room for reconciliation. The fear of the oppressed is erased here, and space is

[151] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 70–80.
[152] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 131.
[153] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 167.
[154] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 74.
[155] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 117–18.

cleared for Christ's healing presence. Christ's rule now begins to work for the future of the world.

Fitch further connects powerlessness to the proclamation of the gospel. Our gospel presentation should not make the statement "You have a problem you're going to hell" but should be more decentering than that.[156] We should ask the question: "Are you caught in a world gone wrong, in sin, in injustice, in hopelessness?"[157] This leaves the presenter with the opportunity to further inquire: "Will you give up control and submit to Him as your Saviour and Lord?" If the answer is in the affirmative, then the gospel truth of Christ's lordship over sin and the power of evil is clearly stated.[158] This is power through weakness.

It stands to reason that Fitch and Nouwen have a very similar approach to ministry. Nouwen stresses the singularity (the independent nature of following the downward path) while Fitch stresses the collective nature of following the same path as he focuses on the church and its faithful presence.

Summary

After providing a brief overview of upward and downward mobility from a secular social theorist's view, I explained how Nouwen provided an ethical framework for these terms from within the context of his existential journey from Harvard to Daybreak. Surveying Nouwen's corpus then allowed me to engage the themes of home, time, power and wealth from within his downwardly mobile lens. This opened the door to look further afield to

[156] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 85.
[157] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 102–8.
[158] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 86.

see how these themes were broached in the church throughout the ages. To that end, a very brief historical overview was given on how Basil the Great (4th century), and John Calvin (16th century), engaged with some of these themes in order to demonstrate that these themes and practice-led concerns have stayed the course in the history of the church. Of course, more could be written about these and other historical figures, but my interests lies more concretely in the missional authors from the past thirty years. Thus, engaging authors both within the Reformed theological tradition (which most clearly aligns with my theological worldview) and outside of it, we examined Goheen and Keller's Reformed insights, Chester and Timmins' broadly evangelical views, and finally, David Fitch's anabaptist approach to church planting. Although none of them adopted Nouwen's nomenclature for upward and downward mobility, they engaged the themes of home, time, wealth, and power in varying degrees, and their contributions are helpful for our understanding of them. Nouwen differs to some degree from these authors in his pressing of the practical side of the issue. Nouwen questions whether the church should be doing more to follow Christ's downwardly mobile path in order to reach marginalized communities, and concludes that it should. This question will be revisited in Chapter Four as we reflect on the interviews of pastors and missional leaders from across Canada.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

Before engaging with Nouwen's lived experience and vision of downward mobility as being generative for the mission of the urban church, the methodologies that govern this research project must be outlined. There are four coalescing research themes and methods, which will be briefly discussed in this chapter: practical theology, practice-led research, phenomenology as a methodology, and two interpretive frameworks to analyse the data. After I define and explain the connection between my research question, practical theology, and practice-led research, I will discuss the history and application of phenomenology, which will serve as the methodology for this qualitative research project. I will then define two interpretive frameworks: Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Thematic Analysis (TA).[1] Finally, after the explanation and application of the IPA and TA methods of interpretation, I will briefly outline how participants were chosen and the data collected and analysed.

Practical Theology and Practice-Led Research

In his doctoral thesis, *Eucharistic Reciprocity*, William DeJong articulates what we should and should not expect to see in the study of practical theology. DeJong argues that practical theology is not a subset of theology, nor is it a rival theology to systematic

[1] Although these two methods of interpretation are most often employed within the field of psychology, they will be shown to be generative within the field of practical theology as well.

theology. Rather, it is a comprehensive method of doing theology more broadly.[2] If systematic theology begins from above—with Scripture and Christian tradition—then practical theology begins from below, with human situations requiring theological reflection.[3] Practical theology is not, however, the same as pastoral theology, which is better referred to as "that branch of practical theology focused on pastoral care and counselling."[4]

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was one of the early proponents of organising theology into three disciplines: practical, historical, and philosophical.[5] For Schleiermacher, practical theology is a normative discipline that "assesses the activities and procedures of the church's ministry."[6] Over a century later, the study of practical theology was transplanted to American soil by William James (1842–1910) and Anton Boisen (1876–1965). Boisen drew the phenomenological connection to practical theology, which led him to view and analyse individuals as "living human documents" that required study and interpretation.[7] Nouwen, self-consciously following Boisen's lead, also analysed "living human documents," and viewed their actual social conditions as sources of theological reflection.[8] According to Nouwen, "there is no human problem,

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[2] DeJong, *Eucharistic Reciprocity*, 9.
[3] Graham et al., *Theological Reflection*, 2–3.
[4] Browning, "Pastoral Theology," 194–95.
[5] DeJong, *Eucharistic Reciprocity*, 8; Purvis, *Theology and University*, 150.
[6] Purvis, *Theology and University*, 150.
[7] Farely, *Theologia*, 93. Nouwen studied under Anton Boisen after joining the Menninger Institute in 1964. Boisen taught the students to view psychiatric patients as "living human documents." Boisen also kept Nouwen close to himself by challenging Nouwen with some fundamental questions regarding social relationships and sufferings. For example, Nouwen deeply appreciated Boisen's concept of God who is "the internalisation of the highest values of our social relationship." See Karickal, "From Professional Functioning," 29. See further, Ford, *Wounded Prophet*, 91.
[8] Karickal, "From Professional Functioning," 71. Boison's reflections on the "living human documents" found their origin in his own experiences as a patient. See Anton Boisen, "The Present Status of William James," 155–58.

human conflict, human happiness, or human joy, which cannot lead to a deeper understanding of God's work with man [sic]."[9]

Boisen's focus on "living human documents" provided the phenomenologist John Patton with the opportunity to engage in what he called "existential phenomenology." By this, Patton meant that practical theology serves as an "intentional, rational effort to allow a phenomenon to be experienced without any conventional ways of seeing and understanding getting in the way of the experience."[10] Learning from the father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, Patton argued that for practical theology to be properly divided, the researcher must bracket their own attempts to classify and categorise the data in order to permit the situation itself to speak.[11] In *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research,* John Swinton and Harriet Mowat also connected practical theology to phenomenology but cautioned against a positivist view of data interpretation, arguing that a qualitative researcher is not out to solve the problem or "crack the case."[12] Rather, practical theology is a theological interpretation of the "living human document" through a particular methodological lens (e.g., phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnography, etc.) that serves as a critical theological reflection on the practices of the church. That is, as the church interacts with the practices of the world with a view to developing faithful participation in God's redemptive practices, it is engaging in practical theology.[13]

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[9] Karickal, "From Professional Functioning," 71.
[10] Patton, *From Ministry to Theology*, 36.
[11] DeJong, "Don't Judge a Theology by Its Name," 5.
[12] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 36.
[13] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 6. Peter Ward (*Introducing Practical Theology*, 44) draws a further connection to Christopraxis, stating that "the enterprise of practical theology is the ongoing work of Christ in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit."

The investigation of the "living human document" as a phenomenological study and the study of God's redemptive practices found in Scripture is not without its challenges. Paul Tillich, an important voice in the field of practical theology, called this type of investigation correlation.[14] He wrote that correlation means to compare and associate, or correlate, "existential questions that were drawn from human experience with theological answers offered by the Christian tradition."[15] David Tracey took it one step further and included a dialectical element between Scripture and the human experience, arguing that these two realities serve as mutually corrective in our understanding of the phenomenon.[16] In her book *Christian Theology in Practice,* Bonnie Miller-McLemore defends this approach by contending that the "living human document" is a valid text for theological study, comparable to traditional texts of Scripture and doctrine.[17]

Agreement with this approach is not unanimous, especially with more conservative biblical scholars. Oliver O'Donovan, in *Resurrection and Moral Order,* expresses his concerns with the dialectic between Scripture and human experience. He defends that one must approach the "phenomena critically, evaluating them and interpreting their significance from the place where true knowledge of the moral order is given, under the authority of the Gospel."[18] That is to say, practical theology is and must

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[14] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 6. It should be noted that Bonnie Miller-McLemore (*Christian Theology in Practice*, 42) prefers the language of "human web" over "living human documents" in order to accommodate the situation in which the human text is located. The human web, she argues, reduces the individualistic implications of the language implicit in the living human document.

[15] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 77. The authors point out that Tillich (*Courage to Be*) exemplified this approach when he correlated the message of the gospel with, for example, the psychological concept of unconditional acceptance.

[16] Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 55.

[17] Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice*, 1.

[18] O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 20.

remain phenomenologically attentive to praxis (i.e., the investigation of the "human living document"), but correlation must be nuanced to allow for the primacy of Scripture over a simplistic interpretation of praxis. The result is that one can maintain a high view of Scripture as *norma normans* while remaining attentive to the concerns and experiences that emerged from the correlation between Scripture and lived reality.[19]

Understanding the theological and practical contours of this discipline leads to this question: How does practical theology help facilitate an answer to the current question concerning Nouwen's view of downward mobility and the urban church? In *Practical Theology,* Richard Osmer argues that to answer a question of this type, four further questions must be addressed: "What is going on?"; "Why is this going on?"; "What ought to be going on?"; and "How might we respond?"[20] The first question will be answered through interviews with pastors and ministry staff who serve in lower socio-economic urban centres across Canada. The second question will be addressed by interpreting the data through an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and a Thematic Analysis (TA). The third question will be explored through a four-way conversation between Nouwen's writings, various missional voices, the interview findings, and Holy Scripture (which will serve as the final authority in answering this question). Finally, the question "How might we respond?" will be addressed through a reflective theological and practical response generated by the answers given to the other questions. The first two questions will be fielded in Chapter Four, and the latter two in Chapter Five.

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[19] Another voice supporting this is Andrew Root (*Christopraxis,* ix) who defends that practical theology should be focused on divine action. See Ward, "Introducing Practical Theology," 44–48.

[20] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 4.

Practice-led Research

Practice-led research (PLR) is a uniquely helpful method of qualitative research in practical theology that is congruent with a sensitive and attentive interpretation of "human living documents." In "Inquiring Through Practice," Carol Gary argues that PLR is "initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners."[21] She adds that "the research strategy is carried out by using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners."[22] Effective PLR involves asking or defining the right questions concerning the practice under review. If the question is effectively defined, the practitioner can engage with the issue, which should inform the practice.[23] The question to ask is: "How does the research help us to answer the question and enhance the practice being studied?"[24]

There is a difference, however, between practice-led research and a related research technique called practice-based research (PBR). In PBR, the contribution to new knowledge or practice is demonstrated through creative outcomes. The practitioner engaged in PBR will usually develop some kind of artefact or object that will ultimately contribute to further knowledge of what is being investigated. The artefact then becomes the basis of a contribution to new knowledge. However, PLR is less concerned with producing results. Rather, PLR is driven by the creation of new theoretical knowledge to a specific practice or field of study. Thus, the primary component of effective PLR is to contribute to new knowledge by asking or defining the right questions concerning a

[21] Gray, "Inquiring Through Practice," 3.
[22] Gray, "Inquiring Through Practice," 3–4.
[23] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 44.
[24] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 44.

specific practice under review. As far as this research project is concerned, that practice is church planting in lower SES communities in urban Canada.

Phenomenology: Philosophical Assumptions

Since this is a phenomenological research thesis, both the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, along with its application within the field of qualitative research, also need to be briefly explored. Phenomenology was initiated by Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology, and refined by Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Edith Stein, Paul Ricoeur, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and others. Although phenomenology has disparate roots depending on the thinker—ranging from Aristotelian-Augustinian anthropology to Kantian metaphysics to a rejection of Cartesian reason—what unites phenomenologists from the past to the present is the refusal to analyse the subject in abstraction from lived experience.[25] Phenomenologists have sought to revitalise philosophy by returning to the lived experience of the human subject (the living human document) and embracing the adage that they represent a "philosophy of attention."[26]

Husserl's contribution to the field of phenomenology was his desire to transcend Kant's philosophical phenomenal-noumenal abstraction by proposing to "bracket" (*epoché*, suspension of judgment) all questions about the true nature of material realities "in themselves."[27] For Husserl, phenomenological analysis can only start by turning attention to the phenomenon; this he epitomised in his famous dictum: "We must go back to the things themselves."[28] This meant setting aside the "natural attitude" we have

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[25] DeJong, *Eucharistic Reciprocity,* 63–64; Cox, *Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion*, 9–33.

[26] Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 4; Mortari and Tarozzi, "Phenomenology as Philosophy," 19.

[27] Cox, *Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion*, 20.

[28] Husserl, *Shorter Logical Investigations*, 88.

towards the world and bracketing our own experiences in order to focus on the phenomena, that is, how things appear to us in our consciousness or how our consciousness intends them to be.[29] With Husserl, consciousness enjoyed a privileged interpretive status; arguably, this meant experiences were reduced to merely cognitive perceptions disconnected from the physical world.[30]

Martin Heidegger was a student of Husserl, but he was not convinced of his teacher's approach to finding the true nature of material realities "in themselves."[31] He argued that it was impossible for a subject (or co-researcher) to be a detached observer of intentional objects and to perceive things only mentally; rather, the subject invariably intends to be involved through demonstrating what he called "care" (*sorge*).[32] Since one is always in the world with others (living within the circumstances of one's shared existence), attempting to bracket out one's own experiences was too quixotic for Heidegger.

Heidegger's approach is important for two reasons. First, Nouwen grappled with and gained from his writings. Although Nouwen admitted to never having read any of Heidegger's work, he did engage Heidegger's thought through others and purports that Heidegger had a great influence on his life.[33] Nouwen noted that Heidegger opened the door to important metaphysical realities for him.[34] Applying these metaphysical realities was a way for Nouwen to explore his own living human document and to help him to

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[29] Cox, *Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion*, 20.
[30] Cox, *Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion*, 31.
[31] DeJong, *Eucharistic Reciprocity*, 9–33.
[32] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 184–93.
[33] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 132–33.
[34] Nouwen ostensibly co-opted these terms to help him understand, in an existential way, both being in the world (*Sein*) and being in the world without being of it (*Dasein*). See Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 133.

gain a deeper understanding of himself.[35] Nouwen then communicated this self-understanding in his writings, believing the adage that "what was most personal is also most universal."[36] Gillespie muses: "It seems Nouwen wanted us to join his experience of the adventure of life; learn from it and love through it."[37] Nouwen's self-expression of such adventurers, writes Gillespie, "drew people to him and led him to believe that individual persons were connected to one universal body."[38]

Second, Heidegger also provides an interpretive approach to the data that is gathered within a qualitative research study. This interpretive tool, known as "hermeneutics" (Greek *hermeneuein* "to interpret"), is centred on the researcher in the process of understanding the material. Hermeneutics helps people interpret and make sense of an experience, though not at the cost of their own pre-existing values and ways of seeing the world.[39] Whereas Husserl's aim was to find the real "essence"—the eidetic reduction—which "is a process where a particular object is reduced to its essence," Heidegger created a hermeneutical circle.[40] This interpretive circle functioned as a kind of spiral that moved outward and was meant to provide space for revisions to biases, understandings, and judgments based on personal experiences. Further, it entailed that the researcher is as much a part of the research as the participant is; in fact, the researcher is invariably reliant on previous knowledge to interpret the data.

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[35] Gillespie, "Similarities and Differences," 117.

[36] Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, 26. See Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 14; Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 10.

[37] Gillespie, "Similarities and Differences," 119.

[38] Gillespie, "Similarities and Differences," 119.

[39] Ho, Chiang, & Leung, "Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis," 1758.

[40] Giorgi, "Descriptive Phenomenological Method," 90.

Phenomenology – Research Analysis

Following in the trajectory of Heidegger's phenomenology allows us to engage the interpretive method that will be employed in the research project. What Heidegger and, *inter alia*, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, and Stein did not provide was a framework or method to help interpret the data. For that we turn to Van Manen, who provides some clarity to the world of interpreting data within a qualitative research thesis. He points out that interpretive or hermeneutic phenomenology primarily draws meaning from transcribed interview data.[41] Within this interpretive analysis, thematic analysis is a popular interpretive strategy to identify themes. Drawing this together, I have chosen two interpretive tools that will be employed in a mutually reflexive way in order to properly interpret the interviews (the data set). As mentioned above, these are Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and a Thematic Analysis (TA).

Defining IPA and Thematic Analysis

It is noteworthy that both IPA and TA have found their general habitus in the field of psychology. Although there is not a well-worn path from psychology to practical theology (specifically the practice of church planting in lower SES neighbourhoods) there are general principles within both these analytic tools that are generative for this research project. What follows is a brief description of these frameworks, my rationale for using them, and some structural weaknesses within each.

An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis is not a purely phenomenological method of interpretation and analysis, but it has a phenomenological epistemology, since

[41] Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 66.

its primary goal is to investigate how participants make sense of their experience.[42] In order to examine the data, IPA draws upon interpretive phenomenology (hermeneutics) and idiography (the focus on the particular rather than the universal).[43] The analytical process within IPA is often described as a double hermeneutic or dual interpretation process because, firstly, the participants of the study make meaning of their own world, and secondly, the researcher tries to decode that meaning within her own world.[44] Therefore, the researcher seeks to make sense of everyday experiences by questioning how things appear to the participant and how this can be interpreted in order to help understand the phenomenon in question.[45] Therefore, by choosing IPA as an interpretive tool or method, one must be committed to exploring, describing, interpreting, and situating the means by which the participants make sense of their experiences.[46]

In order to concretize what this means for me as the researcher, a few expectations need to be met as I analyse my data set within this framework. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith, the researcher must totally immerse himself in the data by, as it were, stepping into the shoes of the participants.[47] This begins with multiple close readings of the transcripts to understand not only the content shared, but the language used (metaphors, symbols, repetitions, even pauses) and the context in which this language was used.[48] Notes are encouraged on the side margins of the page and these

[42] Pietkiewicz and Smith, "A Practical Guide," 362.

[43] Pietkiewicz and Smith, "A Practical Guide," 363. Smith et al. (*Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 23) points out that IPA follows Heidegger as it is concerned with examining how a phenomenon appears and the analyzer is implicated in facilitating and making sense of this appearance.

[44] Smith and Osborn, "Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis," 53.

[45] Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 77–101.

[46] Smith et al., *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 35.

[47] Pietkiewicz and Smith, "A Practical Guide," 366.

[48] Pietkiewicz and Smith, "A Practical Guide," 367.

annotations are meant to promulgate emerging themes.[49] This process of reading, note-taking, and spawning emergent themes is in line with Heidegger's hermeneutic circle. Then, as themes begin to emerge, they are grouped together to develop clusters that can fit descriptive labels. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith, once the major themes are located, the researcher should provide write-ups with extracts from the interviews.[50]

Similarly, Thematic Analysis is the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the body of the data set.[51] This interpretive tool helps identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within the data set, while at times going further than IPA in interpreting various aspects of the research topic.[52] TA differs from IPA in that it is not wedded to any pre-existing framework or method, and thus can be used to do different things within them. Subsequently, TA is a realist method which reports experiences, meaning, and the reality of participants who find themselves in a range of "rules," and operates within the context of the lives of the participants.[53]

It is important to understand what a theme is in Thematic Analysis. First, a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.[54] Second, what counts as a theme must be determined either by its prevalence within the data set or number of instances across the data set.[55] There is some flexibility in determining what

[49] Pietkiewicz and Smith, "A Practical Guide," 367.
[50] Pietkiewicz and Smith, "A Practical Guide," 369.
[51] Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 78.
[52] According to Braun and Clarke ("Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 77), some researchers argue that TA is not a specific method, but a shared reflective tool that can traverse a variety of methods.
[53] Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 81.
[54] Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 82.
[55] Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 82.

constitutes a theme, but the overriding concern is whether the theme captures something important in relation to the overall research question.

There are two types of approaches within thematic analysis: deductive and inductive analysis (or structured versus semi-structured interviews). With theoretical thematic analysis, the data is explicitly analysed under a theoretical framework.[56] This approach begins with focused and structured questions in an interview process enacted inside the parameters of the chosen framework. A portion of my interviews fits this theoretical approach and will be examined through deductive analysis. An inductive analysis, however, is data-driven, with little to no attempt to make the data fit a pre-existing framework.[57] This semi-structured approach demands that the researcher immerses herself in the data by "dwelling" in the language of the participants. Thus, without a predetermined theoretical perspective, this approach allows the researcher to create themes that are germane to the data and uncontrolled by a framework. As discussed below, both methods are utilised in this project to analyse the interviews.

There are several reasons for these two approaches. First, IPA provided the interpretive lens to begin analysing the data. Especially helpful within the IPA framework is the hermeneutical lens—what Heidegger called the phenomenological inquiry.[58] This investigation into a lived experience and the significance it had on the participants is an important tool in data analysis. Second, IPA is idiographic, being concerned with the particulars. Ideography takes the individual story, or the story within the story of a selected sample, and carefully outlines some generalisations that are helpful in reporting

[56] Ho et al., "Hermeneutic Phenomenology Analysis," 1760.
[57] Ho et al., "Hermeneutic Phenomenology Analysis," 1760.
[58] Smith et al., *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 26.

the data.[59] This means that IPA provides the framework to allow in-depth analysis of each case while holding this in tension with the size of the study and the broader social themes that TA helps to distinguish. IPA is restrictive, as far as my research interests are concerned, in its general focus on a moment in time or an isolated incident where the experience took place. For example, IPA studies are interested in what someone experiences as they choose to make a career change, or what they experience when moving from one country to another.[60] IPA would prove helpful for this project if I could isolate such particular events within the lives of the participants serving in lower SES communities. Unfortunately, trying to capture such singular events in church planting in SES communities was rarely possible for most participants, which limited the method's usefulness.

Cognizant of IPA's limitations, a Thematic Analysis broadens the scope of the project. TA allows me to transcend the experience to analyse all the data, which opens the possibility of exploring and interpreting the data more comprehensively.[61] TA goes beyond the experiential or phenomenological content of the data by identifying the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualizations, or ideologies that potentially shape and inform the semantic content of the data.[62]

Participants and Demographics

Moving from the theoretical to the practical, I will now provide the contextual information for my research. Desiring a broad cross-reference of pastors from across

[59] Smith et al., *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 24.
[60] Smith et al., *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, 27.
[61] Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 82.
[62] Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 84.

Canada, I found twenty participants from as far west as British Columbia and as far east as Nova Scotia. Typically there are far fewer than twenty participants in an IPA project in order to allow an in-depth analysis about each person's experiences.[63] Pietkiewicz and Smith strongly suggest, for example, that focusing on depth, not breadth, in the data analysis is necessary.[64] Others fix a number to the participants, arguing for no more than eight to twelve participants or as low as four.[65] As I am engaging two mutually reflective frameworks (IPA and TA), the latter framework does not suggest an ideal number of participants as the analysis transcends the experience—or the phenomenon—of the participants and engages their ideals, opinions, and assumptions.

The IPA framework also recommends that researchers be intentional in their participant selection. Smith and Osborn recommend that the researcher find a fairly homogenous sample: a closely defined group for whom the research questions will have significance.[66] Subsequently, the participants are twenty pastors or missional leaders located in urban centres across five provinces, including British Columbia, Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia. The majority of pastors interviewed were from the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area (GTHA). Although attempts were made to interview pastors from Quebec and other locales around Ontario who expressed interest in this study, these interviews did not materialise. Furthermore, I had no contact with pastors in the Maritimes (except for Nova Scotia) or in Saskatchewan or the Territories.

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[63] Pietkiewicz and Smith, "A Practical Guide," 364.

[64] Pietkiewicz and Smith, "A Practical Guide," 364.

[65] Peoples (*How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertatio*n, 49–50) recommends 8 participants and a maximum of 15 participants are ideal in a phenomenological study. Akerlund (*A Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*, 63) interviews only four participants.

[66] Smith and Osborn, "Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis," 56.

I gathered participants by emailing ministry collectives and personnel across various denominations in Canada (including Reformed, Presbyterian, Baptist, Salvation Army, and Assemblies of God churches) in order to inquire whether they or someone they knew would be willing to participate in this research project. The McMaster Research and Ethics Board approved my pamphlet and letter of introduction and intent, which were emailed to each prospective participant. The ideal pastor or missional leader had to be a leader of a church within a neighbourhood with a demographic of at least twenty-five percent lower-SES residents; that is, at least twenty-five percent of the residents within a one-kilometre radius of the church building had to be considered urban poor.[67] To be sure, poverty means different things for different people, depending on one's context, and not all the pastors or missional leaders were familiar with the percentages of poor within their own context; however, generally speaking, if there were government-assisted low-income housing complexes in the neighbourhood, below-average rental costs in high-rise apartment buildings, a high number of landed immigrants or refugees and some street involved people in close proximity to the church, these factors determined if the neighbourhood was a lower SES or not. To that end, roughly thirty-five percent of the participants (seven out of twenty interviewees) ministered in very poor neighbourhoods with the majority of residents ostensibly below the poverty line, while the remaining sixty-five percent of pastors served a mix of middle-class people and lower SES residents. Notably and unsurprisingly, the same thirty-five percent who lived in the majority lower SES neighbourhoods ministered to a

[67] Although personally I—along with the Canadian Reformed denomination that holds my credentials—hold to a complementarian view of the ecclesial offices in the church, for the purpose of this study this position was bracketed in the search for the ideal participants for this study.

majority of members within the congregation who were considered poor or not financially solvent. These same churches had difficulty attracting middle-class, financially-solvent individuals to become members of the church. This classism will be further analysed in Chapter Four.

Furthermore, one of the questions in the interview determined whether the pastor lived in close proximity to the church and whether they encouraged members to do the same. This was to determine whether they were practising what Nouwen called a ministry of presence in their community by inhabiting the space in which they ministered. Of the seven pastors serving in majority lower SES neighbourhoods, four lived in the neighbourhood, while the other three did not. Of the four that moved in, only one demanded that others must do likewise in order to serve as leaders in the church. Similarly, of the remaining thirteen pastors, all but two had moved into their neighbourhood. However, those who had moved in generally also encouraged their leadership to move in.

The age of the participants averaged in the mid-forties, and the average time in active ministry was between twelve and fifteen years. The majority of the participants were from Euro-Caucasian descent, while three were of far-east Asian descent, one of Indian descent, and another of African-Canadian descent.

Data Collection

The data collected within an IPA qualitative research framework is meant to elicit rich, detailed, and first-person (one-on-one) accounts of ministry experiences and struggles under investigation.[68] Similarly, the data collected within an TA qualitative research

[68] Pietkiewicz and Smith, "A Practical Guide," 365.

framework is meant also to elicit informed contemplation on the experiences of the participants, as well as the ideas, opinions, and attitudes of the participants.[69] As noted previously, although my interview style leaned into the semi-structure and inductive approach, the majority of the questions were structured or deductive in nature.[70]

The interview consisted of eleven questions, with four subdivisions under question nine. At least seven of the questions fell clearly into the category of a structured, deductive questionnaire. For example, I began by questioning the participants on the demographics of their local neighbourhood and the make-up of their church, and whether it was easy for them to attract the urban poor or middle-class person to their church. Next, I questioned the participants on whether their understanding of Henri Nouwen in the context of downward mobility had an impact on how they view their ministry and whether his move from Harvard to Daybreak was something to emulate or question. Although the remaining questions around home, time, wealth, and power had something of a deductive nature to them, they were able to be semi-structured and inductive as I attempted to open the question up in order to facilitate the respondent's grappling with his or her experience in connection with the four themes. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to elaborate on their answers or talk about new experiences as they arose. They were also encouraged not to worry about time, although the interviews did not typically exceed an hour. Finally, eight of the interviews took place over Zoom, while the remaining were in person.

[69] Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 81.
[70] See Appendix 2 for interview questions.

Ethical Considerations

One of the ethical concerns of qualitative research projects surrounds the power differential between the researcher and the participants. These concerns are legitimate, but in the context of this research project, I, the researcher, held no power over the people involved in the study. As a fellow pastor with credentials within the CanRC, I was interviewing pastors who held similar credentials, either within the CanRC or one of the denominations listed above.

There are also privacy concerns with the sharing of information in interviews. As the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB) points out, the loss of privacy or the leaking of sensitive information can lead to a number of issues, which could include loss of employment, ostracization by peers, adverse reaction from those in authority, damaged relationships, and so forth. To alleviate any concern about data risk, five precautions were undertaken. First, the interviews did not seek to solicit from the participant any personal failures or weaknesses that might devalue the participant. Second, data was never shared or stored in an unsafe location, but was password protected in Dropbox. Third, all transcripts are anonymized, and pseudonyms are used when references are made to a particular pastor. To that end, no specific places were mentioned, and even if the reader may be able to deduce the cities of the participants, the (pseudonymous) pastors will not be connected to any particular place if quoted in the body of the paper. Fourth, all Zoom videos will have been deleted at the completion of this project. Finally, the procedures to protect confidentiality and anonymity were approved by the MREB.

Summary

Four coalescing research themes and methods have contributed to my research: practical theology, practice-led research, phenomenology as a methodology, and two interpretive tools that serve to analyse the data set. Practical theology opens the door to understanding the context of this research project, which is engaging in theology from below with human situations that require theological reflection. Drawing the connection to Anton Boisen, it was noted that his use of the phrase "living human documents" became generative for Nouwen. He firmly believed that there was no human problem, human conflict, human happiness, or human joy which cannot lead to a deeper understanding of God's work with humanity.[71] Although correlation seems to be a natural trajectory within practical theology, it does not serve the desired end, as it undermines the authority of Scripture in the process of elevating the "living human document."

Moving from Practical Theology to Practice-Led Research, we learned that effective PLR is asking or defining the right questions concerning the practice under review. That is, if the question can be effectively defined, then the practitioner can engage with the issue which should inform the practice.[72] That practice in question is church planting and pastoring in a lower SES neighbourhood of urban Canada.

Having drawn the philosophical foundations of phenomenology from the work of Husserl, Heidegger, and Boisen, we moved more concretely into the two frameworks of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and Thematic Analysis. Independently these two frameworks lack something necessary for this research project, as the former can be too narrowly directed to the phenomenon and the latter somewhat detached from the

[71] Karwickal, "From Professional," 71.
[72] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 44.

phenomenon. However, when held together they effectively interpret the data by generating the themes that include both the phenomenon and the attitudes, ideals, and opinions of the participants.

Chapter Four explores the data obtained through the interviews with the twenty participants. As the themes are fleshed out, I will reflect on how local pastors and missional leaders are experiencing and engaging with the themes of home, time, wealth, and power, and on emerging themes derived from the data in connection to Nouwen's view of downward mobility and the urban church. This will assist me in positing some possible theories around Nouwen's perspective and the perspectives of the participants in this study, which will be reflected in more depth in Chapters Five and Six.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

In order to organize the research derived from the interviews, Osmer provides a basic tool of analysis by encouraging the researcher to answer two simple but important questions. The first question (What is going on?) will be answered by organizing the data collected from the interviews thematically through an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and a Thematic Analysis.[1] Then I will provide an introductory analysis of the material through a number of observations which will seek to explain why it is going on.

An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

To understand what is going on, I will begin with the three themes generated through the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of the interviews. These themes were not introduced in the semi-structured interviews; however, they demonstrate the existential side of the participants' practice of ministry and their ability to express their experiences and feelings surrounding the broad theme of downward and upward mobility. The themes are:

1. Conflicting emotions over the theme of this project.
2. Personal guilt with respect to the theme of this project.
3. Deep conviction in pursuit of the theme of this project.

[1] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

Conflicting Emotions over the Theme of This Project

Although I did not anticipate latent frustration regarding the broad theme of downward mobility, it became clear it was not a neutral subject, nor was it void of phenomenological engagement. I begin by exposing an area of this theme—latent frustration—that will demand more extensive theological reflection in Chapter 5.

Felix shared his frustration about downward mobility, which he felt was a cultural application of Nouwen's experience not necessarily fitting for those living on the margins. He stated: "Downward mobility is not a bad thing, per se; but you can't say this stuff to them (i.e., the urban poor). They're like: 'How much lower am I going to go? I'm already at the bottom!'" Felix considered the context of a landed immigrant. Having come to Canada quite impoverished and forced to work for every penny, he felt that Nouwen's experience was categorically different. Felix speculated that Nouwen was subconsciously operating out of some kind of internal guilt. Felix stated: "Nouwen talks about downward mobility because he had a position of privilege from which he could come down from. For Nouwen, downward mobility is a personal thing, not a universal reality."[2] Nouwen's European cultural heritage allows him to speak on this subject, whereas Felix felt he could not do the same in his context.

There were also conflicting emotions amongst several participants who questioned whether they could use this nomenclature. Quinten was forthright in his assertion that he will never speak about downward mobility because his members are downwardly mobile already. Quinten pointed out: "Those suffering from a mental

[2] Felix also shared the story of how someone grouped him in the same category with a number of European pastors and said that we have all come from a place of privilege. His response: "Privilege? What are you talking about? Do I look like a white guy to you? I fought for every inch that I have."

condition or physical disability are generally blocked from any upward movement by these two conditions, anyway." Craig commented that the church is geared toward middle-class participants, and wonders whether Nouwen's background of privilege only reinforces this disparity. Craig also noted that Nouwen was not married, which gave him an advantage in being able to pursue a downward movement from Harvard to Daybreak that does not really exist for many Christians, especially pastors and leaders serving in lower SES neighbourhoods.[3]

Personal Regret and Guilt

Regret and guilt were expressed in different ways by a number of interviewees. These feelings were generally expressed in connection to the accumulation of wealth, with some brief references to home. Notably, none of the participants expressed regret or guilt over their use of time, the second broad theme in this study, though there was a veiled reference by one participant as to whether he always used his power or authority in the most appropriate way.[4]

Quinten commented that the pressure to accumulate greater levels of equity is almost inescapable. This is a struggle for him and for others. "It is a struggle to heed the voice of Christ in relation to giving up material wealth and prosperity for Christ's sake," Quinten commented. Not heeding this voice produces a sense of latent guilt. Quinten wondered if the words of Christ to "sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Matt 19:21) were truly appropriated in his heart and in the

[3] All but one participant was married, and the one that was not married had previously been married and has two children from this marriage.

[4] One participant did share that when he exerts his power to micromanage or control the affairs of his church, it tends to backfire; he has since learned that he has to let go. This was not so much an admission of guilt as a confessed desire to engage in proper ministerial practices.

hearts of the middle-class church. “I don’t think every time I read these words or I read in church history of people who actually listened to it that neither I nor my (broader church) community is prepared to take Christ seriously,” Quinten said. Rather, “I love it as an ideal, but I don’t pursue it in practice; it seems our culture has no room for this kind of problem.” Quinten also experienced guilt connected to his pickup truck. Although it is needful, he acknowledged that “the truck creates a division between me and the urban poor.”

Feelings of guilt and regret around wealth were also expressed among other participants. Owen shared that he is good at hiding upward mobility and is thankful that Nouwen gets to the place of motivation and forces the question: “What do I truly value?” Owen feels he needs to reflect often on that question personally. For Brian, the tension around the accumulation of wealth and his understanding of what he and his wife *need* spurs him on to pray: “Protect me from riches lest I forget about you” (Prov 20:9). However, Brian is not convinced he is navigating this tension well; he feels guilt over his desire to care for his home, possibly at the cost of the church he leads. Nathan echoed the same sentiments and admitted that he still grabs onto the cultural expectations of what constitutes a comfortable life. He feels that he—along with other Christians—easily adopts the sentiments of their home culture. Finally, Ken goes further and admits that the lure of materialism is perhaps more prevalent in his life as a pastor than in the lives of congregation members. Although he did not qualify that statement, he wonders whether he is letting his materialistic lifestyle separate him from the marginalized people he works with.

Feelings of Deep Conviction to Reach the Marginalised

I begin here with an ideographic reflection, as this theme is singularly focused on one participant—Dave—who felt deeply convicted to commence a church plant in a marginalised area of one of the largest cities in central Canada. To capture the essence of this neighbourhood, he noted that people only move into this particular location when they have nowhere else to go.

Before entering this particular lower socioeconomic community, Dave and his wife moved into his wife's grandmother's house, just a few blocks from where he would be called to serve. It was an impoverished neighbourhood, and his initial response to the invitation to purchase the house was this: "I do not want to live in the slums." However, they were convinced to move in despite the forty-five-minute commute to their large middle-class church. Dave recalls commuting home from a youth program after eleven o'clock one night. Just blocks from his house he saw a two-year-old walking in diapers down the street, alone. Immediately, anger mounted in his heart, which he directed at God. In his car, he yelled aloud: "God, do you care about this place? Don't you see these people suffering?" As soon as those words left his mouth, his anger turned to fear. "I don't think I should have said that," he commented. "I was so convicted by what the Lord laid on my heart that I had to pull over onto the side of the road and tears began to well up in my eyes." He felt God saying to him: "Yes, I do see them . . . and I want to send you to them." But Dave protested: "No, I am in line for the senior pastorship. Don't do this!"

For two years, Dave argued with God, wrestled with his thoughts, and prayed alongside his wife, until one Sunday he preached a sermon that led to an epiphany. Dave

received a steady stream of compliments on the sermon, which convicted him. He summarised his thoughts this way: “All I’m doing each week is convincing Christians that they didn’t make a mistake by choosing Jesus. That’s all I’m doing . . . reassuring them to keep going.” Furthermore, he knew six guys that could fill his role at this large suburban church, but not one who was going to this difficult urban neighbourhood.

Convicted that God was calling him to serve this lower SES neighbourhood, Dave resigned from his church after twelve years of faithful service and began to minister to that struggling community. The decision to start up in a neighbourhood filled with marginalized people led him to set his salary at whatever the social assistance level was. “Whatever people on welfare get—that’s what my salary has been to this day,” he shared.[5] Dave began to walk around the neighbourhood praying and waiting for opportunities to establish a church in the community. Opportunities arose, a core team was formed, and over time a church was planted. Since Dave’s move, he has witnessed deep brokenness, unrelenting poverty, health issues, food insecurities, and more toddlers wandering the streets late at night. By God’s grace, Dave and his family were able to create a safe space in the neighbourhood for people to retreat to, where clothes and food and other resources are shared, mentorship and tutoring happen, a compassionate community of believers grows together, and Christ is faithfully preached.

Dave’s deep conviction to minister to the impoverished and the downcast was mirrored in almost all the interviewees, to varying degrees. Many left their extended families in one part of the country to plant their ministry in another; many were determined to stay in impoverished communities even as their friends lived in middle-

[5] Dave did note that at times he has had to supplement his income with side jobs, such as officiating weddings, among other things.

class neighbourhoods or rural acreage and sometimes criticized their moves. For example, Nate mentioned that not only family members questioned his decision to move into a particular neighbourhood, but other pastors. They asked him: “Why would you want to work in that community? Why plant there?”

Pursuing Christ according to this conviction was not easy for the interviewees. Nolen mentioned that his family has suffered from bed bugs twice and scabies once because they hosted people in their home. He reasoned: “It is hard to show the love of Christ, to invite people into our home, and to build that kind of community without it costing us in some way.” Nolen was nonetheless happy to report that about thirty percent of his congregation shows this kind of radical hospitality. Ed commented on how hard it was to step out in faith and become vulnerable for the Kingdom, when everything in him was telling him to play it safe. He and other participants found this especially difficult due to the effect on their families, specifically their children. Generally, the issue around their children was not safety—although one pastor did question whether people from his SES neighbourhood would hurt his children—but a desire to pursue what was best for their kids. For a number of the interviewees, this translated into putting their children into as many programs as possible. Ed reflected that he struggled with determining what was best for his kids, because he knew this concern could lead him to idolize his children over the Kingdom of Christ.

A Thematic Analysis of Seven Major Themes

Having engaged three emotive themes generated from the dataset, I will continue with a Thematic Analysis of the four themes that made up my semi-structured interview: (1) Home, (2) Time, (3) Wealth, and (4) Power. Additionally, three more themes were

generated through the data analysis: (5) *Kenosis*, (6) Preaching and Evangelism, and (7) Nouwen as an Exemplary Model. The first four themes were superimposed on the dataset, as they were included in the interview questions.[6] The three other themes developed from a careful reading of the dataset, and summarised ideas and concepts that appear most frequently across the interviews.[7]

Home: An Analysis

Within the missional context, home is far more than a shelter that accommodates inhabitants. In some ways, it is at the heart of the ministry of the church. It is also the touchstone of many issues today. Ken put it well: "If there was another Socrates today, at the heart of his elenctic method of questioning would be the theme of home and homelessness. Where is your home? What are you trying to do with your home?" These are questions that demand critical thinking, especially as the church desires to be planted in lower socio-economic communities in urban Canada. Under the broad theme of home, four sub-themes were derived: Location, Motivation, The American Dream, and Displacement.

Location

Of the twenty pastors interviewed, fourteen moved into the area where they are church planting and ministering. Of the six who did not, one said they were unable to do so due to the incessant demands it would place on their family; a few others lived in homes

[6] That is to say, these themes were generated from a careful reading of Nouwen's corpus.

[7] Another theme or concept that continued to appear was *gentrification*. Although an important reality in our ever-changing urban core, it does not change the reality that there will always be people on the margins living in our cities that need to hear and be transformed by the Gospel. I have chosen not to include this in the list of themes generated from the dataset.

provided for them (leased) by the church, so they had no say in the matter; and for the remaining pastors, the epicentre of their ministry had changed geographically and they were still living in the area of the initial plant.

Of interest is that all of the church leaders saw the spiritual value of living close to their place of ministry and worship. Brian summarised the sentiment shared by many of the other participants: “My wife and I needed to have a home where the people are as walking proximity to your place of worship shows you actually can be present in your community.” Dave commented that a ministry of presence is all about community, connection, and belonging. Owen called it a need for a sense of belonging. Two participants shared that the concept of home defined their story as a church. Their churches regularly meet in the living rooms of various members, not simply because rental and real estate costs are so high in the urban core, but also with the purpose of building closer relationships with the attendees. The inverse of this reality is living far from the church’s place of worship and meeting. Ken quipped: “It is difficult to invite people to your church if you live forty minutes away.”

Having embraced the home as a ministry opportunity, about half of the interviewees also encouraged their membership to move into the urban neighbourhoods. This was typically done in one-on-one settings. Nick shared: “I have never communicated this from the pulpit, but encouraged members privately to think about where they live through a theological and spiritual lens.” He said elsewhere: “If asked, I would tell them to live in the city—in the heart of the city—where we can have the greatest impact for the Kingdom.” It should be noted, however, that participants who serve churches where the majority of the members are marginalized do not address this

matter of moving in or staying in their local community, as housing security is such a challenge. As Owen pointed out, those living on the margins generally do not have the option to move: "When they find something secure, they hold on to it." Subsequently, the dataset shows that encouragement was typically given to those who were more upwardly mobile (financially speaking) and able to move.

One participant raised the issue of colonisation within the context of the move-in model. He queried whether relocating and moving into a neighbourhood fed a kind of take-over mentality. He did not define "take-over," although he said that some might be suspicious of such a model.[8] However, in contrast, Craig affirmed that Jesus came down and was in-fleshed in a particular neighbourhood. "This aspect of intentionality, of entering into the place that God has invited you to walk, has shaped a lot of my own views," stated Craig. "Our church is wrestling with that reality, even as I speak."

Motivation

In addition to being present in a community, another motivating factor for pastors to move their homes to SES neighbourhoods was to practise localised hospitality. This seemed to be a key spoke in the wheel of moving, and almost all the participants had something to contribute to this conversation. "We try to model, without forcing it on our members, what it means to be hospitable even in the little space we may have. Hospitality is key to serving people," claimed Ken. Frank stressed that everyone must see their home as a ministry centre. In fact, the question is this: "Is my home a place where I can

[8] This is certainly a concern if this forces what may be called "gentrified displacement." That is, if by moving in the new owners are removing poor people from their residences to benefit their own economic advantage, suspicion can rise. Conn (*Urban Ministry*, 291) questions asks: "Can community transformation be realised without having to displace the people Christ admonished us to care for?"

welcome believers to help them grow in their faith and unbelievers to help them come to know Jesus Christ?" Frank went on: "If that is not something you do, then God needs to do a work on your heart." Although he doesn't underestimate the need for the home or the apartment to be a safe haven— "where you can just go, 'huh,' and be family"—he stressed that homes are gifts from above that need to be leveraged for God's Kingdom. Craig also extends this kind of challenge to his congregation, encouraging them to show radical hospitality by going beyond their own social and economic strata. "This kind of hospitality opens the door for hearts to be changed when they are exposed to the living Christ, the beauty of Christ, and what He has done that has eternal significance for them," added Ed.

The Power of the American Dream

In the context of home, the so-called American Dream might be described like this: "The opportunity available to every American or Canadian allowing the highest aspirations and goals to be achieved."[9] Nick noted that he felt that his congregation's desire to live on acreage is sort of the new American Dream. Nick also shared that during the Covid-19 pandemic, people began to move from the city to bigger properties with bigger homes to fulfil these aspirations. "Maybe it was a kind of reprieve from a sense of dissatisfaction that many felt on account of Covid," he queried. "More security and permanence. Such a longing for permanence is good. It speaks to our *imago Dei*—and a longing for a real home," Nick postulated. But Nick wonders if his congregation is motivated more by immediate satisfaction than by the beatific vision of the new heaven and new earth. He

[9] Barone, "What Is the American Dream?"

reasoned that everyone is looking for their true home: a place where they belong, and a place where they can be accepted. However, as Ed pointed out, the irony is that no-one will ever fully find their perfect home on earth, even if they expend all their efforts trying to find it.[10]

Other participants shared similar concerns. Brian asserted that we talk about our homes a lot because they are what we value most. Sadly, he argued, this value is often not ministry related. Nolen put it like this: "When 'our' members consider renting or buying, it is mostly just a financial consideration or an aesthetic choice . . . rarely is there a mission component to it like, 'Where might God be pleased to send me and use me for the good of his kingdom?' Then, as the home becomes the focus, the cycle for more, for bigger, and for better can quickly consume." This cycle is self-perpetuating, as Dave noted, because a bigger home translates into a bigger mortgage, which means more stress and more home-focus, tethering the Christian to bricks and mortar and not to ministry. Ed bemoaned the fact that some of his members "always find time to work on the home and do the next renovation to improve the home, only to sell and do it again." He asked: "How can that not adversely affect our witness?" Ted agreed, and stated that when his church was initially planted, members were seemingly very committed to the vision of their church and their local community, but as families grew and parents wanted their children to have the same experiences as they had (or wished they had), vacations were extended, cottages were bought, and members subconsciously moved out. Ted concluded: "I am not sure what to call this."

[10] Keller summarises this reality brilliantly in his book, *Counterfeit Gods*, where he engages the themes of money, power, glory, sex, and other hidden idols of the heart.

Conversely, a few interviewees shared stories of members pressing against the so-called American dream. Nathan once visited a member in a large rural house. It was a dream home, but only a year and a half later this member sold it and built a much smaller one. Nathan asked why he suddenly downsized, given that he loved his first home so much. The member replied: "I recognized how much my house was displacing God. I became very proud of my achievements and focused on the home more and more, and it started to consume me. So, I got rid of it, built a smaller home, and was able to put my life into proper perspective again." As Nathan commented, this congregant "was able to recognize the sin within upward mobility." Ken shared a similar story. He witnessed a snowball effect when a dozen members of his congregation leveraged their homes for Christ's Kingdom. Their stories, stated Ken, reflected the "bigger reality that they don't own their homes; their homes belong to the Lord. His name is on the mortgage." Eden put this issue into a question form by asking: "How can we honour God with what He has given us? When there are lots of funds you might not choose to live in a mansion, but in a smaller house in order to be able to give more back to God. For when God has blessed you financially, it is not just for you: it is also for others."

Displacement

Some participants argued that their move into a lower SES area was a form of displacement. Whether they moved to a smaller home, a less-attractive neighbourhood, or further away from family, it was invariably a form of displacement. Indeed, it is hard to show the love of Christ, invite people into your home, and build community without it costing you in some way. Nick summed up displacement well: "When God calls you to live in a certain impoverished community, you might need to give up a certain idealised

version of what your house is, and where it is." Nick continued with the example of William and Catherine Booth, the founders of the Salvation Army, who rooted their identity in Christ and for his sake were willing to be displaced in an impoverished area of east London. For many pastors and congregants, the question is: "Am I willing to be displaced for Christ?"

This willingness is rooted in Christ. "Christ's ministry was so personal; Jesus walked with the poor, the outcast . . . and for this reason, my wife and I chose to buy our home on this street . . . and put our kids in the public school," said Brian. The purpose of their active displacement (a sacrifice in varying ways) was to be present in their neighbourhood. Another honest pastor called displacement such a tall order that he struggled to be willing. For this reason, each of the interviewees saw displacement as a personal journey. Although generally they displayed willingness to be displaced for Christ, not all were in a position to displace themselves voluntarily.

Time: An Analysis

The issue of time generated a lot of interest and discussion during the interviews. To that end, two sub-themes were generated out of the data set: Relativity of Time, and Practising a Ministry of Presence.

Relativity of Time

It became clear through the interviews that the dynamic of time differs in relation to one's class and vocation. Those who are upwardly mobile or middle-class and those who are on the margins experience time differently. Leaders who spoke for marginalized attendees or lower SES communities in which they serve described time in the context of

surviving, rather than managing. Dave noted that most of his members are not bound or controlled by time; put another way, his community stands under time and does not feel they can or must manage it. Rather, the question that many ask subconsciously is this: "How do I make time bearable?" This was true for all churches where the majority live on the margins.

However, for the middle-class church member, time is managed between tight work schedules, busy social activities, family demands, religious duties, and commitments and opportunities. Ed posed this question with a few of his members: "What are you pouring your time into?" The answer to the question about one's use of time says a lot about the heart. Ed pressed this a bit further: "Why is it that we can find time to do more work on our homes but never enough time to minister to people in the church or community?" Quinten was a little more circumspect about the use of time. "Investment of time and trying to accomplish something measurable within a time period is critical to any schedule. You need to be able to identify that you spent this amount of time and accomplished these goals," he quipped. Still, as Nick points out, efficiency can become the enemy of incarnational, downwardly mobile living.

Practising a Ministry of Presence

The most powerful use of time, repeated consistently throughout the interviews, was presentness. Nouwen stresses the importance of a ministry of presence, and this was corroborated by most of the participants in this study. Ted summarised this reality: "Every true mission or movement has its roots in communicating and living out Christ's presence with people who need it." Dave concurred: "Presence is probably the most powerful thing in a neighbourhood." This means that the church needs to be casually

present, not just slavishly bound to programs and activities. In his ministry, Craig discovered the importance of being physically present to hear people's stories. For Craig, the path of downward mobility involves cultivating the reality that human stories are part of pastoral work and entering into the contexts of members through listening is critical.

Theologically, practising a ministry of presence is following a divine prerogative. One pastor asked rhetorically: "Why did God go through the trouble of coming in the person of Jesus Christ if he could have sent another tablet? He chose flesh because his time was given to us, not scripted and controlled, but effective. Life on earth is very important; just being present is an essential part of ministry." We have been saved to serve, and service and time walk hand in hand. Frank pointed out that, as with the theme of home, time needs to be visited within the context of the second chapter of Philippians, where we find the Christ-hymn summarizing Christ's willingness to take on human flesh in order to dwell among us and die in our stead. Prior to the hymn, the Apostle calls the church to have the same attitude as Christ.

A ministry of presence is marked by humility. Furthermore, it has significant challenges. Fiona noted that when middle-class people are invited to "waste time" with the community, their immediate response is often: "I want to do something." But, Fiona reiterates, "the best thing you can do is sit at the table and just be. Just listen and talk." Stuart corroborates this approach, saying that spending time with people—even if it is just talking politics or likes and dislikes—is important in building relationships." Of course, he adds, doing this through a Bible study is most valuable. Still, as Quinten pointed out, love requires presence without an agenda.

What about when a ministry leader is too busy with scheduled meetings, preparations for Sunday, pastoral visits, and so forth? A number of interviewees weighed in on this question indirectly. Ken stated: "We were created to go six kilometres an hour, not one thousand. We are trying to be superhuman, but we need to act like humans who are dependent on an eternal God." Ken confessed that being enslaved to time is an idol that he needs to crucify in his own life. And Craig asks: "How do we model time for others?"

Wealth: An Analysis

In some ways, the theme of wealth ran like a thread through all the other themes. The religion of upward mobility (as Nouwen called it), or consumerism (as it is more commonly understood), is an idol that is manifest in where and how we live. Applying a Thematic Analysis to the dataset on the theme of wealth, I generated three sub-themes: The Socialising Impact of Wealth, Arrival Mentality; and Contentment or Simplicity.

The Socialising Impact of Wealth

One of the interview participants referenced Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, specifically the "social imaginary." Explaining the phrase, Nick commented that "when you have a certain level of economic prosperity and security, something changes in you at the subconscious level . . . if you are not very vigilant about the way you think about yourself in the context of God's Kingdom, it changes you."[11] Nick shared some anecdotal

[11] To highlight the connection between what Nick is sharing and Taylor's "social imaginary," see Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 171–72, 210. Further, this change in the subconscious that Nick speaks of seems to be connected to expectations in which the immediacy of access—e.g. a sudden increase in wealth—takes hold of one's imagination, and not always for the good of others.

evidence to that end. He stated: "I have seen people move up the mobility trajectory, and when you talk to them, you realise they talk and think differently—it is like they forget what it is like to not have ready access to money. They still see themselves as social warriors, maybe, but their understanding of poverty is low and ironically quite impoverished." Nick noted an illness among middle-class members of his local church who were absent psychologically and spiritually from those who struggle. In a similar vein, Connor was asked incredulously: "Wait, not everyone goes on vacation?"

In order to address the perceived social imaginary around money, Nick sometimes sits down with those who found themselves increasing in wealth and gently inquires about its personal effects, specifically in regard to their attitude toward the marginalized. This question, he argued, serves to help people to think through their *a priori* views on wealth and living in light of Christ's will for their lives.

The social distance between those who have been and those who still are marginalized may be larger than we admit. Some call this social conditioning. Denise does not object to middle-class growth in the church because, as she shared, we *need* those who are moving up the mobile ladder to financial stability; however, her concern mirrors Nick's concern. She is worried that if the middle-class mindset is not challenged, these members will not understand the shared values and participate in the shared mission of those who are on the margins.[12] Ed summarised the issues well when he argued that consumerism makes it easy to become one with the world, because it is difficult to realise how much we are influenced by our materialistic culture and consumed with building an

[12] Taylor (*A Secular Age*, 180) sees the good in this and calls this impetus to money-making a "calm passion" that, when it takes hold in society, can help to control and inhibit violent passions. However, this supposed societal benefit of money-making is a reductionistic way of looking at the pursuit of money because it can easily move into the pathology of greed.

earthly kingdom. For Dave, the irony in Scripture is that the rich and affluent are probably more broken and spiritually depraved than the poor. He finds it interesting, however, that Jesus did not go to the rich and the affluent first; this may be, Dave postulates, because it would take more than three years to get through the layers of spiritual blindness formed by excess money and greed.

At the same time, it was noted that no one is exempt from the pull of consumerism and greed. Fiona noted that the urban poor and street-involved also struggle with hoarding possessions. She commented: "We as humans want to fill something inside of us with outside things." As a church, she noted, "we are trying to journey together towards something different than that; we are trying to find the simplicity of things in Christ." Stuart likewise had a word of caution in regard to "them and us" terminology when it comes to the wealthy and the poor in our congregations. It is not just the wealthy in our congregations that might be captivated by possessions; the poor are captivated by the same desire.

Arrival Mentality

Arrival mentality is connected to the American dream. People strive to "arrive" at a specific financial status and live the comfortable lifestyle that affirms their arrival. Through the interviews, I learned that the arrival mentality may especially exist among second and third-generation immigrants. One of the interviewees spoke candidly about his experience as a second-generation Chinese immigrant. The message from his parents was that he needed to arrive at the lifestyle they were not able to achieve themselves. He put it like this: "There is a cultural dynamic at play that shapes our framework of having to move towards financial solvency and enter the next economic strata." Stuart, a third-

generation Dutch immigrant, shared a similar concern, which he says is also present among his own demographic. The same unspoken—and at times spoken—push to be more financially secure than his immigrant grandparents has led him towards this kind of upwardly mobile arrival mentality.

It was no surprise to hear a few interviewees share that moving into a lower SES community to minister has distanced them from family and friends. Dave pointed out he and his fellow church leaders felt a silent critique for pushing against the arrival mentality. His leadership team expressed: "We feel like we are different from our friends now." Dave summarised the pushback that he felt from fellow Christians, who were essentially saying: "We feel bad that you're working in this ministry and living in this neighbourhood." Others would say: "When are you moving back?" Some would ask: "I imagine this is a temporary stay?" The perceived temporality of living in a lower SES neighbourhood affirms the common view that someone has not arrived until they own a larger home and land to call their own.

Contentment or Simplicity

The Apostle Paul learned the secret of being content. "Whether well fed or hungry (Phil 4:12)," he had what he needed: Jesus Christ. I questioned the interviewees as to what contentment or simplicity looks like in their ministry. I also shared what it meant for Nouwen to give up his salary and lifestyle at Harvard for a room at Daybreak as a caregiver for people with disabilities.

Nick noted that there is nothing essentially virtuous about being poor. Christ, he pointed out, brings us to a place of flourishing prosperity—not in terms of material riches, but spiritual riches. Similarly, he added, there is nothing wrong with having

possessions or being rich with good things. “We also don’t remind people they are poor, and that they’re in a particular situation; we want to elevate with the Gospel.” Nick questioned: “Why do you pursue these things, and what is your motivation?” He continued, “Poor and rich are both encouraged by the Apostle Paul to learn the secret of being content.” Not surprisingly, one of Nick’s aims in his church is to bring people back to the true sense of contentment: satisfaction in Christ.

A number of the interviewees felt that their church did not struggle with the insatiable pull to have more and were genuinely content. Most of Ted’s members are good at using their resources as tools for Christ’s Kingdom, and make purchases that bless the community more than themselves. Brian noted that his launch team is very generous and willing to help others in need. Connor pointed out that he finds his church has an aversion to being slick, looking really nice, and having new toys—because that does not impress anyone and it is not meant to either. Still, the majority of the interviewees commented that there is an insatiable yearning of the heart for more, and affirmed that this needs to be confronted in churches and addressed regularly from Scripture.

At least one leader found Nouwen’s downwardly mobile experience of a simple life to be generative in his life said he was drawn to Nouwen’s contemplation and was led to this question: “What does simplicity invite us into?” At this same time, Owen admitted that honesty is needed, for when blessings abound, we need to know how to leverage them for Christ. Others have learned practical ways to appropriate contentment. Fiona stressed the importance of Jesus’ teaching about the necessity of both giving and receiving, and stated that we are all built for that duality. Nolen encourages people to

give "faithfully, sacrificially and cheerfully at least until it hurts" in order to foster a spirit of contentment. At the same time, he denounces materialism as the thing that will not bring lasting satisfaction: only Christ can do so. Quinten had a final prognosis: "I don't feel that materialism is fading, but is actually gaining power in the church."

Power and Powerlessness: An Analysis

This theme evoked a lot of emotion and generated the most eclectic responses. This may be because power wears different faces, depending on the person wielding it. A comparison of marginalised people with little power, those who are delegated power due to their position, those who assume power because of their social status, and those who abuse their power in order to keep it will demonstrate different results across the board. Even the question "Is the church a power broker?" produces a range of responses surrounding the relationship of power and the church.[13] When does the exertion of power become an issue in the church? Answers were found in the Thematic Analysis of the dataset, and the three sub-themes generated: Empowerment, Power and Control, and Christ and Powerlessness.

Empowerment

The interviewees generally took time to clarify how they understood power and its place in the church. Nick stated: "Power is good. Authority and influence in themselves are good. In fact, we were created to rule, and so one day we will rule with Christ . . . But sin

[13] Beach (*Church in Exile*, 46) engages this theme in connection to the changing status of the church in the West: "It is fair to say that the church is one of those former power brokers who once enjoyed a place of influence at the cultural table but has been chased away from its place of privilege and is now seeking to find where it belongs in the ever-changing dynamics of contemporary culture."

entered the world and distorts the good in power." Nick argued that power melded with sin keeps Christian leaders from questioning their use of it. Nick reflects on this question: "How do I give away power as much as I can to people because I do not want them to feel disempowered in the church?" He articulated his reason for considering this: "Disempowered people are often discouraged people, and it may be that you discourage them from practising their faith, from giving, from charity." Felix corroborates this point by saying that everybody has power, even if they are not aware of it. For Felix, this means stating your privilege. "I am middle class . . . and so I do middle-class things whether I am aware of it or not." For Ed, power provides the vehicle to influence and empower others around you. However, it is possible to turn people away because they are powerless. It is possible, says Ed, to make people feel that they do not measure up and that their attire or status does not meet an entry requirement. They may sense some implicit judgement and wonder: "What did I do wrong?" Or they may think: "These people are better than me."

The notion of power in the church is as wide as it is deep. Quinten is concerned that people from the lowest economic strata feel completely powerless because their lives are managed by others. He postulated: "Sometimes the only power they have is the choice to go to church or not." Stuart noted that typically the disempowered or marginalised go forward in the mindset that they are basically garbage and cannot stand on their own feet. He stated: "They think based on the clothes we (those in power) have, cars we drive, even the language we speak, that they can't be that—Christianity is not attainable for them. The result for some, then, in coming to Christ, is a status level, rather than being vulnerable and repenting before the Lord and putting faith in Christ."

Our calling is to seek relationships with those who are disempowered so they can see that they are truly beloved of God. Fiona shared that as leaders, "we recognize we have power." We hold the keys to the building. However, she stated: "We do not like the power differential demonstrated in the 'us vs them'; that is, us serving them (community members) who receive from us." One antidote to the "us vs them" dynamic in Fiona's community was to have community members (often the street-involved) serve the staff and everyone in line. Craig's church plant also seeks to mitigate any power struggle. One of their solutions was to acknowledge that Jesus is the senior pastor. They were intentional about dividing the power and levelling the leadership. Then he quipped with a note of accomplishment: "Most people would not know that I am the lead pastor." Dave noted that the power really is in the priesthood of all believers; subsequently, he stated: "I have never put myself out there in the community as the leader—I am just an average person."

The notion of power as it relates to Christ was also commented on. Of course, Jesus used the power at his disposal for good. Ed argued that we cannot forget that "Jesus had the power to destroy the devil in the wilderness during his temptations and the power to come down from the cross. But he didn't use it. He gave it up." This should inform our understanding of the use of power. Since Christ emptied himself for others, Frank asks his members this pointed question: "How are you thinking, through the use of your power dynamic, for areas of good and justice?"

A timely word to sum up the sub-theme of empowerment was given by Dave. He shared this simple truth: "Power is realised when we empower others." Maybe the most powerful thing we have as leaders in Christ's church is the ability to empower others.

Finally, Nolen pointed out that "God doesn't value people differently; people on the lower socio-economic scale or in the chain of authority as a president may have different roles, but they do not have different values in God's eyes."

Power and Control

As I was analysing the interviews, the theme of control began to appear occasionally. The honesty of Nick on this point is refreshing. He shared that a lot of his desire for control stems from the fear that if he does not exercise this authority in this way, the church will fall apart. Yet, he concluded: "When I do this, I may end up not having a church after all." On the other hand, Quinten has seen that individuals in the church who have strong, forceful personalities but no power or influence often become bullies: "The only thing they can do is exercise their power to intimidate. I have been frustrated by this exercise of power and have had to call people out for that." In a related way, Brian noted this kind of subversive control by men who assume leadership positions in the church despite not being spiritually ready. Brian noted that he has had to challenge these men to work on their spiritual character, which sometimes leads to a power struggle.

Christ and Powerlessness

All interviewees reflected on the life and death of Christ in relation to the theme of power. Dave argued that "at the centre of Jesus' gospel ministry were the marginalised, the broken, the sick, the weak, the disenfranchised, and the powerless." He exhorted: "If that is at the centre of Christ's gospel and message, his people need to be there too." Nate saw the demonstration of Christ's powerlessness as being extremely powerful. "He had more power over the systems of the world, because he turned it all upside down." In an

idiographic way, Nate shared a story he often reflects on in connection to Christ's ministry, which has also helped shape his own ministry:

> I remember playing hockey one time, and the fellow, you know, everyone wanted him to fight, and he could have, he's pretty strong and boxed . . . for fun. But he knew how to handle himself. All he would do was just smile, and skate away smiling; he had more power over these people than if he fought, he had more power over the people who wanted him to fight as many lost control of themselves and lost the ability to play the game.

At the same time, the theme of Christ's powerlessness, as Nouwen articulates it, was partially contested by a number of the pastors. Nathan said boldly: "I don't agree with the premise that Jesus became powerless. He confronted the Pharisees and the Sadducees, even Pilate. He spoke with authority. He wasn't uncomfortable with power. He also had the power to come down from the cross. He only became powerless insofar as he did not exert his power on the cross." Much of this Nouwen would agree with, but Nate and others parted from Nouwen in the applications of Christ's power and powerlessness for his followers. Nathan continued: "Therefore, I'm not quite sure the church should become powerless." Ted agreed, and provided an existential reason for this. He shared that there was a time in his ministry when he chose to become powerless: "I sought to serve. I gave up power to connect with my neighbour. But this transformed into worse despair and hopelessness, and I became powerless. I set out to do something good, but by it I became powerless. When I think of the cross through this lens, it is not something to emulate."

Instructive for Ted in his understanding of power was Andy Crouch's book *Playing God*. Crouch highlights that Christians have done both power-over (maybe like the religious right), and power-under (possibly like the Amish community). However,

Christ's power is not over or under, only transformative.[14] Crouch used the example of his cello teacher, Dane, who did not lose his own power by teaching his students cello, but empowered them; this, in turn, made Dane himself more powerful.[15] So, contended Ted, "Christians shouldn't lose their power to minister in this world, but employ it for the good of the world."

Kenosis: Incarnational Living

Although this is not one of the four themes directly addressed in my interviews, approximately half of the interviewees shared some reflection on Phil 2:6–11, where we read about Christ's *kenosis.* Drawing from the passage, the interviewees made connections to their own ministries and calls to live incarnationally.

The word *kenosis* is found in Phil 2:7, where the Greek reads: ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών: "but himself he emptied, taking the form of a slave." The words ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν are translated differently in various translations, including "made himself nothing"; "gave up his divine privileges" (NLT); or "but he lowyde him silf" (Wycliffe). These phrases capture the basic essence of *kenosis*. According to Moisés Silva, there have been a number of distinct interpretations of this phrase, and most of them can be plausibly defended.[16] Moisés argues that the Word is connected to "becoming flesh" in the previous verse.[17] The reality is that Jesus gave up his position and status to join humanity. J. A. Motyer, in *The Bible Speaks Today,* notes that the

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[14] Crouch, *Playing God*, 213–16. The idea of power over and power under is also stated as high-power distance and low-power distance. See also Crouch, "It's Time to Talk about Power."

[15] Crouch's point is that his power to play the cello does not do damage to Dane's power. This, Crouch (*Playing God*, 41) notes, is what game theory calls a positive-sum transaction: at the end of the lesson, the total amount of power in the world to play the cello has increased.

[16] Silva, *Philippians*, 103. Silva does point out that the very diversity of interpretations should warn us not to move from the ambiguous word to the meaning of the passage as a whole, but vice versa.

[17] Silva, *Philippians*, 103.

reflexive pronoun here points to the voluntary nature of Christ's incarnation.[18] Jesus' emptying of himself, as much as it is a mystery for finite minds, is what has inspired a number of pastors to engage in pastoral ministry.

Frank stated that our attitude should be like Jesus—that is, we need to do all things in light of *kenosis* and his humility, without complaining or arguing. For Brian, the example of Christ's ministry fueled a desire to walk with greater compassion. Since Christ's ministry to the poor was so personal, Brian's desire to share the same compassion has grown. Nick contended that since Christ became one of us, became poor, and lived among the marginalised, "we must also be willing to go into these places, not just to give as a charitable act, but to model what incarnational ministry looks like for the poor." He also shared that his leaders try to model Christ's "going" because of who he is: a compassionate and serving Lord.

Owen also encourages his congregation to put Christ's incarnation at the centre of their ministry: "When you do that, much of the upward mobility trajectory that you and I are on is going to start to smell funny." Nathan shared a similar point: "In my journey to pastoral ministry, I did not connect the dots right away to Jesus' *kenosis*, but it did come with the territory, because I gave up a lucrative position. However, for me it wasn't emptying really: it was becoming overwhelmed in a good way, with the privilege and joy of the task of ministry."

[18] Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, Ch. 2.

Church Ministries: Gospel Proclamation

The themes of church ministries and gospel proclamation move from static nouns to active verbs, and from concepts to practice. Although this widens the thematic field, the idea of proclaiming the gospel appeared frequently within the dataset. This should not surprise the reader, as the interviewees were generally in a position to engage in gospel ministry through preaching or evangelism. Under the theme of church ministries, I will look at two sub-themes: Preaching, and Evangelism.

Preaching

Dave shared that preaching ought to be aimed at the whole community: the poor, the financially solvent, the mentally ill, those with disabilities, the physically sick, the aged, those under marital stress, and the lonely, whether rich or poor. In connection to preaching, Dave stated: “The downward way of Christ in walking with the poor, the marginalised, the prostitute, the disabled, and the tax collector reveals something that should not be lost on us.” Craig points out that as a pastor you are not just teaching people, but you are learning from their social context as well; it is important to know the social and spiritual needs of your community as a preacher of the gospel. Quinten said it well: “I want to communicate in my preaching the elevation of honour and respect to those who are marginalised and to give them a place at the table.” Felix defended God’s design for the community: “The rich and the poor belong together. They need each other. They both need to be fed the gospel and be built into a spiritual house of faith.” Owen sees the importance of quoting voices that are marginalised in his sermons. He stated: “I’m more hyperconscious of which voices I’m amplifying, and try to de-centre my

library in its whiteness to include black, brown, and indigenous voices, theologians, and commentators."

Evangelism

Moving from the preacher to the pew, the membership of urban churches is also strongly encouraged to share the gospel. One of Dave's concerns was that when the church gets well established, its structure and programs begin to take over and the membership begins to serve the structure and not the mission of the church, which is to reach the lost through evangelism. Frank addressed this privation of love for the lost by asking his congregation: "What is your go?" He typically addresses this from the pulpit when he preaches the so-called Great Commission and the call to disciple the nations from Matthew 28. He states: "Wherever you are, that is your go. If your go is your workplace, that is your go. If it is your neighbourhood, your school, your community sports, whatever it is, that is your go." He concludes by saying: "Ask God to show you your go!" That is, who is the Lord calling you to share the gospel with in your daily life and work? Nolen also encouraged his congregation to strive to be neighbours to everyone God puts on their path. At his church, there is a unique focus and push for gospel ministry among those who care for suffering loved ones, as these are the tired and worn caregivers of the community.

Nouwen as an Exemplary Model

The final theme from the dataset grew out of the last question of the interview: "Is Nouwen's move from Harvard to Daybreak something to be emulated or questioned?" The answers to this question provided a window into how pastors understand Nouwen's

theology and praxis. The majority of the pastors had limited knowledge of Nouwen's journey; many were not aware of the phenomenological reasons that precipitated Nouwen's move from Harvard to Daybreak. Nouwen's lack of purpose, feelings of angst and loneliness, and spiritual crisis at Harvard were generally outside the purview of the interviewees. However, Nouwen's move was generally viewed in the context of the theme of downward mobility, which I presented to them in relation to serving those living in lower SES in our cities. That said, this question was helpful in addressing my research question.

Only one pastor answered in a clear affirmative: "Yes, Nouwen's move is to be emulated." Dave reasoned that "if at the centre of the gospel are the marginalised, weak, and powerless, and if serving them is following the selfless Christ on the path of downward mobility, then I think that is where we need to be." Conversely, only one voice answered with a firm "No," and his reason was that Nouwen's context was drastically different from his. Ted pointed out: "Nouwen was single and didn't have any kids. If I want to move and serve the disabled, I can't. That ship has sailed." One participant contested the question because he did not like either/or questions. Still, he joined the majority who said that although we cannot all follow Nouwen's steps, we can all learn from him. Finally, two pastors questioned Nouwen's actions because of the supposed need among the affluent. Brian noted: "Christ calls us to reach all people . . . therefore, we need people to reach the affluent, as well." "Nouwen," he argued, "was in a place to connect with them at Harvard and felt he could have stayed to reach them." Craig also didn't feel that Nouwen provided much of an example because God moves in different ways with people in places of affluence. However, he questioned: "What Nouwen teaches

us is to commune with discernment—how do we listen to God, and how do we do this in the community?"

Still, the majority of participants agreed that there is something to learn from Nouwen's move, though their answers varied. Owen, who is well versed in Nouwen's writings, noted that what needs to be emulated is Nouwen's listening to the voice of the Spirit and readiness to heed his calling. Still, Owen wonders whether Nouwen weighed this calling with the witness of Scripture, the community of believers, and a deep sense of conviction. Whether or not Nouwen did so in equal measure, Owen felt that he modelled a relational trust in sharing his burdens with others and wrestling with his own sense of calling. What ultimately stood out for Owen was Nouwen's willingness to be displaced and to embrace his chance to serve people with disabilities at Daybreak.

Quinten followed a similar thought pattern. Who could say that "Nouwen was misguided when you consider his writings and the influence that he has had?" In fact, Quinten continued, "Nouwen's influence becomes all that much greater because of the integrity he showed in his commitments and sacrifice." Quinten did not think Nouwen can be perfectly emulated necessarily, but he said: "Nouwen's example provides a corrective to the way we think and what our goals are. We are not citizens of this world but heaven, and the wealth we accumulate is not what we should put our hope in."

A few interviewees, as noted above, addressed the theme of calling. Eden noted that we cannot emulate Nouwen for the sake of emulating him, but we are called to learn from him. "Going to L'Arche was Nouwen's calling, but behind that calling was the way he saw people and his desire to build community with them—to spend time with people in order to listen, to learn, to love, and to grow with them and because of them." There

are many ways for that to happen, Eden pointed out, but one fact is certain: “As soon as you want to connect with people, you have to slow down and meet them at their pace.” Frank noted: “That was (Nouwen’s) go! His go was to move to L’Arche.” Felix shared that one’s go must always be Christ-centred. So, the question is not necessarily “Do we follow Nouwen or not?” but “Are we willing to follow people like him who have radically obeyed Christ’s call: ‘I am sending you . . . will you go?’” Finally, Nate, who was also well-versed in Nouwen’s existential reality, pointed out that since Nouwen’s soul was being battered at Harvard, he had to go. God was leading him through this valley of spiritual darkness to find joy and peace in serving at L’Arche. Nate surmised: “I think Nouwen found joy and peace at L’Arche, although this doesn’t mean he or we will be without our struggles or without our detractors when we follow God’s call.”

It was noted that Nouwen’s decision to leave Harvard for L’Arche was less critical than his heart for people who were experiencing hurt, suffering, and disabilities. A few of the participants spoke of Nouwen’s compassion. One participant remarked that Nouwen’s transition has been a huge influence on how he sees his own life and ministry. Nouwen, he argued, “points past himself to Jesus, who chose to be with the marginalized, the weak, the powerless, and the poor.” These are the people Jesus drew out and still seeks out. Another participant noted that you do not really feel the gospel gain traction until you’re among the poor and the suffering (the people for whom Christ came first). “In our church,” Nolen stated, “there is a particular push for caring for those living life on the margins and for those who are suffering with them. Nouwen filled that role as someone who leads by example.”

Reflecting on the Data

Having discerned the above themes using IPA and TA, I have explored Osmer's first question: "What is going on?"[19] Yet a corollary to this question is: "Why is this going on?" or "What is the meaning behind what was expressed under the seven themes and subthemes above?" These questions will be considered by considering three observations. My first observation concerns how the participants understood the use of terminology; the second is how they understood the four major themes (home, time, wealth and power); and my third observation surrounds the ostensible middle-class status of the participants in the study.

Use of Terminology

The use of terminology in question is the phrase: *downward* and *upward mobility*. In the interviews, I defined and applied these terms from a theological worldview, generally untethered from its sociological context.[20] I appropriated these terms from Nouwen's writings (in particular, *The Selfless Christ)*; Nouwen adopted these terms with Christ as the example of someone who demonstrated the way of downward mobility and refused the path of upward mobility in his life and ministry. Having embraced Nouwen's understanding of these themes, I shared their meaning and application with all the interviewees. I provided them with a general theological explanation for the use of the

[19] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

[20] This was not always possible because the words can apply to both the spiritual and the secular. It is important to note that the interviewees—at least at the beginning—were generally applying these words from a socio-economic perspective and not a spiritual one.

terms—as Nouwen would have us understand them—with the hope that they might appropriate these themes through that theological lens.[21]

However, it became clear that at least four participants struggled to embrace Nouwen's definitions of upward and downward mobility. This was inseparably connected to the socioeconomic status of their congregation and the neighbourhood around their church. The participants who challenged the use of the terminology served congregations where the majority of their members lived in impoverished or downwardly mobile lives (from a socioeconomic perspective, their membership generally lived below the poverty line). In short, this context framed these interviewees' understanding of the terminology.

As noted above, Felix was the most impassioned in his response and critique of "downward mobility." He asserted that downward mobility "is a cultural application for people of European descent." He buffered that a bit by saying that "it is not a bad thing, it just needs to be called out." Felix argued that since Nouwen was European and came from a position of power, he engaged this theme ostensibly from a degree of guilt. This kind of reasoning induces a question within an IPA. Are Felix's comments generative for an insightful interpretation that can serve to summarise my findings on this matter from the entire dataset, or not? As one IPA phenomenologist stated: "A single sensitive

[21] Briefly stated, I prefaced my introductions to this theme of downward mobility by sharing that I was not speaking about the disenfranchised, systematically marginalised, or those lacking social or economic mobility, but rather those who are willing to follow the footsteps of Christ and walk the downward path of humility and servanthood for the sake of the others as Christ Himself did. Likewise, for upward mobility, I was not undervaluing the pursuit of education, job promotion, or even wealth, but the pursuit of these as a religious right of passage. Or, as Nouwen (*The Selfless Christ*, 9) writes: "a life sustained by competition, self-aggrandisement, career orientation, and a spirit of ambition."

comment from a participant can provide the researcher with some valuable insights into meaning, which may be pursued in seeking an insightful interpretation."[22]

Given the possible phenomenological import of Felix's comments, this needs some more discussion. Again, Felix noted that only those who start high (in a socioeconomic sense) can practise downward mobility. Most of those in the margins were at the bottom in the first place. For Felix "this is the groundwork for liberation theology—a theology from below, the power from below." So according to Felix, downward mobility is a cultural application of Nouwen, and is therefore not applicable to the people Felix ministers to in the urban core.

Engaging Felix's concerns needs to be done by reflecting on them through two contextual lenses: his and Nouwen's. First, it is obvious that for Felix there is an inherent weakness in the nomenclature. Felix wants to speak for those who walk with the marginalized and argue that appropriating a more downwardly mobile lifestyle as a way to follow the selfless Christ cannot be separated from the harshness of generational or systemic poverty that disempowers those who live on the margins already and keeps them from becoming upwardly mobile. "How much lower do you want me to go?" is an understandable question for those on the margins, even if there is a mixing of Nouwen's spiritual application of the phrase and Felix's socio-economic use. That said, Felix is not alone in this concern. Another participant, Quinten, echoes the same concern: "We do not want to remind people that they are poor, as being downwardly mobile suggests." Drawing the connection to Christ, Quinten defends: "Christ preached the gospel to the poor but did not diminish them in any way as poor people." To this end, both Felix and

[22] Smith et al., *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*, 59.

Quinten's impassioned answers are generative and insightful for the entire dataset and will be further addressed in Chapter 5.

However, and in the second place, Felix may not have understood Nouwen's context or existential reasoning. Nouwen's willingness to join a marginalized community for the sake of the gospel does not by necessity indicate a kind of guilt-riddled power dynamic, as Felix supposes. Nouwen was able to move downward on a socioeconomic scale, indeed, but was it because of guilt that he was driven to serve at Daybreak as Adam's caregiver? Nouwen described his move as a sense of longing to walk more closely with Christ and to satisfy his empty soul, which was caught up in too much of the world.[23] Arguably this is not guilt, but gospel appropriation. A similar picture may be found in someone who is financially insolvent and poor but has come to know the grace and love of Christ and begins to volunteer at a food bank or kitchen to help others who are street involved. Nouwen saw himself as a child of God—a beloved child of God redeemed by the saving blood of Christ—and this fueled in him the desire to demonstrate that love to a community in need. Ultimately the question is whether downward mobility is simply a kind of social imaginary for western Christians who feel guilty about their wealth and want to move down the socioeconomic ladder to appease their conscience, as Felix might suggest, or a spiritual, existential path that can be defended biblically and applied across the socioeconomic spectrum as a way to live out of and for the Christ who has redeemed impoverished souls. I agree with Nouwen that it is the latter.

[23] As Nouwen (*Road to Daybreak*, 3) shared: "Gradually I discovered that Harvard was not the place where I was called to follow Jesus in a more radical way; I was not really happy there, found myself somewhat sulky and complaining, and never felt fully accepted by the faculty or students."

Understanding the Four Major Themes

A second observation concerns the understanding and application of the four major themes addressed in the interviews. Home, time, wealth, and power will be analysed more fully in Chapter 5; however, the data dictates that when the majority of church members are of lower socioeconomic status, these themes have different meanings than they do for middle and upper-class members.

For example, in some urban churches, "home" is conceptualised as the place where people gather together in community. Thus, according to some interviewees, the street-involved attendees may view home differently than those who can own a physical home. One interviewee put it this way: "We have many people living outside who end up living together and developing what they would describe as a deeper sense of home than what they experienced when they were within four walls." This type of living arrangement may not be easily understood by those who only know a middle-class existence where the home is the dwelling for the nuclear family. However, Nouwen makes the claim that "where one finds community one invariably finds a home."[24] Is a wall-less home the type of home that Nouwen has in mind? It seems it is. Phenomenologically, Nouwen is more concerned about the subjective nature of a home, being home, than the objective nature of real estate with a building on it called "home." Of interest from the dataset is that the interviewees did not always distinguish between the existential and the physical reality of home.

Time is also similarly experienced differently among different groups of people. As noted previously, for many in lower-socioeconomic areas, time is not something that

[24] Nouwen, *Adam*, 127.

can be controlled, but something that needs to be spent. “Where can I spend my time in order to see this day through?” is the question many in lower socioeconomic communities ask. The questions “How long will this take?” and “How much time can I give to this?” are the questions middle-class people generally ask. This parsing and micromanaging of time presses up against the ministry of presence that Nouwen seeks to typify in his writings. However, whether one is under or over time, controlled by time or controlling time, the ideal of practising a ministry of presence and meeting God in service in the margins forces this question: Does the theme of time, in connection to following the downward way of Christ, transcend socioeconomic status? Again, Nouwen would suggest it does.

Similar questions occur around the theme of wealth. One participant, who serves in a very poor urban area in central Canada, commented that faithful attendees who were street-involved were not necessarily drawn by the competitive, self-aggrandizing spirit of upward mobility, because that was unattainable for them. Rather, for many in this lower SES, hoarding was their upwardly mobile pull. “Hoarding,” Eden commented, “serves as a security blanket for an unknown future.” How this intersects with the theme of wealth and the gospel narrative around the sin of greed that transcends socioeconomic status is not easily reconciled.[25]

Moving from one’s personal choices around the accumulation of wealth to the church’s choice, Craig shared another concern. He feels that a lot of church practices are geared toward middle-class members without the church realising it. One example may

[25] The majority of the interviewees mentioned gentrification. The Statistics Canada (“Dimensions of Poverty Hub”) figures from 2016 to 2022, for example, saw an increase in wealth and the beautification of homes, and also saw fewer urban poor, in most cases.

be potlucks at church, where "middle-class families are able to bring in meals that are tasty and costly, but lower-income individuals or families can't help in the same way and might feel disconnected as a result." Craig notes that this can aggravate the inevitable struggle between the rich and poor within the church.

Finally, it is evident that there are power differentials in every church and neighbourhood. Generally, those who are on the margins or under the poverty line seem powerless compared to their middle-class counterparts. Many on the margins do not know what it means to have power—even the power to choose what to eat, what to wear, and where to sleep is outside their control, as one participant pointed out. Living a life of powerlessness is not something learned, but experienced, making it difficult for the middle-class church to fully understand the social, psychological, emotional, and even spiritual impact of powerlessness.

The observations on home, time, wealth, and power from the dataset demonstrate the complexity of engaging in church planting in a lower socioeconomic area of urban Canada. In Chapter 5, we will unpack these themes and put them in conversation with Scripture, Nouwen's approach, and pertinent secondary literature.

Middle-Class Pastors

A third observation is that all the interviewees identify as middle-class. Some pastors fundraise and face various levels of scarcity, while others have chosen a path of reduced salary to try to mirror the lives of those they minister to. Still, when pressed, the pastors all identify as middle-class; they have secure living arrangements, no food insecurity, and a degree of solvency that allows them to enjoy discretionary spending. However, as each serves those living on the margins, there is a natural tension around knowing how to walk

with the marginalized effectively. One current cultural narrative is that this kind of middle-class privilege creates power differentials between the middle-class and the working poor, which creates suspicion between these classes. Whether this is a real problem or a perceived one, is yet to be known. But how the church should mitigate the differences between these classes remains one of the purposes for writing this research project.

Summary

This chapter brought together the two methods of analysis introduced in Chapter 3 and applied them to a dataset of twenty interviews with pastors and missional leaders serving in the urban core across Canada. Beginning with an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, three themes were introduced that allowed us to experience something of the existential reality of planting and leading churches in or among lower socioeconomic neighbourhoods across urban Canada. Following this, a Thematic Analysis was applied to the dataset, beginning with the four major themes of this project (home, time, wealth, and power) and generating three more themes from the dataset. The commentary on these themes was rich and variegated and sought to answer the simple question: "What is going on?" As this inevitably generated a number of questions and issues, three further observations were made after reflecting on the corollary question: "Why is this going on?" These observations demonstrate the importance of further theological reflection—a task which will be taken up in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

I believe that Nouwen's writings, as living documents of his life, can serve as a source of inspiration for church planters and pastors in the inner city.[1] Nouwen helps us confront the religion of upward mobility, something that few other missional authors seem prepared to do, especially within their lived experience. Although Nouwen does not systematize his approach to confronting the religion of upward mobility, the four themes of home, time, wealth, and power serve as a helpful rubric to engage his approach. Complementing these themes are the additional themes of *kenosis*, preaching, and Nouwen as an exemplary model; these will provide a more effective approach to understanding downward mobility and the urban church.[2]

This chapter will be organized in the following way. First, I will interact with Nouwen's theological presuppositions that do not align with a Reformed approach to ministry. Second, and notwithstanding some theological differences, I will demonstrate that the above-mentioned themes serve to expand an understanding of what it means to minister effectively in lower socioeconomic communities of urban Canada. As per Richard Osmer four questions outlined above, this will answer the "What ought to be going on?" question. The final question, "How might we respond?" will be addressed by

[1] Karickal, "From Professional Functioning," 214. Nouwen (*Wounded Healer*, xvi) writes reflectively when he argues: "Nothing can be written about ministry without a deeper understanding of the ways in which the minister can make his own wounds available as a source of healing."

[2] Although the data set generated three new themes as listed, I will be addressing the first of these three indirect themes under my Reformed appraisal of Nouwen's interpretation of *kenosis*, and the latter two (outreach/evangelism and Nouwen as role model) will be addressed with the other four major themes.

reflecting on four corresponding spiritual disciplines for each of the four major themes, which will serve as possible antidotes to the upwardly mobile pull that captivates the hearts of church leaders and members alike.

Theological Concerns

Nouwen's defense of downward mobility will be examined within the context of my practice of ministry as a pastor of a theologically Reformed church. Does Nouwen's theological understanding and application of following the selfless Christ on the path of downward mobility align with my understanding of Reformed theology and praxis? To answer that question, three embedded themes will be addressed: the *kenosis* of Christ, liberation theology, and the counter-cultural method of cultural engagement.

Kenosis

Nouwen understood Christ's attentiveness and life-giving service to be animated by his *kenosis* (defined in Chapter 4). Nouwen reasoned that just as Christ emptied himself of divine privilege and celestial importance to live among the "weak" and "broken," the church needs to be prepared to empty itself and live similarly with the hurting.[3] Nouwen saw this path as a means to experience a deeper union with Christ. In sum, Nouwen understood Christ's *kenosis*, as described in Phil 2:6–7, as a call to embrace powerlessness.

As Nouwen saw it, Jesus moved from power to powerlessness, from greatness to smallness, from success to failure, from strength to weakness, and from glory to

[3] Karickal, "From Professional Functioning," 125.

ignominy.[4] Nouwen understood Jesus' whole life as one in which earthly power and the upwardly mobile path were resisted.[5] Jesus himself asked: "Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"[6] Drawing this together, Nouwen argues that Jesus leaves little doubt that the way he lived ought to be the way of his followers. He states:

> Downward mobility is the divine way, the way of the cross, the way of Christ. It is precisely this divine way of living that our Lord wants to give to us through his Spirit . . .When Jesus says that the Spirit will make us full participants in the divine life, a life that makes us into new people, living with a new mind and in a new time: the mind and time of Jesus Christ.[7]

The gospel radically subverts the presuppositions of our upwardly mobile society by calling us to embrace the way of the *kenosis* of Christ.

Where does this lead the Christ follower, the church planter, and the faithful member? Nouwen might say that when inspired by the Holy Spirit we will grasp Christ's *kenosis* and thus have grace-filled eyes for others. By embracing powerlessness (realized in Christ's *kenosis*), the church will be far more sensitive to what is happening in the world and more able to show compassion. When the church looks carefully into the eyes of the marginalized, when it pays humble attention to their ways of living, and when it listens gently to their observations and perceptions, it receives a glimpse of the truth

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[4] Nouwen, *Compassion*, 25.

[5] Nouwen, *Selfless Way of Christ*, 31.

[6] Luke 24:26. See also the following Scripture passages: "The disciple is not superior to his teacher, nor the slave to his master" (Matt 10:24); "Anyone who wants to be great among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Matt 20:26–28); "Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 10:39).

[7] Nouwen, *Selfless Way of Christ*, 39, 42.

Jesus embodied in his descension.[8] This is a glimpse of "grace-healed eyes," to quote Tertullian.[9]

As we engage Nouwen's understanding of Phil 2:6–11 and the *kenosis* of Christ, it should be noted that implicit in Nouwen's reflections is the idea that condescension informs not only our theology, but also our praxis. Nouwen asks: "Is one's freedom and purpose in life found in following the downward way of Christ, and lost if we do not?"[10] For Nouwen that question is rhetorical. However, one might question if Nouwen overstated what Paul intended in Phil 2:6–11. Paul introduces the hymn of Christ (as Nouwen calls it), by calling the church to embrace not the praxis but the mind of Christ.[11] In Phil 2:5, Paul writes: "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." What is suggested here is that Christ's *kenosis* is preceded by his mindset of humility, which is a foundational pillar for Christian unity.

Nouwen might respond that the praxis is implied because the Christian is both united to Christ by faith and commissioned to follow in the divine way.[12] Therefore, since Christ represents us in his condescension and demonstrates a willing and obedient refusal to garner status, power, wealth, comfort, and self-aggrandizement—all that upward mobility seeks to embrace—should not the Christian embrace such a life as his disciple?

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[8] Nouwen (*Selfless Way of Christ*, 34) does not employ the word *kenosis* as a way to define Christ's ministry among us, but generally his understanding of downward mobility demands an understanding of Christ's *kenosis.*

[9] Nouwen, *Selfless Way of Chris*t, 34.

[10] Nouwen, *Selfless Way of Christ*, 30.

[11] Nouwen, *Selfless Way of Christ*, 30.

[12] Nouwen (*Selfless Way of Christ*, 43) writes: "Thus, discipleship is the life of the Spirit in us, by whom we are lifted up in the divine life itself and receive new eyes to see, new ears to hear, and new hands to touch."

Indeed, does not Phil 2:6–11 stand alone as one of the most succinct and poignant portrayals of Christ as our self-emptying, self-abnegating, and self-sacrificing Saviour?[13]

Nouwen is correct in calling the Christian to reflect existentially on the *kenosis* of Christ and what it means to embrace a Saviour who chose the downward way, to serve and ultimately to secure the salvation of others. However, to equate the two worlds—Christ's *kenosis* and our praxis as his disciples—demands a more careful hermeneutic. To that end, David Hesselgrave, in *Paradigms in Conflict,* helps navigate what it means to follow the selfless Christ, as he distinguishes between two models that are generally held by academics and practitioners in missiology.[14] These are the "incarnational" and "representational" models.[15]

It is somewhat apparent that Nouwen's approach aligns with the incarnational model. Although Hesselgrave points out that there are different incarnational models (liberationism, holism, and conversionism), what binds them together is the desire to continue Christ's mission.[16] Nouwen's ostensible understanding of the incarnational model—in particular, the liberationism and holism models—is demonstrated in his desire to follow the downwardly mobile Jesus and live out Jesus' attitudes, lifestyle, activities, and ministry methods. Just as Jesus became poor to identify with the poor, so Nouwen believes we need to become poor to identify with the poor, which is possible through an

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[13] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 160.

[14] Although Hesselgrave (*Paradigms in Conflict*, 142) does not interact with the word *kenotic* nor Nouwen's view of embracing Christ, he does question the writings of Thomas à Kempis and his collected text entitled *The Imitation of Christ.* He felt that Thomas began to advocate a social Gospel through this "forced" imitation of Christ that followed the pattern of Christ in a social Gospel sense and bled into liberation theology. See also Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 143.

[15] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 19–22.

[16] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 145. Although these different views propagated under the incarnational model can be generalized to a degree, they are not all the same in their theological position of the authority of Scripture and the role of the church in society, especially as it relates to evangelism. The latter view, conversion-incarnationalism, is the closest to the evangelical position of following the so-called Great Commission and evangelizing the nations. See also Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 147–48.

incarnational lifestyle.[17] Thus, Jesus is not only a model for Christian ministry, but a prototype, and his ministry is archetypal for the church today.[18]

Although Hesselgrave agrees there is great merit in applying the incarnational model to our lives and ministries, he does caution a full embrace of it. He states in the outset that it may be untenable for finite, sinful mortals to duplicate Christ.[19] He is the divine man, celibate and holy, who was set apart for the salvation of lost sinners, something that none of us are called to or can do. Secondly, there is a rather opaque line between this model and liberation theology that has embraced all kinds of social and political activities (including participation in violent revolutions), all in the name of following Jesus as the prototype.[20] Certainly this is an abuse of the application of the incarnational model, but this abuse is not separated from the model. For this reason, Hesselgrave's greatest concern is that this model inadvertently undermines the *monogenes* of Christ: Christ's thoroughly unique, unprecedented, and unrepeatable nature.[21] Quoting Köstenberger, Hesselgrave points out that the incarnation is linked to Jesus' eternal pre-existence (John 1:14) and his unique relationship with his Father (John 1:14, 18).[22] Writing around the turn of the twenty-first century, Hesselgrave notes that we need to hold to the absolute uniqueness of the incarnation of Christ as the West faces pluralism, syncretism, new ageism, false Christs, and the disintegration of absolutes.[23]

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[17] Bonk, *Missions and Money*, 161.

[18] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 145, 159.

[19] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 152. It is noteworthy that the Apostle Paul says rather we are servants of Christ (Phil 1:1); and are to live in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27), be united to Christ (Phil 2:1) and have the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5). That is, his attributes are ours to appropriate and by his Spirit we are united to him, not as Christs, but as his children and servants.

[20] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 149.

[21] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 153.

[22] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 153.

[23] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 153.

In the hope of protecting and defending the *monogenes* of Christ, Hesselgrave argues for the representational model for one's praxis of ministry instead of the incarnational model.[24] Hesselgrave explores the representational model through the work of Köstenberger and his commentary on John's Gospel. Köstenberger argues that the representational model accentuates some of the discontinuity between Jesus' mission and ours, and he embraces Paul's ministry as an example of what it means to be a representative or an ambassador for Christ.[25] Köstenberger writes: "The representational model . . . acknowledges the uniqueness of Jesus' person and work while viewing the primary task of his disciples as witnessing to Jesus." [26] Although, of course, there would be no gospel, church, or mission apart from Christ, it was Paul (acting as Christ's "ambassador," from the Greek *presbeuo*) who explained the gospel, extended the church, and exemplified mission.[27] In fact, Paul publicly called himself a model missionary in the representational sense of the word.[28]

At the same time, it can be argued that there is an overlap between the two models, which forces Hesselgrave to be judicious towards those who embrace an incarnational model for ministry. Jesus, he argues, is certainly an example to follow, and lessons must be drawn from his actions and attitudes but not at the cost of diminishing the absolute uniqueness of Christ as the eternal Son of God.[29] Thus, if one leans too heavily on the incarnational model, the uniqueness of Christ may be lost; but, if someone leans

[24] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 153.
[25] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 155.
[26] Köstenberger's remarks are quoted in Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 150.
[27] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 155.
[28] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 156.
[29] Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, 162–3.

too heavily on the representative model, something of Christ's call on the church to follow his example can also be lost.

Knowing this allows us to return to Nouwen's approach to ministry more circumspectly. Nouwen embraces a kind of incarnational model that sees Jesus as a prototype for ministry amongst the marginalized. Nouwen wanted to advocate for the poor, care for those with disabilities, and walk with the powerless as Jesus did. He writes: "The long painful history of the church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, and being a leader over being led. Those who resisted this temptation to the end thereby give us hope as the true saints."[30] For Nouwen, by following Christ's descending way, we are enabled to be in solidarity with the powerless.[31]

However, embracing the powerlessness of Christ as the antidote to the abuse of power—even in the church—conflicts with important biblical themes surrounding Jesus's power. The question should be asked: Was the condescension of Christ, especially his death on the cross, a demonstration of the powerlessness of Christ? Can it not be argued that Jesus' ministry and death (his active and passive obedience) was marked by power, not powerlessness? Indeed, he let his blessed body be nailed to the cross as a display of powerlessness; but this same act can equally be a display of power, as Jesus restrained himself from retaining a myriad of angels to aid his delivery from death. Furthermore, Christ's ministry is replete with the exercise of divine power. He rebuffed the devil's temptations with power (Matt 4:11), exorcised demons (Matt 8:28–34; Luke 10:17), calmed the seas, (Mark 4:35–41), healed the infirmed (Luke 13:10–17), raised Lazarus

[30] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 60.
[31] See also Karickal, "From Professional Functioning to Personal Confession," 198.

from the dead (John 10:38–44), and did sundry other miracles. Above all, it was in power that Jesus rose again from the dead (Rom 1:4), triumphing over the dark powers and authorities of the demonic world (Col 2:15). Evidently, it was not "powerlessness versus power" that characterized the life of Christ, but power in the face of perceived powerlessness.

However, this does not diminish the need to hear Nouwen's message in a world replete with power mongering. The brief communique referenced earlier between Nouwen and his sister about her daughter with disabilities summarizes Nouwen's existential understanding on the matter. He writes:

> We have never had a 'weak' person among us. We are all hardworking, ambitious and successful people who seldom have had to experience powerlessness. Now Laura enters and tells us a totally new story, a story of weakness, brokenness, vulnerability and total dependency. Laura who always will be a child will teach us the way of Christ as no one will ever be able to do.[32]

I believe that Nouwen's word of warning needs to be heard: unless we have a proper understanding of Christ's powerlessness (i.e. his willingness to die on the cross), we may always pursue power over Christ.[33] Still, it must be noted that for the Christian in general and the church leader in particular, it can not be an absolute to become powerless for the sake of the powerless, as Nouwen might suggest. Indeed, this is untenable; the pastors and leaders interviewed could not fully endorse the reality of becoming weak with the weak and powerless with the powerless in their ministries.[34] Powerlessness, one interviewee noted, leaves you unable to help others. It is noteworthy that Nouwen had to

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[32] Nouwen, *iGracias!*, 15.

[33] Karickal, "From Professional Functioning," 127.

[34] One is left to wonder where exactly Nouwen embraced this. Was he weak and powerless in Lima? He left there because he lacked the social engagement he needed. Was he weak and powerless at Daybreak? If so, how could he continue to care for Adam and remain active in his ministry as a priest, writer, and keynote speaker at untold events?

retain some power as a caregiver for the powerless. He could not join Adam in his disability; rather, Nouwen was able to demonstrate his compassion and empathy to Adam by retaining the power of his own abilities. To summarize, Nouwen's indirect charge to the church is that power must be in the service of love—that is, love must reign over power. Further, the church needs to heed the warning to relinquish control if control is keeping it from denying itself and picking up its cross and following Christ. Finally, like the Apostle Peter we need to be prepared to be led even into hardship, if that is God's will for our lives (cf. John 21:18).[35]

Liberation Theology

Another theological concern surrounding Christ's *kenosis* and downward mobility stems from Nouwen's view of God's preferential treatment of the poor. Nouwen asked: "Where is God?" His answer: "God is where we are weak, vulnerable, small and dependent, where the poor are, the hungry, the handicapped, the mentally ill, the powerless."[36] Nouwen's understanding of God's presence with the weak grew out of his time in Lima, Peru. It was there that he began to understand God's predilection for the poor, which then provided the impetus to his "new" spiritual journey. He writes: "There I came in touch with 'God's option for the poor' and grew in the conviction that somewhere, somehow, I too had to make that my option."[37] It was also in Lima that Nouwen originally discovered that "those who are marginalized by society may carry a great treasure for the church," a

[35] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 60.
[36] Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey*, 71.
[37] Nouwen, *¡Gracias!*, ix.

treasure that would make the church a more compassionate, caring, body of believers.[38] Nouwen took this one step further. He states: "It is so easy to be swept off one's own feet by the glitter of the world, seduced by its apparent splendour and yet the only place I can really be is the place of poverty, the place where there is loneliness, anger, confusion, depression and pain."[39]

Nouwen admired Gustavo Gutierrez, the father of Latin American liberation theology, and defended that God shows some kind of preferential treatment to the poor and the marginalized; however one cannot de facto bind Nouwen to Gutierrez's theological framework.[40] That framework, simply summarized, is rooted in Gutierrez's view of Jesus as the great Liberator and Emancipator, whose Kingdom announcement was chiefly an aspiration for a just society that "opens up the promise and hope of complete union for all men with God."[41] Gutierrez further approved the bishops of Latin America's understanding of the reason for Christ's coming: "to liberate all men from all enslavements to which sin has subjected them—ignorance, misery, hunger and oppression, in a word, injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness."[42] Indeed, for Gutierrez the solemn obligation of the church is to be a divine agent of a sociopolitical revolution, whereby the oppressed achieve "total liberation."[43]

Although Nouwen concluded that we need to demonstrate compassion for the poor and the oppressed because Jesus does so, he did not accept Gutierrez's sociopolitical

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[38] Nouwen (*¡Gracias!*, ix) does not in fact describe what he means by "a great treasure" in but within his corpus more broadly one can conclude that whatever guides and animates the heart to share the compassion of Christ, is a great treasure for the church.

[39] See Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 186.

[40] According to Karickel ("From Professional Functioning," 17) Nouwen was influenced by Gutierrez's writings, but to what degree remains uncertain.

[41] Gustavo, *A Theology of Liberation*, 281–82.

[42] Gustavo, "The Hope of Liberation," 67.

[43] Gustavo, "The Hope of Liberation," 79.

solution. Nouwen felt that Gutierrez was more focused on critiquing social structures than realizing the spiritual exile and captivity of the poor for whom he cared.[44] Thus, for Nouwen the liberation of the poor and the oppressed would ultimately follow a return to the spiritual, which meant building friendships and affective relationships, but most importantly, fostering a ministry imbued with prayer and joy.[45]

Nouwen not only questioned Gutierrez's approach, but went further and spiritualized poverty in his desire to empathize with the poor. He writes:

> True prayer always includes becoming poor. When we pray, we stand naked and vulnerable in front of our Lord and show him our true condition. If one were to do this not just for oneself, but in the name of the thousands of surrounding poor people, wouldn't that be a "mission" in the true sense of being sent into the world as Jesus himself was sent into the world?[46]

For Nouwen, there is a deep and tenable connection between physical poverty and poverty of the spirit. When Nouwen decided to follow the downwardly mobile path and make his vocation with the poor, he was not motivated firstly to embrace the materially poor, but those poor in spirit, which he saw as those with disabilities.[47] Being financially poor without faith in the living Christ does not bear any blessing of God, but being poor in the spirit does, as Jesus teaches in Matt 5:3. Nouwen sees this worked out in the wilderness temptations of Jesus. He writes: "Jesus was faced with the same questions, but when he was asked to prove his power as the Son of God by changing stones into bread, he clung to his mission to proclaim the Word and said: 'Human beings live not by bread alone but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.'"[48]

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[44] Nouwen, *iGracias!*, 40.
[45] Nouwen, *iGracias!*, 144.
[46] Karickal, "From Professional Functioning," 127.
[47] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 22.
[48] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 8.

In the end, Nouwen was moved by the material poverty of those living in Lima and the physical poverty of those with disabilities, and he desired to experience life with those who were poor by practicing a ministry of presence; yet, for Nouwen spiritual poverty was the more immediate and enduring concern.

Counter-Culture and the Lordship of Christ

Moving from Nouwen's brush with liberation theology, my third concern is about Nouwen's view of Christ's lordship and cultural engagement. Nouwen does not clearly subscribe to a specific model of the gospel and cultural engagement. However, applying Keller's helpful analysis of the four main types of the church's cultural engagement— the transformational, kingdom, relevance, and countercultural models— to Nouwen's corpus, I argue that Nouwen's praxis and writings suggest a countercultural model of engagement.

According to Keller, the countercultural model emphasizes the church in contrast to the society of the world; the church seeks to build a community where barriers are broken and the marginalized are cared for, and this, in turn, serves as the medium for the gospel to go out and for justice and peace to reign.[49] An urban church that adopts a countercultural model emphasizes the need to reach the poor, the marginalized, the weak, and the un-networked.[50] It is a contrasting community in opposition to the kingdom of the world—a kingdom constructed out of systems based on power and human glory. It is a community that desires to be aligned with Christ's Kingdom, which is based on love, service, and the surrender of power.

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[49] Keller, *Center Church*, 205.
[50] Keller, *Center Church*, 206.

Keller argues that the counter-cultural approach is to "follow Christ outside the camp" and to identify with the marginalized.[51] Subsequently, counter-culturalists promote a life of simplicity and material self-denial for the sake of charity, justice, and community. In the urban context, counter-culturalists see the need to decrease geographical mobility (committing to a local church and a neighbourhood) and social mobility (giving away large amounts of your income to those in need).[52] There is an emphasis within this movement on a strong multiracial, cross-class Christian community, a simple lifestyle, practical engagement with the poor, contemplative spirituality, and a prophetic stance against big corporations, the military, and consumer capitalism.[53]

Keller cites some criticisms that have been levelled against this movement, chiefly regarding its doctrinal positions. Keller argues that the movement predominately subscribes to theological views that stress the horizontal aspects of sin (abusing creation, failure to care for the poor, violence in relationships) but place less emphasis on the vertical (e.g. offending the holiness of God).[54] Consequently, it tends to downplay the doctrines of justification, substitutionary atonement, and propitiation.[55] This also means that, for many counter-culturalists, the need and importance that the church places on evangelism (verbally communicating the gospel and calling people to repentance) is at times reduced to simply drawing people into an attractive community of love that promotes justice and peace.[56]

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[51] Keller, *Center Church*, 206.
[52] Keller, *Center Church*, 206.
[53] Keller, *Center Church*, 206.
[54] Keller, *Center Church*, 208.
[55] Keller, *Center Church*, 208.
[56] Keller, *Center Church*, 209.

Three things can be noted concerning Keller's appraisal of the countercultural method in regard to Nouwen's life and writings. First, Nouwen does not align himself with a particular movement, and it would be somewhat reductionistic to put him squarely into this counter-cultural camp. However, what we do know is that some Anabaptist authors, especially Fitch and the new monastics who seemingly have embraced this model, have leaned on Nouwen's spirituality.[57]

Second, although Nouwen may not easily be defined as a counter-culturalist, the transcendent nature of a holy and righteous Saviour is amiss in Nouwen's theology. Writing personally from a self-consciously theologically Reformed point of view, I find that Nouwen's theological drift demands some correction. That is to say, Nouwen does not provide a fecund and effective defence of the power of the cross as a means to reconcile lost sinners to a holy and righteous God. Nouwen is a man of compassion and concern for the hurting, and although he knows by faith that he is beloved of God, this does not translate into a Reformed orthodox view of the *ordos salutis* (order of salvation), including the call to repentance from sin, a defence of the doctrine of justification, or an emphasis on the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of these theological *lacunae* in his corpus is realized in the seeming lack of Spirit-filled fervour to evangelize others, or to view himself like Paul, as an ambassador of Christ calling people to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:21).

This does not mean that Nouwen lacks evangelical faith. Nouwen clearly states that he does embrace the evangelical faith concerning the doctrine of sin and Christ as the only means to salvation: "In our heart, we come to see ourselves as sinners embraced by

[57] Keller, *Center Church*, 206–8. Keller does not mention David Fitch for variations within the model, but by Fitch's own admission he finds himself in the Anabaptist theological worldview.

the mercy of God."[58] But again, reading from a Reformed theological lens, his corpus lacks an effective theology on the Lordship of Christ as the holy and transcendent One. Although Nouwen has a powerful and deep theology of suffering and an understanding of God's participation with us in our suffering, his lack of emphasis on Christ's transcendence and holiness keeps him from engaging fully with the doctrines of grace, resulting in what some view as an implicit universalism. It seems he adopted the universalism propagated by Vatican II, which in summation defends that the "Church to which we are all called . . . will attain her full perfection only in the glory of heaven. Then the human race as well as the entire world will be perfectly established in Christ."[59]

Third, although Nouwen espoused a tacit universalism, his passion was ultimately to help people see the presence of Christ, the love of Christ, the compassion of Christ, and the restoring forgiveness of Christ, in order to encourage them in their sense of identity with God as his beloved. He writes: "Only in the context of grace can we face our sin; only in the place of healing can we dare to show our wounds; only with a single-minded attention to Christ can we give up our clinging fears and face our own true nature."[60] He goes on: "More than ever the church has to live out Christ's love for the poor, the sinners, the publicans, the rejected, the possessed, and all who desperately need to be loved."[61] He talks about a holy unrest and calls believers to make haste so that the promise might be soon fulfilled.[62] This is a word for the church, whether in the inner city

[58] Nouwen, *Way of the Heart*, 61.
[59] Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, 24–47, 78–87.
[60] Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 17.
[61] Nouwen, *Sabbatical Journey*, 54–55.
[62] Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 102.

or in rural Canada: the love of Christ can and must be proclaimed and embodied by his children.

In the end, Nouwen's push to help the church become more downwardly mobile is not a movement away from the gospel, but one towards the Christ of the gospel. Nouwen's heart of love and compassion grew out of his love for Christ and a Spirit-filled understanding of Christ's sacrifice for sinners. Nouwen reveals the heart of Christ for those who are marginalized, poor, living with disabilities, weak, and powerless, and calls the church to see the same. Further, Nouwen correctly exposes the idolatry of frenetically pursuing the upwardly mobile way, which keeps us from the Christ of Scripture and blinds our eyes and calcifies our hearts towards those who stand in great need of his love. Nouwen also opens the door for us to consider our appropriation of Christian praxis as it relates to four tangible and intangible realities (home, time, power, and wealth) which allows us to express the heart of the selfless, downwardly mobile Christ more fully and beautifully.

Engaging Nouwen's Themes

The themes of home, time, evangelism, exemplary modelling, etc., all help clarify what it means to minister more effectively in lower socioeconomic communities of urban Canada. These will be briefly described here again before exploring what was gained from the extant literature and interviews, and interacting with a corresponding spiritual discipline that will be presented in connection to the four main themes.

Home

As stated in Chapter 2, Nouwen understands the importance of a theology of home in the context of downward mobility.[63] Nouwen came to understand the meaning of home when he cared for Adam, his friend with disabilities. He writes: "Those first fourteen months at Daybreak, washing, feeding, and just sitting with Adam, gave me the home I had been yearning for; not just a home with good people but a home . . . in the body of my community, in the body of the church, yes, in the body of God."[64] For Nouwen, the church should follow the downward way of Christ to foster, as it were, homes where we live in community with the marginalized so that their lives can be experienced and their voices may be heard. To that end, Nouwen provides the church (and in particular its leaders) with two words of encouragement.

First, Nouwen indirectly encourages the church to view its understanding of home through a phenomenological lens. Nouwen uses his existential journey to Daybreak to reflect deeply on the meaning of home. For Nouwen, home is where Christian compassion and love are evident; it is the primary place where loneliness and anxiety can be assuaged, and where community—a real sense of Christian belonging—can be experienced.[65] This was Daybreak; Nouwen's stay there was not perfect and rosy, but it was simple, and the authentic love of the members (especially people with disabilities) gave him the sense of a true home.[66] Nouwen suggests that if the home is not understood

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[63] Nouwen, *Adam,*127.

[64] Nouwen, *Adam*, 126–27.

[65] See Nouwen, *Adam*, 127.

[66] See Durback, *Seeds of Hope*, 29. At the same time, there was in Nouwen an inner struggle that no sense of home could be fully resolved, because that was a sense of intimacy which no friend or community could give him. Nouwen in (*The Inner Voice of Love,* xiii–xix) reflects on a breakdown in a friendship that caused him to experience depression and the dark night of his soul; as a result, he spent time away from Daybreak. Upon his return, he realized the importance of finding one's self-identity in the love

through this spiritual existential lens, it can soon become a mausoleum of greed, comfort, status, and a demonstration of growing indifference to those who are experiencing poverty, marginalization, and disabilities. Therefore, to protect and foster an understanding of home as a place of compassion and belonging, Nouwen encourages the church to practice hospitality, which is "the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend."[67]

Unlike Nouwen, the missional authors reviewed did not address the existential reality of home as clearly as Nouwen does, but spoke more theoretically about the purpose of home and its paradoxical complement, displacement. For example, Goheen challenges his readers to leverage their homes for the service of Christ and to advance his Kingdom.[68] For Goheen, displacement may be part of God's call for someone to let go of their home, leave their family, and set aside all other responsibilities for the sake of the Kingdom of Christ.[69] In *Centre Church,* Keller encourages readers to understand the temporality of their present home in comparison to the eternal promise of a true home, which he feels should serve to steer Christians away from any number of false views of home and subsequent idolatries.[70] Quoting the Apostle Peter, who calls us to live as "foreigners and exiles" in this world (1 Pet 2:11–17), Keller argues that living in a counter-cultural way may demand a form of displacement that serves as a declaration and expression of the gospel.[71] Fitch, on the other hand, enters a slightly more phenomenological reality in *Faithful Presence,* as he sees home as a place where Christ's

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of God alone; this was the only antidote to his inner struggle. See further La Noue, *The Spiritual Legacy of Henri Nouwen*, 46.

[67] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 71.

[68] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 34.

[69] Luke 9:57–62.

[70] Keller, *Center Church*, 83.

[71] Keller, *Center Church*, 323.

presence can and should be felt. In his diagram of home within the church's mission—which he encircles with a dotted circle—he argues that home must be a place for community, love, and conversation, and as such should be a place where hospitality is practiced.[72] As Fitch recalls, Christ entered the homes of the marginalized, the publicans, and the sinners; likewise, today his presence should be known when we invite those on the margins into our homes.[73]

The interviewees moved the conversation from the theoretical to their praxis of ministry. The majority of interviewees shared the importance of living close to their place of ministry, in part to open their homes in order to practice hospitality. "This kind of hospitality opens the door for hearts to be changed when our neighbours are exposed to the living Christ, the beauty of Christ, and what he has done that has eternal significance for them," Ed shared. Or, as Owen noted, the fellowship that happens in the home shows the need for people to feel a sense of belonging. This kind of hospitality must go beyond one's own social and economic strata.[74]

A few participants also shared that they moved into the urban core of a lower SES area to create a home there. However, when these same pastors encouraged middle-class members to follow suit, some identified a significant barrier to making that move, which these pastors contributed to the existential pull to the upwardly mobile life. Nick wondered if his members were more motivated by immediate satisfaction than by the worth and beauty of the new heaven and new earth. Nick's reflections echoes Nancy

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[72] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 146. As noted in Chapter 2, the dotted circle is meant to show that the fellowship is porous; that is, the home is open to strangers.

[73] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 50.

[74] It was noted that encouragement to move into a particular neighbourhood was given to middle class members who were able to move. Those in the community already, of course, were not expected to move and those who attended from a lower SES were not encouraged, as that was not an option for them.

Ammerman's conclusion in *Sacred Stories,* that one's life is more often shaped by economic and aesthetic meaning than by religious or spiritual meaning.[75] This also parallels Ray Joslin's concern in *Urban Harvest* over the mass exodus of Christians from the inner city in the late 1970s and early 1980s; Joslin questioned if it is a sin to sell your inner-city home in order to pursue the "better" life in the suburbs.[76] At the same time, I noted that it was difficult for the interviewees to define and even address the upwardly mobile pull encapsulated in the so-called "American Dream" amongst their membership. Although there was one case of a member selling his dream home for the sake of Christ, overall the consensus is that for leaders and members alike, it is difficult to heed God's call to give up a comfortable home in place of a home that resembles the homes of the marginalized.

Where the interviewees converge with Nouwen and—to some degree—the missional authors, is around this question: is a wall-less home the type of home that Nouwen has in mind? As argued, Nouwen sees the home through a phenomenological lens and is thus more concerned about the subjective nature of a home—that is, being home—than with the objective nature of owning or renting a home. Nouwen draws a line between one's home and one's soul, forcing the question of whether we need to decentre our view of home from the upwardly mobile push that idolizes it and says "Look at the home I own," to a gospel-centeredness that says, "Come and experience the home in which we live." Just as everyone can be a neighbour without a fixed address by demonstrating the love of God, so everyone can see past the four walls of their home to the purpose and meaning of being a home to those in need. In fact, I believe Nouwen asks

[75]Ammerman, *Sacred Stories,* 229.
[76]Joslin, *Urban Harvest,* 26.

us to look past the location, style, and aesthetics of our homes to what lives within—our soul and the vulnerable souls of others in need of the love of the Beloved One.

In varying degrees, Scripture confronts the reality of a false view of home. Ps 49:16 states: "Do not be overawed when others grow rich when the splendour of their houses increases; for they will take nothing with them when they die, their splendour will not descend with them." The Apostle Peter encourages the church to remember their identity in Christ—not in their socioeconomic status—and, as shared above, to live as "foreigners and exiles" in this world (1 Pet 2:11). The author of Hebrews echoes that reality, and reminds us that the fore-bearers of the faith "were foreigners and strangers on earth," (Heb 11:13) and were waiting for the city (with many homes) from above "whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10). Jesus comforts the disciples by promising that they have a home waiting for them in glory. "In my Father's house there are many rooms . . . for I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). Jesus also challenges the false sense of security found in an earthly home when he says: "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matt 8:20). To another potential disciple, Jesus commanded: "Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Luke 18:22). Jesus does not command all his children to sell their homes and experience displacement to follow him, nor does he suggest all his followers find their homes amongst the street involved or make their homes bland and lacking in appeal; however, he does encourage us to have an eternal perspective of our homes, and he seems to welcome displacement as a means to break from the subversive idolatry that may be found in one's home. Can we really call our home a home if it lacks Christian hospitality, love, and a sense of true belonging?

In short, Nouwen, the missional authors, and the interviewees all contribute to a biblical perspective of home through a downwardly mobile lens, which is helpful for churches desiring to establish themselves in urban centres. The question is: How do we foster a proper and effective theology of home in lower SES communities? Put another way, what spiritual discipline needs to be exercised in order to create the home that best demonstrates the love of our selfless Saviour? Nouwen answers this question by stressing the need to practice the discipline of voluntary displacement, "in order to have solidarity with millions of those who live disrupted lives."[77] For Nouwen, experiencing displacement is a paradoxical reality for the meaning of finding a home.[78] As Nouwen grappled with the downward and displaced Christ, who left heaven's home to live amongst us, he concluded that displacement is crucial in home-building, as it allows us to understand our own vulnerability and empathize with others, especially those who are living on the margins.[79] He states: "[Displacement] counteracts the tendency to become settled in a false comfort and forget the fundamentally unsettled position that we share with all people."[80]

Nouwen reflects on venerated individuals who chose to be voluntarily displaced. Martin Luther left the monastery to speak out against the scandalous clerical practices and the deformation of the church; Dietrich Bonhoeffer left the United States for Germany to stand up against the Third Reich; Simone Weil left her middle-class milieu to work in factories to be a common labourer; and Martin Luther King Jr. left his "ordinary

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[77] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 64.

[78] Choosing displacement for Jesus' sake and choosing community or a home in the name of Jesus appear to Nouwen (*Daybreak*, 225) as two aspects of the same choice.

[79] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 64. Nouwen (*Home Tonight*, 20–21) felt displaced at Harvard, while L'Arche provided an opportunity to be part of a true home.

[80] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 64.

and proper" place in society to lead protest marches.[81] For others, displacement did not entail a physical move, but a new attitude towards their "factual displacement" and a faithful perseverance in their unspectacular lives.[82]

Nouwen is quick to add that believers must be careful not to romanticize displacement, nor to suggest it is an easy prescription to live compassionate lives. Still, to live in community and to offer a home to others, there must be movement from positions of distinctions to positions of sameness, from being the object of interest to disappearing into compassion.[83] This is not to shirk responsibilities, Nouwen argues, but it is a necessary ingredient to grow in compassion and to be *in* the world without being *of* it, in a *Sein and Dasein* kind of way.[84]

Thus, to practice this discipline one must recognize where displacement may be occurring in one's life and allow God's call to be heard in these avenues.[85] Indeed, Nouwen adds, the more we can discern God's voice through his Spirit in our daily lives, the more we will be able to hear when God calls us to more drastic forms of displacement.[86] Again, not everyone is called in the way that Saint Francis, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther, Martin Luther King Jr, or Dorothy Day were called, but "everyone must live with the deep conviction that God is in their life in an equally unique way."[87] In the end, the goal of voluntary displacement is to initiate compassionate living by exposing our own phenomenology around brokenness, loneliness, sin and selfishness, and then seek to create shared space for those seeking consolation and comfort on

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[81] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 65.
[82] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 65.
[83] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 64.
[84] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 70.
[85] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 70–71.
[86] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 72.
[87] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 72.

account of their brokenness, loneliness, sin, powerlessness, and pain.[88] This form of displacement, then, is paradoxically the building block of a home where space is created for love, unity, fellowship, peace, truth and Christ-like belonging to flourish.

Time

Nouwen was confronted by the concept of time within his own cultural context. In the West, he suggests, time is akin to ownership; it is a commodity to be controlled. Westerners tend to seek to hoard time for themselves at the cost of serving or being present with others. Nouwen points out that many people feel that they no longer have time, but that time has them.[89] He argues that Westerners experience time as *chronos*, or "a randomly collected series of incidents and accidents over which we have no control."[90] According to Nouwen, such people—including many within the church—will become victims of fatalism and boredom, not in the sense of doing nothing, but in the sense of doing everything indifferently. Nouwen's antidote to this dilemma was to embody a kind of "timelessness" that allowed him to serve effectively at Daybreak and fight the constant temptation to do more "productive" enterprises instead.[91] This use of time is more contemplative; Nouwen defines it as *kairos*: time that provides new opportunities and a change of heart.[92] Although Nouwen may not have fully embraced this kind of timelessness, his panacea for the loneliness and hurt he saw in the people around him was to strive to be present with them. He asks, "Are we humble and willing enough to be

[88] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 73.
[89] Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 95.
[90] Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 95.
[91] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 103.
[92] Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 95–96.

present with the people to whom we seek to minister?"[93] For Nouwen, this question frames the path of downward mobility, as it challenges the upwardly mobile pull towards busyness.[94] For Nouwen, the opposite of acquiring this badge is removing barriers to available time (real or otherwise) and striving to be present with those to whom we minister—whether on the margins or not—in a ministry of presence. This ministry, Nouwen argues, can be experienced even in silence, as we can communicate Christian love just by being present with someone.[95] Thus Nouwen invites us to move beyond "clock time," where everything is safe and scheduled (and where we get impatient when we are interrupted) to "grace moments."

The extant literature on this theme was minimal, but Fitch provides some helpful points. As noted in Chapter 2, Fitch's general thesis is that understanding Christ's incarnational presence is instructive for learning to be present with others.[96] It is only because God is present with us in Christ that we have the capacity and even the desire to be with others. The mystery here is that through being present with others we can experience the presence of Christ through his Spirit. The challenge for the church, Fitch suggests, is to be present with "the least of these" and include them in everyday life.[97] Therefore, the church makes its biggest impact in lower SES neighbourhoods when it is present with the poor without turning them into a program.

The participants in this study uncovered various understandings of the use of time, and the dataset has demonstrated the complexity around the practice of a ministry

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[93] Karickal, "From Professional Functioning," 187.

[94] The phenomenon of being 'too busy,' as Nouwen (*Making All Things New*, 11) suggests, is not just a modern-day phenomenon (as many have said in the past) as much as it was a contemporary experience of Nouwen's life.

[95] Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 51.

[96] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 95.

[97] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 102.

of presence. “Wasting time” with people and listening to their stories without rushing them seems to be the way many interviewees practice a downwardly mobile way of life in their urban ministries. However, it should be noted that the marginalized tend not to seek to control time, but to survive it, and so “wasting time” with them merely serves to make time bearable. Conversely, for the middle-class, there is a need to break from seeking to control time to leveraging our time for the sake of the other.

The majority of interviewees shared that as Christian leaders, a ministry of presence is probably the most powerful thing one can practice in one’s neighbourhood. This does not entail leading a church slavishly bound to programs, but a church seeking to cultivate margins with others. In those margins, one interviewee shared, we need to wait expectantly for the unexpected to show up. Since we are not aware of how the Lord will be present and what gospel opportunities will be afforded us when we are present with marginalized people, we have to provide the space for these opportunities to occur.

A personal idiographic account will be shared here to authenticate this point. A number of years ago, while engaging in street evangelism in an inner-city mall in central Hamilton, I took the opportunity to sit beside an elderly gentleman on a bench near the food court. Neither of us were in a rush, so I was able to make some small talk. As time progressed, the gentleman began to share his life story with me. He had been born in Afghanistan, but a year before the war against the Taliban began, he left to be with his daughter, a professor at a university in Canada. He became animated as he shared about life in Afghanistan. Over the years, he would travel back and forth between Canada and his native country to help out his brother. The conversation continued to ebb and flow as it crossed matters of faith and praxis, burdens and joys, family and friends. Some forty-

five minutes passed before he had to leave. He thanked me, and then said something that grieved me: "You are the first person, since my arrival to Canada five years ago, who has asked about my story and cared to listen. No one has time to listen here, and no one seems to care."

Practicing the ministry of presence may be one of the greatest gifts we can provide the refugee, the landed immigrant, the widow, people with disabilities, the estranged, the lonely, and those on the margins of society. Nouwen shared that to be present is to listen to and identify with each other "as mortal fragile human beings who need to be heard and sustained by one another."[98] The ministry of presence is also a window, Nouwen argues, through which we can see how God creates space to serve the world with Christian love.[99] When presence is fostered, a loving spirit-filled reciprocity blooms, which serves to strengthen and bless all those within a community.[100] A community is weak and anemic *without* a continual practice of being present with one another. Fitch argues that "God becomes . . . present through a people who make his presence known . . . as churches shrink and the injustices of the world press on us, it has never been more urgent for the church to be faithfully present in the world around us."[101] Although the ministry of presence is rooted in Christ, Christ's ministry of presence was not an end in itself, but a means to demonstrate his compassion, to let people know of his purpose, and ultimately to show them their greatest need: the redemption of their souls through his salvific work.

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[98] La Noue, *Spiritual Legacy of Henri Nouwen*, 130.
[99] La Noue, *Spiritual Legacy of Henri Nouwen*, 118.
[100] Nouwen, *¡Gracias!*, 145.
[101] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 28.

Evidently, the use of time to practice a ministry of presence is desperately needed in order to minister effectively, especially in lower SES communities. What spiritual discipline can help us to grow in and foster this kind of ministry? Nouwen answers this question by sharing, again, a discipline that stands paradoxically against the notion of presence: solitude. Nouwen suggests that by learning how to surrender our time to the practice of solitude, we are more able to be real and intimate in our time with others.[102]

At the same time, Nouwen is clear that it is not solitude in and of itself that allows us to be more connected to people, but the movement practiced during solitude. For Nouwen, this is a movement from solitude to community, and from community to ministry. In solitude, we leave behind our many activities, concerns, plans, projects, opinions, and convictions, and enter into the presence of our loving God naked, vulnerable, open, and receptive.[103] For this reason, solitude in a paradoxical way conserves time. There is an existential link between fruitful solitude and an effective use of time because communing with others is best precipitated by communion with God in prayer.[104]

Therefore, by learning to surrender one's time to prayer in solitude, one's intimacy with God can be strengthened; in turn, this will translate into one becoming more spiritually and emotionally intimate with others.[105] For Nouwen, this phenomenon

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[102] Nouwen, *Way of the Heart*, 17.

[103] Both Dallas Willard and Henri Nouwen have convinced me of the need to connect solitude to prayer as interconnected virtues that inspire spiritual growth as a disciple. See Willard, *Great Omission,* 70–90. Nouwen (*Inner Voice of Love*, 68) calls solitude a creative absence.

[104] Nouwen (*The Living Reminder*, 44) characterizes this need for solitude as a "ministry of absence," where we minister through both intentional presence and absence and "learn to leave so that the Spirit may come."

[105] Nouwen, *Wounded Healer*, 51. Ford (*Wounded Prophet*, 12) also says: "[Nouwen's] deepest contemplative moments were reached in writing in which he often found solitude and the centre of himself."

is rooted in the life of Christ. The secret of Jesus' ministry lies in the lonely place where he went to pray in Luke 5:16. From the reader's vantage point, it seems Jesus' solitude and rich fellowship with his Father provided him with the necessary strength and vitality to follow his Father's heart and minister to those in need. Nouwen translates this into a practice of ministry, intimating that there is a useful "uselessness" in withdrawing to a lonely place and remaining with God to do nothing but "waste time" with him in prayer.[106] He writes: "Prayer is not a way of being busy with God instead of with people."[107] Rather, prayer "unmasks the illusion of busyness, usefulness, and indispensability. It is a way of being empty and useless in the presence of God, and so proclaiming our basic belief that all is grace and nothing is simply the result of hard work."[108] Indeed, solitude is the place where God reveals himself as God-with-us, as the God who is the centre and purpose of our existence, as the God who wants to give himself to us with unconditional, unlimited, and unrestrained love. Solitude is the place of conversion and turning away from comparison and competition; it is a place of self-emptying and total dependence on God.[109]

Understanding time through a downwardly mobile lens is to leverage it for the sake of deepening and enriching the communion we have with those who are marginalized. This offers practical implications for those engaged in urban church planting which will be shared in the final chapter.

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[106] Nouwen, *Living Reminder*, 51.
[107] Nouwen, *Living Reminder*, 52.
[108] Nouwen, *Living Reminder*, 52–53.
[109] Karickal, "From Professional Functioning," 263.

Wealth

Nouwen was a white, middle-class Dutch-American who served at two of the most prestigious universities on the western side of the Atlantic. While Nouwen was at Harvard in the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts (having been offered tenure, a home, and an income that amply covered his needs), he chose to leave for Daybreak in Toronto. He had not first, however, lived on the streets of Lawrence (the poorest city in Massachusetts) with the powerless and the marginalized.[110] This lived reality raises a critique that has already been addressed: Nouwen does not have an authentic voice in the charge for the church to embrace a more downwardly mobile approach to ministry because of his privileged position. As noted, one interviewee wondered if his move was merely a means to assuage his internal guilt for what he had accumulated in his upwardly mobile life. However, it has been defended that Nouwen's move to a downwardly mobile life of assisting Adam at Daybreak, with his mental and physical disabilities, invites Nouwen to the table, rather than cancels him. Put another way, his move allowed him the right to question what other middle-class Christians may fail to question: the moulding influence of wealth on the soul.[111]

Nouwen's existential struggle was not against his desire for more wealth per se, but against his own insatiable competitive and ambitious spirit that sought comfort, status, and prestige.[112] These, he found, were pathologies and saboteurs to the Christ-like union he wanted to experience.[113] In this existential struggle, Nouwen was not elevating

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[110] "Top 10 Poorest Cit[ies] in Massachusetts 2023."

[111] Nouwen (*The Road to Daybreak*, 66–67) believed that the sensual desires for worldly things endanger the soul which, he states, is destined to rest in God.

[112] Nouwen et al., *Compassion*, 7–17.

[113] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 154.

himself to some moral high ground. Rather, he understood the phenomenological patterns of his own heart and its bend towards the upwardly mobile life. Nouwen is honest with himself, and writes that it is seemingly impossible to change the direction of the ladder toward downward mobility, as "everything in me wants to move upward."[114]

However, this pull to the upwardly mobile life through competitively climbing the career ladder and achieving success and popularity not only consumed him at times, but ironically, fed an existential sense of gnawing emptiness.[115] Nouwen did not impose those feelings on others, but wondered if others who were driven by securing wealth as a kind of *modus operandi* to life had also bought into the upwardly mobile lie that more is intrinsically good and that not joining the trajectory for status and success is failure.[116] Subsequently, Nouwen was concerned not only for his own soul, but for the souls of those who may not yet realize that success and the love of wealth and prosperity may be the greatest suppressant to a vibrant spiritual life, as they leave little space for God and for others.[117]

All of the missional authors corroborate Nouwen's concern and write passionately about the influence that wealth, consumerism, and greed can have on the soul and the church's missional calling. In summary, we learned that Basil the Great saw an inverse relationship between the accumulation of wealth and care for one's soul or the souls of others. He states: "It is equally difficult to preserve one's soul from despair in hard times, and to prevent it from becoming arrogant in prosperous circumstances.[118] John Calvin

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[114] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 154.
[115] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 122.
[116] Nouwen, "The Selfless Way of the Christ," 14.
[117] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 115.
[118] Basil, *On Social Justice*, 49.

spoke about the natural proclivity of the soul towards what he frames as an infinite eagerness to pursue wealth, honour, and intrigue, apart from finding contentment in the Lord. He writes: "We have a remarkable dread of . . . poverty, mean birth, a humble condition and feel the strongest desire to guard against them.[119] Goheen articulates the radical loss of meaning that wealth imparts on a soul when it is separated from the metanarrative of Scripture. He argues that the plethora of goods and services available to us bids people to retreat into entertainment and seek distractions through new forms of technology, all as a means to distract themselves from their empty and disillusioned lives.[120] Chester and Timmin argue that the pathologies that detract us from our love for the poor are our proclivities towards the increase of wealth and position.[121]

Keller addresses his concerns around the accumulation of wealth in the context of the spiritual morbidity of greed. He argues that greed can hide itself from the victim.[122] Finally, Fitch does not have a lot to say about wealth in his book, although he indirectly considers various pathologies that hurt a Christian's incarnational presence. Some of those pathologies are greed, covetousness, and strife. The church, he opines, should be a place of refuge and healing, rather than a place of success, power, competition, ambition, and striving.[123]

The danger of wealth and its comorbidities was widely communicated in the interviews through the sub-themes of the socializing impact of wealth, arrival mentality, and contentment or simplicity. It was pointed out that no one is exempt from the

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[119] Calvin, *Calvin's Little Book on the Christian Life*, 14.
[120] Goheen, *A Light to the* Nations, 210.
[121] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 82–84.
[122] Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 52.
[123] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 80.

proclivity towards consumerism and greed. Addressing an ill among middle-class members of his church, one interviewee shared that some members are absent psychologically and spiritually due to this proclivity. Stuart noted that this struggle is not defined to one demographic; it is not just the wealthy in our congregations that might be captivated by what they own or can buy, but also the poor. Since all are encouraged by the Apostle Paul to learn the secret of being content, Nick questioned what the pursuit of wealth, for people of all SES brackets, is ultimately for. The question Christians need to ask themselves is this: "What is my motivation for pursuing more things?"

In *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger,* Ronald Sider argues that the church needs to make dramatic, concrete moves to escape the materialism that seeps into it via diabolically clever and incessant advertising.[124] We have been brainwashed to believe, he argues, that bigger houses, more prosperous businesses, and more sophisticated electronic devices are the way to joy and fulfillment. As a result, we get caught in an absurd, materialistic spiral. The more money we make, the more we think we need in order to live decently and respectably. "Somehow," he writes, "we have to break this cycle, because it makes us sin against our needy brothers and sisters and, therefore, against our Lord. And it also destroys us. Sharing with others is the way to real joy."[125]

For his part, Nouwen longed to live a simple life, and his move from Harvard to Daybreak was an existential statement to that end.[126] He advocated for a more authentic way of living, believing that following the downwardly mobile path allows one to excise some of the superficial trappings of modern life. Before moving into Daybreak, Nouwen

[124] Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 186.
[125] Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 186–87.
[126] Though he kept up a rigorous speaking and writing schedule, Nouwen (*Sabbatical Journey*, 48) sought a simpler and clearer way of communicating.

spent a year at L'Arche à Trosly in France. For Nouwen, the poor—not monetarily, but in physical ability—that he met there challenged him to confront his own existential brokenness and need for healing. In a radical change of attitude, he learned that the poor can become guides for spiritual life and serve as healers and true barometers of the human spirit.[127] The residents at L'Arche's open display of feelings, ranging from anger to unconditional love, forces those in communion with them to throw away masks and be what they are. This, Nouwen argues, is truly a healing ministry which is "fruitful" rather than "productive," as God makes his presence known through their emotional honesty.[128] It was at L'Arche in France that Nouwen began to realize the beauty of living a simpler life and the need to become more vulnerable, which in turn allowed him to understand the needs of others.[129]

Although an understanding of Nouwen's view on simplicity can be extrapolated from his corpus, he does not define clearly what the discipline of simplicity entails. To find such a definition and application, I turned to Lausanne's 1980 Occasional Paper, entitled "An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle." A detailed summary of the commitment to simplicity extends beyond the scope of this thesis, but there are a few conclusions within this paper that provide clarity to this discipline.

To begin, the authors address the purpose of their article in Part 3: Poverty and Wealth: "All of us are shocked by the poverty of millions and disturbed by the injustices which cause it. Those of us who live in affluent circumstances accept our duty to develop a simple lifestyle in order to contribute more generously to both relief and

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[127] Nouwen, *Lifesigns*, 73.

[128] Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak*, 19.

[129] Nouwen as I have understood him, did not see the choice to live a simpler life as meritorious. His aim was to find peace and love and to walk more closely with his Saviour.

evangelism."[130] With that purpose in mind, the authors felt an obligation to commit to a simple lifestyle out of obedience to Christ, who calls for compassion, evangelism, development, justice, and solemn anticipation of the day of Judgment. The authors' aim was to have every member of the Lausanne movement sign it.[131] In fact, it was a commitment the authors wanted the world to witness and join. They stated: "We affirm that involuntary poverty is an offence against the goodness of God . . . the church must stand with God and the poor against injustice, suffer with them and call on rulers to fulfill their God appointed role."[132] They then made an admission that they (the members of the Lausanne movement) struggled to open their own minds and hearts to the uncomfortable words of Jesus about wealth.[133] For example, Jesus tells his followers in Luke 12:15 to "be on guard against all kinds of greed" because "life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." The authors also noted that throughout the gospels there are warnings about the danger of riches, the vanity of wealth, and the challenge of the rich person to enter the Kingdom of heaven (specifically in Matt 19:23). The authors also shared that they "believe Jesus calls some people (perhaps you) to follow him in a lifestyle of total, voluntary poverty." Furthermore, Jesus calls his followers to pursue inner freedom from the seduction of riches (for it is impossible to serve God and money), and to practice sacrificial generosity (1 Tim 6:8).

[130] Nichols, "An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Life-Style."
[131] Nichols, "An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Life-Style."
[132] Nichols, "An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Life-Style."
[133] Nichols, "An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Life-Style."

Finally, the authors argue that "while some of us have been called to live among the poor, and others to open our homes to the needy, all of us are determined to develop a simpler lifestyle."[134] They define more carefully what this looks like:

> We intend to reexamine our income and expenditure, in order to manage on less and give away more. We lay down no rules or regulations, for either ourselves or others. Yet we resolve to renounce waste and oppose extravagance in personal living, clothing and housing, travel and church buildings. We also accept the distinction between necessities and luxuries, creative hobbies and empty status symbols, modesty and vanity, occasional celebrations and normal routine, and between the service of God and the slavery to fashion. Those of us who belong to the West need the help of our Third World brothers and sisters in evaluating our standards of spending. Those of us who live in the Third World acknowledge that we too are exposed to the temptation to covetousness. So, we need each other's understanding, encouragement, and prayer.[135]

The paper is not the definitive word on the discipline of simplicity, but it opens the door for deeper circumspection. The Lausanne authors corroborate Nouwen's and the missional authors' concern that the most powerful defense against the religion of upward mobility and the proclivity for more wealth is the practice of simplicity. Nouwen et al., are not disparaging those who are wealthy, but inviting them into something better: a downwardly focused simplicity that fuels contentment and, by God's grace, opportunities to share resources with those in need.

A few lines of reflection are in order as we seek to apply the call for simplicity for church planters and the church membership in lower SES areas. First, there is a great need to challenge any upwardly mobile pursuit that is driven by a social imaginary aptly called the "American Dream." Whether people are sold on the lie to live the best life now, to chase comfort over confession, and to live extravagantly, this lie has a

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[134] Nichols, "An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Life-Style."
[135] Nichols, "An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Life-Style."

phenomenological reality that in turn impacts the church and its growth. For example, it leads people to compromise their Christian ethic, replacing generosity, humility, love for evangelism, and care for the hurting with the pathologies of competition, greed, and discontentment. These sins then become saboteurs to union between us and Christ, and between ourselves and others.[136] The religion of upward mobility can break down relationships within the church and the community as it calcifies the heart from the needs of the weak, the poor, and the marginalized. Nouwen noticed this in the Netherlands when he considered the affluence of those in the church and his family, leading him to leave with this prognosis that there was "No real time to grow up and do the necessary thing: "Love God and each other."[137]

Second, when the church practices the mindset of downward mobility, the Lausanne conviction towards simplicity becomes a helpful guide. The simple life that Nouwen and Lausanne defend is not to become poor (as there is nothing inherently virtuous in being poor), but to grow spiritually rich by storing up wealth in heaven (Matt 6:19–21). It is not that riches are bad in themselves, but the question of motivation is critically summarized in this question: Why are you purchasing what you are purchasing and are you content with what you have? It has been said that one of the least prayed-for decisions is the purchase of a home. The question of why and where in terms of moving should be saturated with prayer under the banner of serving Christ and his Kingdom (cf. Matt 6:33). Furthermore, the urban church does well to have wealthy people who live simple lives and pursue inner freedom apart from the seduction of money. Ultimately, as one interviewee noted, the aim of the church planter is to bring people back to the true sense of contentment,

[136] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 154.
[137] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 108.

which is an enduring satisfaction in Christ alone. Finally, the voice of Christ to be displaced for his sake can easily be lost over the clamour for more money. At the same time, the blessing of having wealthy members in the church was not overlooked. Still, this question is asked: Are the wealthy able to live content, even simple lives within the community that they seek to embrace, the community of the marginalized, poor and the powerless?

Power

As we have already critically considered the theme of power in this chapter, little attention will be given to Nouwen's understanding of Christ's *kenosis* and his subsequent embrace of powerlessness. That is to say, although the supposed powerlessness of Christ served as a motivating factor for Nouwen to serve at Daybreak, we will now explore power in terms of its use and abuse within the contexts of upward and downward mobility.

As noted in Chapter 2, Nouwen's theology of power can be cast in two different lights. First, Nouwen saw that power can easily be abused when it is rooted in one's sinful proclivity for control, influence, relevance, popularity, and applause.[138] He saw that this application of power also feeds the religion of upward mobility. The second way Nouwen saw power was in weakness.[139] But it was Nouwen's struggle with power in the first sense that he had to disabuse himself of in order to serve effectively and compassionately in Lima and at Daybreak. One could capture Nouwen's life as a journey, from power to weakness. This journey served to inoculate Nouwen from the temptation for more power, prestige, and relevance.

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[138] Nouwen, *Show Me the Way*, 89.
[139] Jonas, *Henri Nouwen*, xxv.

This theme of power receives little attention in the missional literature, with Fitch as the exception. In *Faithful Presence,* Fitch sees true power not as a pathology, per se, but as something to be recognized, received, and delegated by God. Therefore, followers of Christ do not need to fear power, but ought to realize they are really powerless except for the power delegated from above.[140] Fitch argues that those who carry the most delegated power must submit first, just as Christ did in washing the disciples' feet, to demonstrate that through humility and submission his reign and presence is established among us.[141] This submission, Fitch argues, also gives room for reconciliation, as the gospel is about giving up control and submitting to Christ as Lord and Saviour.[142] Fitch argues that this is power exerted through weakness.[143]

A few of the interviewees reflected on Fitch's understanding of power in the context of this question: "How do I give away power, because I do not want (others) to feel disempowered in the church?" For example, how does the church empower low–income members (those on the margins) to assume leadership roles at the church? Have we learned to maximize the gifts of those who feel disempowered? Do we empower those who seem to have less power into positions of leadership? It is interesting to note that Putman, in *Bowling Alone,* argues that "poor families are generally less involved in religious communities than affluent families."[144] Indeed, disempowered people are often discouraged people.

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[140] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 44.
[141] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 44.
[142] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 86.
[143] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 86.
[144] Putnam, *Our Kids*, 224.

It is possible, says Ed, that the church may disempower people and make them feel they do not measure up. For example, it is possible for a church to convey the message that attendees' attire, pedigree, or education levels do not measure up to an implicit entry requirement. Members may thus sense some implicit judgment and wonder what they did wrong, or believe that other members are better than themselves. One of the interviewees, Stuart, noted that the disempowered or marginalized typically "think by the clothes (those in power) have, the cars they drive, and even the language they speak, that . . . Christianity is not attainable for them." He goes on: "The result for some, then, in coming to Christ is a status level rather than being vulnerable and repenting before the Lord and putting faith in Christ." As Nouwen would say, our calling as pastors and leaders is to seek relationships with those who are marginalized and disempowered by exposing our own powerlessness, so that they can see what it means to truly be the beloved of God**.**

The notion of power in the church is as wide as it is deep, and therefore demands more attention than this paper can discuss. However, we must now consider a spiritual discipline that engenders a proper application of power and disabuses itself of any egregious use of it: faithful service. Although Nouwen does not use the phrase "empowerment through service," he chose the word "ministry" to define this discipline, which has its roots in service.[145] Nouwen fully endorses this ethic and style of leadership, and in some ways built his ministry upon it. Referencing the *kenosis* of Christ, Nouwen writes that if we want to have the mind of Christ, we must become servants of the

[145] The word ministry is rooted in the Latin noun, *minister* or *ministry*: servant, attendant, waiter, etc.

people.[146] Nouwen continues: "True servants depend on those whom they serve. They may be called to live lives in which others guide them, often to places they would rather not go."[147] At the same time, serving is not to be done alone. Ministry, Nouwen argues, is a communal, mutually-shared experience. We do not minister *to;* we minister *with* and *among* others.[148] One of the reasons Nouwen argues for joint service is that he found over and over again how hard it was to be truly faithful to Jesus when he sought to serve alone. He writes: "I need my brothers and sisters to pray with me, to speak with me about the spiritual task at hand, and to challenge me to stay pure in mind, heart, and body."[149]

In this discipline of empowering through service, Nouwen also felt that pastors should remain grounded in their own vulnerability and brokenness in Christ.[150] As shared in Chapter 4, there is concern that a kind of middle-class privilege might create power differentials between the rich and the poor and the middle-class and the working poor, and that this might foster suspicion between these classes within the church. But the discipline of service, when pastors and leaders are aware of their own vulnerability, mitigates those power differentials. All of this is built on the truth of Jesus' ministry to the world. His ministry displays a heart of service, both in sharing the truth that "the greatest among you will be your servant" and in demonstrating service through dying on the cross (Matt 23:11).

Phenomenologically, the discipline of service is a movement of empathy, love, and compassion that flows from a heart united to Christ in awareness of being a beloved

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[146] Nouwen, *iGracias!*, 19.
[147] Nouwen, *iGracias!*, 19.
[148] Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 132.
[149] Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 132–3.
[150] Nouwen, *Road to Daybreak*, 189.

child of God. The practice of service is rooted in humility, and as such needs to give the powerless a voice and hold the powerful accountable for their actions.

Preaching/Evangelism and Nouwen as an Exemplary Model

To conclude this chapter, brief remarks will be made on two themes generated from the dataset that align with Nouwen's vision for downward mobility and the urban church. These are (1) preaching and evangelism, and (2) Nouwen as an exemplary model.[151] Although the dataset also generated the theme of *kenosis,* this theme has already been thoroughly examined at the beginning of this chapter. It should also be noted that the theme of preaching and evangelism did not highlight the same existential realities that home, time, wealth, and power did, but it does play a critical part in developing an effective vision for serving the church in urban Canada.

Preaching

Nouwen retained his credentials as a priest when he moved to the United States to commence his academic career, and he kept them when he ministered at Daybreak. However, although Nouwen preached occasionally at Daybreak and sundry Canadian parishes, he did not engage in the weekly exercise of preaching, nor did he directly speak about the need and purpose of evangelism. This is, as noted, a weakness in Nouwen's praxis of ministry. On the other hand, his pastoral ministry was marked by compassion, gospel-informed spirituality, and incessant prayer.[152] Reflecting on his life of prayer, he

[151] In Chapter 4 I also noted evangelism as a subtheme, but I have amalgamated them for the purpose of this brief theological reflection.

[152] Nouwen had taken courses on ministry and spirituality during his ten-year teaching career before heading to Daybreak. See Beumer, *Henri Nouwen*, 179.

noted: "When we have met our Lord in silent intimacy of prayer, then we will also meet him in the *campo* in the market and in the town square."[153]

In contrast to Nouwen's preaching schedule, most of the interviewees communicated the importance of preaching and sharing the gospel as a means to reach their respective communities without differentiating between the poor and the wealthy. As noted, Quinten said: "I want to communicate in my preaching the elevation of honour and respect to those who are marginalised and to give them a place at the table." This is the gift of preaching. It puts everyone under the same roof, provides the same God-given value to all his image bearers, demonstrates the same need for grace, and holds out the same promise of eternal life in Christ to all (Rom 8:17).

However, pastors and those engaged in evangelism serve in vain if they do not love the community they serve. One of the lessons of Christ's ministry is that he walked with the poor and people with disabilities, the prostitute and the tax collector—those disdained by society—and intimately knew their plight and understood their needs, especially their incessant need for his grace.[154] In fact, as Craig points out, "as (pastors) you are not just teaching people, but you are learning from their social context, as well." The need to know the social and spiritual needs of your community—whether as a formal preacher of the gospel or as a lay member sharing the same gospel—cannot be overstated. Decentering one's library of its whiteness (for white pastors), as suggested by one interviewee, is deeply valuable in order to engage more effectively and compassionately the voices of diverse communities in urban Canada. Avoiding Euro-

[153] Nouwen, *iGracias!*, 21; Nouwen, *Clowning in Rome*, 87.

[154] Heb 2:11 summarizes this truth in this way: "For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."

centrism entails a dialogical engagement with a broad spectrum of non-European voices, while maintaining a conversation with what might be termed 'traditional' European and American sources that have proven generative for ministry in Western contexts. Whether a church leader is white, black, Asian, or African, exegeting Scripture through discerning, spiritual eyes and trusted commentaries aims to both sensitively recognize and speak into the socio-economic and cultural diversity of our audience, without being delimited by our context.[155] As Paul says in Gal 3:28 in reference to the unity in the church, "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"? The gospel is a university of hope, providing unity in diversity as it reconciles, by faith through grace, all who put their trust in Jesus.

Nouwen As an Exemplary Model

Second, we should consider whether Nouwen should serve as our exemplary model in pursuing the downwardly mobile lifestyle. My obvious answer is, to a large degree, yes; otherwise the dissertation would not have been written. But the interviewees, and no less Nouwen himself, demand that this answer be nuanced. To be sure, although Nouwen, along with Carl Rogers, believed that "what is most personal is most universal," Nouwen did not imply that he wanted to be emulated, per se.[156] He shared his experiences as a wounded healer. He was poor in spirit, but passionate about the love and mercy of Christ that he came to know fully through his downwardly mobile path of service at Daybreak. He did not credit his convictions to himself. In fact, Nouwen would say it was Adam who is the greater teacher for us all, as Adam was unknowingly on a mission to reveal Christ

[155] For more on this, see McCaulley, *Reading While Black*, 164–67.
[156] Nouwen, *The Road to DayBreak*, 69; Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 7.

to impoverished souls.[157] Nouwen writes: "Adam helped me, by his life, to discover and rediscover the Spirit of Jesus alive in my own 'poorness of spirit.'"[158] It was through Adam's death that Nouwen's spirit was changed. "His death was a wake-up call. It seemed as if he said to me: 'Now that I have left you, you can write about me and tell your friends and readers what I have taught you about the mystery of our wonderful God who came to dwell among us and who sent us the Holy Spirit.'"[159]

The question remains: should we emulate or question Nouwen's move from Harvard to Daybreak? The interviewees answered in both variegated and generative ways and therefore their responses require further reflection. Essentially, two radically different responses were shared. One perspective is that Nouwen's decision should be emulated because that is what it means to follow the downwardly mobile Saviour who walked with the poor and the marginalized. Since Jesus showed his preferential love for the weak and powerless, so should preachers of the Gospel. The other perspective states the opposite. Two interviewees questioned Nouwen's decision because he had garnered a distinguished professorship at Harvard, and the Lord may thus have called him to stay and reach the affluent: those caught on the treadmill of upward mobility. If given the opportunity, Nouwen would share what these critical voices need to hear, specifically because his soul had experienced gnawing emptiness, a kind of existential battering, and deep loneliness as he climbed the ladder of upward mobility to garner greater academic status.

At the same time, the majority of interviewees were circumspect enough to realize that only a few could embrace the specific path that Nouwen followed. A married man or

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[157] Nouwen, *Adam*, 15–16.
[158] Nouwen, *Adam*, 16.
[159] Nouwen, *Adam*, 16.

woman would struggle to follow that same path, although married couples have served at Daybreak.[160] Nonetheless, the majority of participants agreed there is something to learn from Nouwen's journey to Daybreak. Still, the question is not whether we follow Nouwen or not, but, as one interviewee put it, whether we are willing to discern the voice of Christ and radically obey Christ, who may be saying to us: "I am sending you!"

In the end, Nouwen's move was precipitated not just by existential emptiness and a spiritual vacuum in his relationship with Christ, but also by the obvious need in the world, which he saw could be fulfilled at Daybreak. Nouwen was a man of deep kindness and ready compassion. Spirit-filled, Nouwen chose to become weak for the weak, powerless for the powerless, and poor in spirit for the poor in spirit. Whether he accomplished a truly downwardly mobile ministry at Daybreak will be discussed briefly in the concluding chapter, but this much is true: Nouwen's love for people with disabilities and hurts has been a significant influence on many of the pastors and missional leaders who participated in this study. It is worth repeating that "you don't really feel the gospel gain traction until you're among the poor and the suffering—the people for whom Christ came," as one of the interviewees noted. Nouwen understood this, and because in many ways he bore the stripes of the gospel as a wounded healer, he is worth reading and emulating.

[160] "Employment Opportunities, L'Arche Daybreak." There is no prerequisite to be single to serve there, although it may have been easier for Nouwen to live on site as a single man.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Church planting in lower socioeconomically status communities forces us to address three correlated questions. The first is "why?" Why should we seek to establish gospel-centred churches in marginalized communities, the *terra incognita* of urban Canada? The second is "who?" Who are those involved in this ministry and what are some of the existential matters of the heart that need to be addressed for effective ministry? The third is "what?" What are some of the lessons learned or practices gained from this project that could serve to support ministry in marginalized communities? Of these three questions, the last question will receive the most attention.

The answer to "why?" is predicated on the reality that God sent his Son into the world to seek and to save the lost (John 3:16). Having fully borne the penalty of our sin by his death and then rising again for our justification (Rom 4:25), Jesus commissions his disciples to go into all the world to make disciples of the nations (Matt 28:18–20). This commission is repeated in Acts 1:8, and lived out throughout the rest of the book. Therefore, in Acts we learn that animated by the Spirit of Christ, the gospel is preached, and individuals are converted, discipled, and brought into fellowship with other believers. Inevitably, we see churches planted in various cities and towns across the Roman Empire, and in particular Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor and Greece. Not surprisingly, after the account of gospel expansion is given and churches are particularized, letters are written by the apostles Paul, Peter, et al., to these congregations. Through these letters members are discipled, and a robust theology on soteriological, ecclesiological, pneumatological,

and other matters are communicated and applied. In the end, what becomes self-evident in the twenty-seven books of the NT is that church planting is the *sine qua non* of the mission and the expansion of Christ's kingdom. Therefore, one need not read widely in Scripture to explain why establishing churches in lower socio-economic urban areas is of critical importance.

What should also be self-evident is that when Christ commissioned his church to make disciples, he did not consider certain demographics, communities, or people groups to be outside the purview of this vision. By Jesus saying πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (all nations) in Matt 28:19, he revealed the comprehensive nature of gospel ministry for all people, irrespective of their socioeconomic status. Paul summarizes this truth in his eschatological picture of the church when he writes in Gal 3: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:27–8). That the call of the gospel transcends suburban and urban divides, *terra incognitia* and inviting suburban real estate, middle-class people living in detached homes and those living in government subsidized apartments, the powerful and the powerless, and the unhindered and the people with disabilities alike, should not be lost on the church today. That is, without a firm foundation built on the richness of the gospel of Christ for all people, everywhere, our church-planting labours are in vain.

This question and answer led to the initial impetus for this project. The question exposes a lack of engagement to gospel-ministry in Canadian urban centres, especially amongst lower socio-economic people groups. As noted, while urbanization continues to rise in Canada, there is a continuing rural or suburban drift of faithful Bible believers

away from these marginalized communities. Subsequently, we have a paucity of churches, particularly Reformed evangelical churches, in Canadian inner-cities.

This thesis does not engage the economic or sociological reasons for this migration—although I would contend that Putnam in *Bowling Alone* and *American Kids* may be a resource to unveil some of the socioeconomic reasons—but this project does engage with Nouwen's concern that Christians may be blinded to the need and call of the gospel for the marginalized in our cities, as they are caught in too much of everything.[1] It seems the pull to the upwardly mobile life can blind us from those who need Christ and the gospel. The power of upward mobility, for Nouwen, is antithetical to the way of Christ. As was noted in Chapter 2, the antidote is to adopt a downward way, which is defined existentially by conforming one's life to the pattern of the self-emptying Christ, who calls his church to a selfless, simple, and humble life for the sake of others. For Nouwen the downward way is to resist the upward pull for wealth, relevance, and power as an end in itself.[2] Indeed, pursuing a more downwardly mobile way to reach our communities with the hope of the gospel is the way of the cross.[3]

Notwithstanding this perennial concern for the church, my guess is that most readers of this research project understand why we must plant churches amongst marginalized communities in urban Canada. This leads, however, to the question of "who." Who is the man or woman behind the veil of our public persona, our stated church allegiance, and our Christian philosophy of mission that is engaged in this

[1] Nouwen (*Road to Daybreak*, 108) makes the point that in the West in general but in his native country, the Netherlands in particular, there is too much to play with. No real time to grow up and do the necessary thing: "Love God and each other."

[2] Durback, *Seeds of Hope*, 6.

[3] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 62.

ministry? More pointedly, what are some of the existential matters of the heart that need to be exposed as the church lives out its *raison d'être* for Christ in lower SES communities?

Nouwen suggests that one's reason for ministering to a particular people group may be more important than simply knowing how to run an effective ministry. Nouwen's journey is instructive because he engages with the difficult questions around motivation and purpose in the pursuit of this service. While at Harvard, Nouwen was led to question whether he was growing closer to Christ or whether he was stuck in rather unhelpful life patterns as a quinquagenarian.[4] He contends that his mood became depressed, sulky, and bitter while his soul was restlessly searching for purpose and fulfillment in Christ.[5] Nouwen's search for answers to these existential questions led him not only to desire greater intimacy with Christ, but to pursue a life at Daybreak in order to live out the compassion and love of Christ to the core members there.[6] For Nouwen, this meant embracing the selfless downwardly mobile way that Christ himself modeled on earth.

Notwithstanding this move, I agree with Christopher De Vinck in his biography of Nouwen—*Nouwen Then*—when he postulates that Nouwen never fully practiced downward mobility.[7] In some ways, such a life is unattainable for most, and certainly for a highly sought-after speaker and writer. However, Nouwen did manage to practice what some have called inward mobility; that is, he sought to appropriate in his heart the

[4] Nouwen, *Inner Voice of Love*, 113–15.
[5] Nouwen, *Road to DayBreak*, 3.
[6] People with disabilities otherwise abled residents at Daybreak are called "core members." See "Who We Are," *L'Arche Daybreak.*
[7] De Vinck, *Nouwen Then*, 23.

meaning of following a selfless Christ.[8] Nouwen's inward mobility demonstrated a deep self-awareness that is generative for us as readers, as it is predicated upon three realities. First, Nouwen knew himself to be beloved of God; he knew that God's unconditional acceptance of him as his beloved child through Christ could set him free from the pathologies around upward mobility, especially the compulsion to be seen, praised, and admired.[9] Second, the way of downward mobility can become our way as we are transformed into the living Christ by his Spirit.[10] That is, the more we are filled by the Spirit of Christ the way of selflessness, compassion, love, care for others, and even joining others in their suffering becomes an embodied reality in our lives. Third, the religion of the upwardly mobile life should be resisted, since we share in the ministry of Jesus, who faithfully resisted the proclivity for an upwardly mobile life. To this end, Karickal summarizes Nouwen's perspective on this:

> Ministry requires a solid spirituality . . . to stand up to the temptations and compulsions of the world (i.e. upward mobility) and to bring comfort, healing and life to the suffering people as an act of witnessing to the loving and redeeming presence of God . . .It is the radical, downward and vulnerable way of Jesus. The minister's willingness to make his wounds a source of healing for others, his willingness to lay down his life for others and his willingness to be led by the voice of God determine the creative power of ministry. This is not possible without the knowledge of the 'first love' that assures our belovedness and embraces all our love and service.[11]

[8] There are a number of reasons for this conclusion. Chief among them is that Nouwen was always in a position of power as a caregiver, he was provided for sufficiently, and he was mobile—travelling much of the Western world as a much sought after speaker.

[9] Nouwen, *The Selfless Christ*, 58.

[10] Nouwen (*The Selfless Christ*, 28) spells this out further: "The spiritual life is the life of the Spirit of Christ in us, a life that sets us free to be strong while weak, to be rich while poor, to be on the downward way of salvation while living in the midst of an upwardly mobile society.".

[11] Karickal, "From Professional Functioning," 200.

Nouwen articulated his existential faith struggle in light of the religion of upward mobility that he argues drew him away from Christ and left his soul empty, vacuous of love, and lacking in compassion and empathy for the hurting.

Although Nouwen could not fully live out a downwardly mobile life, the inward mobility of the heart is something he sought after and is also an existential reality that every Christian needs to explore. I believe this inward mobility is seeking to live the paradox of the gospel.[12] For Nouwen and everyone who delights in following Christ, the paradox is rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus makes it clear that the way down is the way up, that to have nothing is to possess all, and that to give is to receive.[13] Jesus puts it this way: "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35) and "those who exalt themselves will be humbled" (Matt 23:12) and "whoever loses his life will save it" (Mark 8:35). This vulnerability is instructive for the church planter and members of urban churches in lower SES communities. What all this suggests is that by following the selfless Christ, we are more able to take the path of "less." Further, Nouwen's approach can serve to inoculate us against the temptations that so easily surround upwardly mobile pursuits, especially surrounding home, time, wealth, and power.

Although Nouwen sought to live out the paradox of the gospel, he did not absolutize the way of downward mobility. That is, he did not and could not absolutize his move to Daybreak to care for the residents there, nor expect others to make the same move. That was never his intention. Rather, he aimed to expose the power that the religion of upward mobility can have on one's soul at the cost of one's intimacy with

[12] Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*, xxiv.
[13] Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*, xxiv.

Christ and the loss of compassion to the poor and marginalized. In that light, Nouwen does not disparage those who are ambitious and hold positions that garner respect and high salaries: politicians, lawyers, academics, doctors, business owners, etc.[14] In fact, Nouwen's concern is not whether these positions are needed, or even essential for economic, social, and political reasons, because he knows they are. Nouwen is simply asking: *"What is the status of your heart?"* Nouwen might say that it is possible to be upwardly mobile in socioeconomic terms but downwardly mobile in your union with Christ; that is, you may be blessed with material wealth and also be willing to be led by Christ, even to the point of laying down your wealth for Christ and others (Phil 2:3–4).[15]

Engaging the status of one's heart was also explored in the interviews. The interviewees were circumspect about the struggles they had against the upwardly mobile lure and its connection to their ministries. Quinten, for example, summarizes the question of motivation well when he states that the pressure to accumulate greater levels of equity is almost inescapable. Ken shared that he was not inoculated from the lure of materialism, and Ed commented that it is hard to step out in faith and become vulnerable for the Kingdom, when everything in you naturally seeks safety and comfort. All the participants were confronted with the existential reality that safety, security, wealth, and power easily captivate their souls. But all would agree with Nouwen that the path of the downwardly mobile Saviour motivates them in their calling to serve in their lower SES communities and stave off the temptations of the upwardly mobile life.

[14] He also does not address the question of utility around professional careers and the importance of climbing the upward mobility ladder to attain them.

[15] Nouwen, *Creative Ministry*, 104.

This leads us back to the initial thesis of this project. This paper set out to be a phenomenological study on downward mobility and church planting in lower socio-economic areas of urban Canada by engaging the life and writings of Henri Nouwen. The research question was positioned in this way: Is Nouwen's experience and vision of downward mobility generative for those engaged in church planting in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods in urban Canada? After exploring his works, reviewing various missional authors, and interviewing twenty church leaders, I answer this in the affirmative. Nonetheless, the question still raises practical concerns around the recurring themes of home, time, wealth, and power. What are some of the lessons learned or practices gained from this project in the context of church planting in lower SES communities?

Home

The project has shown that the existential reality of where and how we live has central importance in our gospel ministry. As one seeks to follow the selfless Christ, one's home plays an important role in demonstrating Christ's love to those on the margins.

Nouwen and the interviewees generally agreed that if our home is not seen or understood through a spiritual and existential lens, it can easily become a mausoleum of selfishness. As was noted, if one's mind is consumed by the need for constant improvements to the home, or the insidious need to purchase a larger home for more comfort and to display more "power" (or worse, to hold a competitive edge against the so-called "Jones"), the heart will become indifferent to the needs of people experiencing

poverty, disabilities, and a marginal status. Nouwen sees this relentless pull to upward mobility as inimical to the gospel because it is a form of idolatry.

Nouwen's antidote to the idolization of the home is displacement. Nouwen forces this question: For the cause of Christ and for the love of those who are on the margins of society, are you prepared to leave your home to create a home for others? Or, put another way, are you prepared to give up a certain idealized version of what and where your house is for the sake of Christ and others? Are you prepared to move to make yourself more available for Christ's call on your life? Nouwen is not promoting homelessness or intentional home insecurity, but he is asking whether we are prepared to loosen our grip on what we own to heed the voice of Christ. Are we busy in prayer, waiting on the Spirit, heeding the voice of Christ, and seeking his peace when we consider moving or renovating our homes?

Once we purchase or rent a home, our goal must be to leverage it through hospitality. As one of the interviewees stated: "Hospitality is key to serving people." For Nouwen, home's purpose is to serve the cause of Christ by assuaging loneliness and healing brokenness. Anecdotally, serving in a lower SES community has proved to us the importance of hospitality for those who are new to Canada (refugees, landed immigrants) and those who have a lower socioeconomic status. One attendee, a refugee claimant, recently shared that until he was invited into a home of a member he felt invisible at church. It was not that he did not experience the love of Christ during the Sunday service (including the communal lunch we enjoy each week), but that our services did not assuage the feeling that he was an outsider who did not belong. When we open our homes to newcomers and the marginalized, we open our hearts to them. This sense of hospitality

gives those we invite a sense of belonging. They begin to feel that they matter. It is also for this reason that having a home in close proximity to the church is one of the necessary means to share more easily in this fellowship and provide people with a sense of belonging.

Another practical application on this theme involves the type of home we live in. Again, this is an idiographic experience, but one that is corroborated by Nouwen's and the interviewees' concern. Can our homes lead the marginalized (especially new arrivals to Canada) down the path of an unhealthy social imaginary surrounding what it means to be Canadian? Can our home convey a false narrative that you are not truly a Canadian, (or a Canadian Christian), until you own your home—preferably a detached, large, suburban home? The encouragement to live a simple life will be discussed more below, but the importance of such a life when it comes to our homes may be more critical than most Christians believe. Indeed, if not only to protect our own hearts from this sin of idolatry, a simpler home may serve to protect the hearts of those we meet and disciple through our churches. That protection is found in helping them center their lives on what is eternal and seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness, rather than the upwardly mobile lifestyle that may gain the world at the cost of their souls.

Time

The practical elements derived from this study around the theme of time can be summarized in three ways. First, we need to learn to share our time with others. For those who find themselves within a middle-class SES (which includes me as the writer), time is not something we so easily share, because we measure time by productivity. It is important to be productive but our challenge is to be present with people and to listen and

learn from others; the act of slowing down to hear their stories is not a quantifiable but a qualitative, phenomenological reality.

For those who are goal-oriented and fill their schedules to the half or quarter-hour, margins need to be carved out for others. For example, one interviewee mentioned that one or two mornings a week he finds a place to sit in Tim Hortons and listen to those who make this their daily routine. He has become such a staple amongst these folks that he has been able to turn this informal time of sharing and listening into an intentional gospel hour. It started merely by chiselling out time in his schedule to just be with others.

Second, the word *busy* should be excised from our vocabulary. This is worn as a badge of honour and even pride, but it should not be, as it may be one of the great barriers to opening up generative conversation, as both the listener and the speaker feels the unspoken pressure to end the conversation because of the ubiquitous need to control time. As one former professor of mine shared after being asked if he was busy: "I will never say that I am busy, as this becomes an unnecessary barrier within the conversation and fellowship we are meant to enjoy."

Third, a ministry of presence must serve as the bridge between those who feel they need to control time and those who feel they are controlled by time. I repeat Fitch's conclusion here: "It has never been more urgent for the church to be faithfully present in the world around us."[16] However, being present with those around us should not necessarily be classified as programmatic time. Although programs can serve as a conduit for shared space and fellowship, sometimes the program can force a kind of "clock-time" where time is scheduled and determinative in order to meet the demands of the program.

[16] Fitch, *Faithful Presence*, 30.

Rather, what has been framed as "grace moments" should be sought out, where one can practice timelessness with others. As Eden pointed out: "As soon as you want to connect with people, you have to slow down and meet them at their pace." Doing life and being present with others in a non-timed environment opens up rich opportunities for gospel ministry. Nouwen's remarks on this need to be repeated here:

> It is a privilege to have the time to practice this simple ministry of presence. Still, it is not as simple as it seems. My own desire to be useful, to do something significant, or to be part of some impressive project is so strong that soon my time is taken up by meetings, conferences, study groups, and workshops that prevent me from walking the streets . . . But I wonder more and more if the first thing should be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them, but truly love them.[17]

Finally, the leadership and members of the urban church need to be prepared to saturate their time in prayer and solitude. As Nouwen stated: "In solitude, we leave behind our many activities, concerns, plans, projects, opinions, and convictions, and enter into the presence of our loving God naked, vulnerable, open, and receptive."[18] This is the paradox of an effective use of time, since solitude and prayer is the place of total dependence on God, the giver and sustainer of time.

Wealth

We move now to some practical considerations around wealth and simplicity. The path of downward mobility surrounding wealth involves how we live coram Deo during the week and how we gather for and engage in worship on Sunday. Indeed, the religion of upward

[17] Nouwen, *¡Gracias!*, 147–8.
[18] See also Nouwen, *Inner Voice of Love*, 68.

mobility is an idol that easily manifests itself in how we live, both during the week and on Sundays.

I have noticed that our wealth and pursuit of wealth can follow us into our worship gatherings. A handful of times I have been contacted by people interested in coming to church who have absolutely no Sunday worship experience. What I have found interesting in these conversations are their questions about money. “Do we have to pay anything?” “Does it cost to come to your church?” These questions are often supplemented by this question: “Do I have to wear a certain type of clothing to join you for worship?” Serving in a lower SES community, I am aware that the majority of people interested in coming to church are bound by a very fixed monthly income. In fact, every week people come asking for a grocery card or financial assistance, as money is tight in our present economic climate. My response is simply: “We expect nothing from you financially and you are welcome to come as you are.” I do share that some members may be more formally dressed than others, but that there is not a defined clothing requirement.

“Wealthy” attire and designer or brand-name clothing can be an inhibitor to the marginalized joining the worship service. It does not take a lot of time for people to enter our space and engage—albeit subconsciously, perhaps —in what may be called “social class signalling.” This may take place before they enter the building, as some may have looked at a photograph on a church flyer we handed out, or gone online to see what people are wearing. Interestingly, in his article “Shoes as a Source of First Impressions,” Bahns Gillath reasons that in the realm of appearance, social class can be perceived by strangers based on such static appearance cues as shoes worn by participants.[19] The way

[19] Gillath, “Shoes as a source of first impressions,” 423–30.

one dresses defines their social class and can foster prejudices.[20] For example, one pastor from a wealthier middle-class demographic with a housing complex in close proximity to his church shared that most of the members wear semi-formal, often brand-name attire to church. Sadly, someone with a lower SES came through the front door and participated in the Sunday worship for a number of weeks; and then she stopped coming. When the pastor followed up with her, he found out that she felt she did not belong because she could not live up to the clothing standard of the members. Although this individual gravitated to the gospel and even the worship service, she felt that she could never meet the social standard that was communicated by members' attire.

This forces another question: Can being a congregation of mostly middle-class members further prompt these feelings of inadequacy among the urban poor or lower SES members? This project answers in the affirmative. As one participant opined, if the middle-class mindset is not challenged, these members will not understand the values and participate in the mission of those who are on the margins. But the church, as noted by Fitch, should be a place of refuge and healing, rather than a place of success, power, competition, ambition, and striving. The antidote to the upwardly mobile drive for success, power, wealth, and competition is to embrace simplicity. Simplicity is needed because it can serve to bridge the socioeconomic disparity between those who are wealthy and those who are poor within the church. For the sake of being a safe place where rich and poor can feel equally welcomed, loved, and encouraged to grow in their faith, simplicity around attire need to be encouraged and fostered. Goheen's note that the church is a contrast community where generosity and simplicity is fostered in a

[20] Kraus, "Signs of Social Class," 428.

consumerist world is a perennial word for the church in whatever community it is placed.[21]

Power

The aim of the church in lower SES is to find practical ways to empower others, especially those living within the lower SES demographic. As was noted above, living a life of powerlessness is not something learned, but experienced, making it difficult for the middle-class church to fully understand the social, psychological, emotional, and even spiritual impact of powerlessness. It is important for pastors and elders in particular, but also the membership in general, to heed the words of one interviewee: "I seek to give away power as much as I can to people because I do not want them to feel disempowered in the church . . . Disempowered people are often discouraged people, and it may be that you even discourage them from practising their faith, from giving, and from charity." Furthermore, as Quinten noted, people from the lowest economic strata can feel completely powerless because their lives are managed by others.

Here are some practical ways to help empower the marginalized attending your church. First, when it comes to church positions, the way to empower members (and even faithful attendees) is to ensure there is no discrimination on socioeconomic status, but rather that everyone is treated equally in Christ. For example, it is easy to disempower those on the margins from any leadership position because they are receiving government assistance or struggle with disabilities and so forth, and otherwise do not have a lot of influence in the church. This creates a power imbalance in the church. The church

[21] Goheen, *A Light to the Nations*, 209.

(especially those in leadership—elders and pastors) needs to be very intentional about providing opportunities for those on the margins to serve in whatever way they can. Often this takes personal contact and recruitment. “I think you would be great at this; would you be willing to give it a try?” Furthermore, qualification for elders and deacons should have no financial qualifier. The urban poor and the middle-class members should equally be considered for office if they are spiritually rich. What qualifies someone for elder or deacon according to 1 Tim 3 and Titus 3 has nothing to do with financial solvency or social class. In sum, the church needs to move to ensure that those on the margins are empowered to serve in leadership positions.

Secondly, the church ought to help the marginalized take control of their money. For example, if a church is providing grocery cards weekly to help those dealing with food insecurity without any connection to the source of this need, there is no empowerment taking place. Rather a practical and biblical view of money and stewardship needs to be taught and exemplified. This begins with encouraging active participation at church, sitting under the preaching of the word, being discipled through weekly ministries, and inviting them into a relationship with Christ if they do not know him as their Saviour. Indeed, where there is a living relationship with Christ, money is better managed and applied. The deacons and others who are trained in managing finances should assist those who are willing to be mentored with debt reduction and budgeting through programs such as Christians Against Poverty (CAP), for example.

Another way to empower the marginalized who are also new arrivals to Canada is through translation apps and ESL courses. For example, in the church I pastor, we provide new arrivals to Canada with QR codes that open a Microsoft translation app that

translates the sermon audibly or into text format. Anecdotally, this has empowered many new arrivals to feel a part of the service, be fed the good news of the gospel, and to grow in their ability to communicate in English. ESL courses are also an excellent way to complement the government funded programs with the gospel narrative.

Although there may be other creative and important ways to empower those who are on the margins, the most critical antidote to any misuse of power is the discipline of service. The humility demanded when serving others inoculates us against wrongfully-employed power. Indeed Jesus, who held the zenith of power, reveals this truth: "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:44). However, in order for this discipline of service to be effective, pastors and leaders must be aware of their own vulnerability and mitigate against possible power differentials. This call for a heart of service is to embrace the truth of Christ that "the greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Matt 23:11–12). Although Jesus does not give us a prescriptive account of what it means to demonstrate servant leadership in the church, a spiritual disposition of the heart must be exhibited for the church to flourish in our urban centres.

Moving now from these themes to the nature of this project, it should be noted that additional research is needed on the demographic that, in some ways, was the "silent" focus group of this study: the poor and the marginalized. Nouwen and the interviewees did not—almost unanimously—fit the characterization of men and women

experiencing marginalization, poverty, powerlessness, and weakness.[22] Thus, more research is needed to seek to understand the lives of those who are physically downwardly mobile, not by choice but by circumstance. Their existential journey was narrated in the third person in this project, but what if they could speak for themselves and share what the downward mobility of Christ and its connection to home, time, power, and wealth means to them? Additionally, how do marginalized Christians engage the corollary spiritual disciplines of displacement, solitude, simplicity, and service in their lives? Their reflections on these themes may be remarkably different from those garnered by those who, like Nouwen, are able to choose a more downwardly mobile path in Christ's service.

Finally, this study has been generative for my practice of ministry as a pastor in a lower SES neighbourhood in urban Canada. Existentially, I recognize tension in writing on this broad theme of downward mobility and the various sub-themes, as my own heart is ostensibly conditioned to avoid weakness and pursue an upper mobility trajectory—a trajectory often fueled by a love for power, comfort, status, and material things. Thus, I intrinsically want to resist the call to imitate the selfless Christ by becoming weak and suffering with the vulnerable and powerless. Although theologically I cannot align with many of Pope Benedict XVI's papal encyclicals, I agree with the conclusion he draws in connection to a heart driven by power, love of money, and ambition. He writes: "Almost without being aware of it . . . we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as

[22] A few interviewees did, however, experience this as a child or young adult coming to Canada as an immigrant, or have chosen to live a life of simplicity that might put them in a lower socioeconomic community.

though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own."[23] This research project is, therefore, a word for the church but also a circumspective and existential challenge within my own core practice as a pastor of Christ's church.

If this project exposes the upwardly mobile idols of our age, convicts our hearts to be more aligned with Christ's heart for the marginalized, and shows us our calling to reach those in need of the gospel in real and tangible ways through a better understanding of home, time, power, and wealth, something has been gained through this research. This project is not about arriving at a destination; it is about the faith journey of vulnerable men and women desiring to be more firmly united to Christ and filled with his Spirit, to love with his heart of compassion those who are in need. It is a call to heed the words of Christ who makes this bold call to discipleship: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it" (Luke 9:23–24). Maybe Nouwen is correct when he says: "I am deeply convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self."

[23] Quoted in Putnam, *Our Kids*, 241.

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APPENDIX 1: SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF MCQUESTION NEIGHBOURHOOD

	Ward 4 *McQuestion +	**Hamilton**	**Canada**
Poverty Rates			
Unemployment	8.5%	7%	7%
Family Structure			
Lone Parent	28.1%	19.1%	28.2%
Married/Common Law	49.1%	55.6%	N/A
Social Assistance			
OW Assistance	6.4%	4%	N/A
Visible Minority			
Aboriginal Identity	5%	2.3%	4.9%
Visible Minority Identity	10.6%	19%	22.3%
Household Income			
Median	$66,128	$87,775	$70,336
Housing			
Percent Income on Housing	25.7%	26.1%	N/A
Education Levels			
No Degree or Diploma	21%	12.2%	N/A
Secondary	32.8%	26.1%	21.5%
College	26.3%	27.4%	22.4%
University	11.2%	27.0%	31.6%
Apprenticeship/Trades	8.6%	7.3%	10.8%

Place of Birth			
Americas	24.3%	15.3%	3.4%
Europe	22.5%	14.2%	15.1%
Africa	12.6%	12.7%	11.1%
Asia	37.9%	57.5%	35%

Stats for just the McQuesten neighbourhood are not available (post-2013). Richer neighbourhoods in Ward 4 both inflate or deflate these numbers depending on what is being measured.

APPENDIX 2: CHRONOLOGY OF NOUWEN'S LIFE AND MINISTRY

1932: Henri Nouwen born on January 24 to Catholic parents in Nijkerk, the Netherlands.

1950: Nouwen joins the Minor Seminary in Apeldoorn.

1951: Nouwen joins the Major Seminary in Rijsenburg, where he studies philosophy and theology.

1957: Nouwen ordained to the priesthood on July 21 by the Archbishop of Utrecht.
Nouwen begins to study psychology at the University of Nijmegen.

1961-1963: Nouwen serves as chaplain for the Dutch army and on cruise ships.

1964: Nouwen joins the Menninger Institute in Kansas, USA, meets Anton Boison, and completes his clinical pastoral studies at the Topeka State Hospital.
Nouwen successfully completed course requirements at the University of Nijmegen.

1966: Nouwen joins the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA.

1968: Nouwen returns to the Netherlands and begins teaching at the Joint Pastoral Institute in Amsterdam and the Catholic Theological Institute in Utrecht. Nouwen begins to pursue an advanced degree in Theology, focusing on the work of Anton Boison.

1969: Nouwen publishes *Intimacy.*

1971: Nouwen receives doctorandus degree from University of Nijmegen.
Nouwen accepts a teaching position at Yale Divinity School, Connecticut, USA.

1972: Nouwen publishes *With Open Hands.*

1974: Nouwen receives tenure at Yale Divinity School.
Nouwen begins to spend extended visits at the Abbey of the Genesee in New York, USA.

1977: Nouwen made Full Professor in Pastoral Theology at Yale Divinity School.

1981: Nouwen resigns from Yale and moves to Peru to work with the Maryknoll brothers and sisters.

1983: Nouwen publishes *iGracias: A Latin American Journal.* Nouwen accepts a professorship at Harvard Divinity School, Massachusetts, USA.

1985: Nouwen makes an extended visit to L'Arche Trosly-Breuil, near Paris, France.
Nouwen visits L'Arche Daybreak, near Toronto, Canada.

1986: Nouwen becomes Pastor of L'Arche Daybreak community in August.
Nouwen begins assisting Adam Arnett.

1988: Nouwen publishes *Road to Daybreak: A Spiritual Journey.*

1989: Nouwen is involved in a truck accident that brings him close to death.

1991: Nouwen publishes *Return of the Prodigal Son.*

1996: Nouwen dies of a heart attack in Hilversum, the Netherlands, on September 21. Funerals are held at St. Catherine's Cathedral in Utrecht, the Netherlands, and in Richmond Hill, Ontario. Nouwen is buried in St. John's Cemetery, Richmond Hill.

2000: The Henri J.M. Nouwen Archives and Research Collection is opened at St. Michael's College, the University of Toronto.

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please describe the demographics of your congregation in socioeconomic categories. What percentage of your congregation would you classify as financiallysolvent middle-class wage earners ($60,000–70,000+)? What percentage would register as lower income (below $60,000) or are living on social assistance? What percentage would be below the low income cut off? (Note: the cut off for a four-person family in Hamilton is $36,000).[1]

2. Do you have government subsidized, low-income homes or apartment buildings in the neighbourhood around your church? What percentage of your neighbourhood would find their residency in these homes/buildings?

3. How would you compare the demographics of your membership with the demographics of the community around your church? That is, does your church fairly represent the demographics of the neighbourhood around your church? Why or why not? Explain.

4. Is it more difficult to 'attract' and 'bring into membership' attendees that come from low income or subsidized homes and apartment buildings than those who are financially solvent or in a higher socio-economic category?

5. Henri Nouwen has written extensively on the theme of downward mobility. He argues both in his life and writings that to practice downward mobility is to follow the trajectory of the selfless Christ who left heaven's glory, became a slave, and died a criminal's death for us. Reflecting on this theme, how does following Christ's downward mobility influence your view of ministry? And what does Christ's selfless, downwardly mobile life teach us about establishing community with the weak, the un-networked, the urban poor, and the financially insolvent?

6. Has the 'religion' of upward mobility (one's penchant for more material goods, wealth, larger home, acreage, status) impacted the life and culture of your church? Has it impacted your presence in your community and your witness to your neighbourhood?

[1] "Low Income Cut-Offs."

7. Have you ever encouraged congregation members who live outside the church neighborhood to move into or stay in the area you are serving to practice a ministry of presence, even if they are financially solvent enough to live in a more upwardly mobile neighbourhood or purchase acreage in a rural area outside the city? Why or why not?

8. What are some complexities with the polarity between upward and downward mobility, and how might one effectively engage these complexities? For example, how do you engage with those who are able to move up the corporate ladder, or serve in a professional career and make well over $120,000 per annum, while seeking to reach a lower socioeconomic community for Christ?

9. I have created a rubric to help people understand some of the contours of a downwardly mobile lifestyle. In this rubric, I have employed the themes of home, time, material wealth, and power along with their antecedent. How might these themes help us understand whether someone is practicing a downwardly mobile life and provide a clue into the necessity of this practice?

Theme (Upward)	**Theme (Downward)**
Home (security – not willing to move)	Displacement (willing to move)
Personal time conscience (often too busy for others)	Time for others (willing to practice a ministry of presence)
Material wealth (Priority towards living the best life now)	Simplicity (willing to live with less/living modestly)
Power (Individualistic – status and reputation)	Powerlessness (Other oriented – living and walking with the powerless)

10. Does this study have potential benefits for the church? Is it necessary to expose the idol of upward mobility in your context, or not? If it is necessary or if there are benefits, how might you frame the practice of downward mobility in your local church?

11. How might you as a pastor or church leader exhibit downward mobility to your congregation? Does the life of Henri Nouwen—leaving his tenured position at Harvard Divinity School for L'Arche in Toronto—strike you as something to be questioned or emulated?