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Theological Foundations of Nonviolent Communication in the Christian Lived Experience

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THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION
IN THE CHRISTIAN LIVED EXPERIENCE

A thesis by

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Abstract

In places globally and locally, people will likely find some sense of division, and/or violence in the world they live. There might be conflict in their homes, workplaces, schools, and places of worship but not limited to those areas. In the 1960's, psychologist Marshall Rosenberg first developed Nonviolent Communication (NVC) amid the United States of America, starting the work with youth and then spreading to include school integration. NVC has found success in places with histories of violence – among families, prisons, warring tribes, and ethnic/racial groups. As NVC has been witnessed bring greater peace, understanding, and reconciliation to these relationships, its founder and participants have attested to NVC as a spirituality that has crossed across multiple faith backgrounds. This thesis studies NVC's intention, mindset, and method, as a spirituality. More specifically, this thesis reflects on NVC as a Christian lived experience - finding its theological foundations in the systematic categories of hermeneutics, paterology, Christology, pneumatology, theological anthropology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. As the Christian lived experience of NVC transforms the individual and effects other aspects of the spiritual life, this thesis concludes how NVC may be an additive hermeneutic to the field of biblical scholarship in nonviolently reading Scripture that contains violence. In this regard, NVC holistically provides a way for humankind to answer Christ's call to the ministry of reconciliation.

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First and foremost, I would not be where I am today, doing this thesis on my own lived experience of nonviolent communication if God had not communicated God's self in love towards me all those years ago. Second, coming from a large Vietnamese family who emigrated to the United States of America to settle in Texas, I received an experiential lesson on communication. Therefore, I thank my siblings and parents for showing me that the evolution towards to a more compassionate self requires desire, intention, effort, and skill. Third, I would like to express gratitude to all those who have played a part in my formation not only as a Jesuit but as a human being; though certainly not exhaustive, I would include friends, mentors, colleagues, students, patients, directees, spiritual directors, provincials, superiors, and community members. More specifically, for the support of this thesis, I would like to thank professors James Nati and Bruce Lescher for their efforts and guidance; my superiors Tony Sholander, SJ, George Wanser, SJ, Marty Connell, SJ, Scott Santarosa, SJ, Sean Carroll, SJ, and ministers Mike Tyrrell, SJ, and Joe O'Keefe, SJ, who gave me the time, space, and care to write on a topic that is so dear to me and that I believe can meaningfully change the world for the better.

Introduction

In the latter half of the 20th century, psychologist Marshall Rosenberg develops a type of communication that helps unite families, organizations, businesses, factions, and nations in which a history of division and violence has existed. In numerous examples and anecdotes in his text *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* and in transcripts from various workshops, Rosenberg provides a practical approach - known as “Nonviolent Communication” (NVC) or “Compassionate Communication” - that involves a perspective and methodology that has helped lead its practitioners to a profound empathy and an increased tightness in community. This thesis (1) presents and analyzes the lived experience of NVC in its focus and method, (2) reveals theological foundations for NVC,¹ and (3) uses the NVC to offer an alternative approach to biblical scholarship.

Magis: Towards the Greater

In the latter part of the life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the work for reconciliation among differing parties increasingly holds high regard. As no stranger to violence, authorities place Ignatius on record as causing harm to a clergy member and attempting to try him in civil court.² As a soldier, he fights in a battle until being injured by a cannonball that later leads to his conversion.³ Even after his illumination toward Christ -

¹ Jaime L. Prieto, *The Joy of Compassionate Connecting: The Way of Christ through Nonviolent Compassion* (Aliso Viejo, CA: Compassionate Connecting, 2010), Kindle position 337 of 3553. Prieto establishes a connection between NVC and Christian spirituality in which Prieto admits that his book is “less about doctrine than about living out Jesus’s values and their underlying principles.”

² Ignatius of Loyola and Joseph N. Tylenda, *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 5-6.

³ *Ibid.*, 18.

on the way to a pilgrimage in 1522, Ignatius would have killed a Moor if his donkey would have followed the same path instead of veering to another fork in the road.⁴ However, a peaceful turn begins to occur. In 1535, when he returns to his hometown to recuperate from illness, he does not live in his house of upbringing but rather stays at an orphanage, thinking of correcting past grievances of his life by teaching catechism to young children and conducting works of mercy. In Barcelona, legend has it that he is beaten in the outskirts of the city, without any mention of self-defense or revenge.⁵ Continuing as a layperson in various locations, Ignatius helps with disputes between different parties, especially among married couples.⁶ Later, as the first leader of the Jesuits, Ignatius sends his fellow men on mission to mend relationships not through policies and procedures nor a top-down approach but in the personal manner of dialogue, deep listening, and proceeding in a way of peace.^{7,8} Desirous to leave people consoled in their daily interactions, Jesuits continue to work diligently for peace and reconciliation through spiritual conversation.⁹

⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁵ “The Barcelona of Saint Ignatius,” accessed November 23, 2022, <https://sainti.org/church/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/04/Barcelona-of-Saint-Ignatius-1.pdf>.

⁶ “Magdalena Hospital,” Sanctuary of Loyola (Sanctuary of Loyola), accessed November 23, 2022, <https://loyola.global/en/>.

⁷ Ignatius of Loyola. “To Father Simão Rodrigues.” To Father Simão Rodrigues | Georgetown University Library, March 18, 1542. <https://library.georgetown.edu/woodstock/ignatius-letters/letter2>.

⁸ Ignatius of Loyola, “To the Fathers Attending Council of Trent,” Georgetown University Library, 1546, <https://library.georgetown.edu/woodstock/ignatius-letters/letter8>.

⁹ Thomas H. Clancy, *The Conversational Word of God: A Commentary on the Doctrine of St. Ignatius of Loyola Concerning Spiritual Conversation, with Four Early Jesuit Texts* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1978), 7.

Focused on St. Ignatius' vocation as a soldier and his convalescence from the wounds of battle via a cannonball to the legs, this past Ignatian Year of 2021-22 celebrated 500 years of Saint Ignatius' conversion.¹⁰ However, what if the focus could be shifted on St. Ignatius the reconciler? Having been trained in the high court as a communicator with rare capacities of literacy and gentility, his background provides the vital groundwork to the Church's mission of saving souls during his lifetime and beyond. Given his conversion, St. Ignatius would have wanted to make amends. As Jesus preaches the greatest commandments as love of God and neighbor as oneself,¹¹ this care finds itself manifested reconciling God with God's people, one individual with another, and a person with oneself.

During his studies at the foremost theological centers of his time - including universities in Salamanca, Alcalá de Henares, and Paris,¹² Ignatius possessed a balance in robustly understanding both theology and psychology. Having been termed the first practitioner of cognitive-behavioral therapy,¹³ Ignatius made connections between affectivity, thoughts, and decisions. With such a zeal for the salvation of souls and given his unique training, one wonders how Ignatius might have been educated in the present

¹⁰ "Ignatian Year," Jesuits.org, March 3, 2022, <https://www.jesuits.org/spirituality/ignatian-year/>.

¹¹ Matthew 22:37-39. "He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

¹² Ignatius of Loyola and Tylenda, *A Pilgrim's Journey*, 2.

¹³ Sean Salai, "The Psychological Insights of St. Ignatius Loyola," *America Magazine*, August 6, 2018, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/08/06/psychological-insights-st-ignatius-loyola>.

day given the developments out of psychology and in communication over the past five centuries.

In his life work starting in the 1960's, psychologist Marshall Rosenberg expresses sadness how his field has tended to focus on diagnosing pathology and treating illness rather than on the human person.¹⁴ Furthermore critiquing the power dynamics in the psychologist-client role, he breaks away from psychology and draws on age-old wisdom to develop an egalitarian and spiritual way of noting without judgment, tapping into emotion, and relating how a person's values are tied into his or her feelings. In doing so, Rosenberg is able to reveal the innate compassion that people hold, leaving people enriched and consoled as Ignatius would have desired.¹⁵ NVC has been a way of proceeding that Rosenberg has taught with proven results, one that has brought about peace between gang members, among warring factions with prolonged history of killing, and within families in suburban homes. Like the rarity of Ignatius' talents of his time lending to a spirituality throughout the centuries affecting the multitude, this process and spirituality of NVC has recently begun to gain ground in saving relationships and people's very lives.

As ministers in the church being formed in the world, people might wonder how one approaches violence and works for reconciliation in the world. Furthermore, as biblical studies are an integral part to the Christian minister's formation, how might one approach violence in the Bible and work for reconciliation with it and its readers? In the

¹⁴ Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2015), 201.

¹⁵ John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), kindle eBook position 3302.

25th anniversary edition of his book *Engaging Powers*, Walter Wink puts this question to the forefront for his audience: “How can we oppose evil without creating new evils and being made evil ourselves?”¹⁶

Likewise, there are these proposed questions from the outset: Of all the good options in the world, why not choose this means of NVC as a way for the reconciliation, or salvation, of souls? By the constructive extension of the lived experience of NVC to the world of academia, what would it look like if people of good will everywhere - especially future ministers - were able to adopt a spirituality of NVC to listen, to be more empathetic, to leave others in consolation, and to work towards the common good in their daily lives? In that regard, Christians may just possibly live out this call to be ministers of reconciliation, through new eyes:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.¹⁷

The Christian Lived Experience of NVC in Spirituality

The Christian lived experience of NVC is a worthwhile study as it can contribute in so many ways, especially in the field of Christian spirituality and beyond. It may be helpful for us to locate where NVC fits into this realm of spirituality.

First, Biblical scholar and spirituality expert Sandra Schneiders defines spirituality as an academic discipline that distinguishes itself by having its material object

¹⁶ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: 25th Anniversary Edition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 1.

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 2:17-19.

as the “conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence towards... the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ.”¹⁸ Specifically, Christian spirituality has the formal object of the Christian lived experience of the faith. Though spirituality writer and NVC teacher Jaime Prieto admits to exploring many authors on the subject of Christian spirituality, he however does not mention Schneiders as a part of his list.¹⁹ However, his words that start his book *The Joy of Compassionate Connecting: The Way of Christ through Nonviolent Compassion* reveals similarly this Christian lived experience of NVC as a “Christ integration... a journey with the destination of a life faithfully lived in harmony with the Gospels”²⁰ ... “toward God.”²¹ In sum, the first focus of this thesis will be specifically to understand the experience of NVC, which includes its mindset and methodology through its founder Rosenberg.

Second, as spirituality may be seen as a focus on the experience of faith, theology may be viewed as the critical reflection of that experience.²² Though theology can help to explain spiritual phenomena, there are limits to such explanation. As Schneiders puts it:

... historically, one of the most interesting characteristics of Christian spirituality as lived experience is its capacity to be outside of, or even ahead of, theological developments, and to introduce into the theological and/or religious purview of

¹⁸ Sandra M. Schneiders, “The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline,” in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 6.

¹⁹ Prieto, *The Joy of Compassionate Connecting*, 333.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 326.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 453.

²² Schneiders, “The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline,” 11.

the Church insights and convictions which stretch the received theological categories and paradigms.²³

For the second focus of this thesis, we will attempt to reflect, explore, and provide an entryway to the theological foundations of the Christian lived experience of NVC.

Third, the focus is to understand and study the lived experience of NVC as how it can be constructive to the comprehension of the spiritual life as it expands to other fields of study, specifically biblical scholarship. According to Schneiders, “the point here is that studies in spirituality are, ideally, neither purely descriptive nor merely critical but also constructive, even though any given study might focus more directly, or even exclusively, on one or another dimension of the project.”²⁴

²³ Sandra M. Schneiders, “A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality,” in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 54.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

Chapter 1: The Lived Experience of NVC

Over the latter half of the 20th century, Rosenberg develops a hermeneutic and a conscious process to approach the world nonviolently through the way human beings communicate. Given its practical effectiveness in turning violence to peace, one wonders how a person who adopts NVC proceeds through the world, especially in biblical scholarship in terms of bringing solace to scripture whose authors, characters, stories, and images have been interpreted as violent. Due to Rosenberg's Jewish background and frequent references to spirituality and religion, this chapter focuses first on the lived experience of NVC in its origins, its perspective, and method before examining its theological foundations and biblical application.

Important to note is that the study of the lived experience of NVC transforms the researcher. According to Schneiders, "Spirituality, like some other fields like psychology and art, is self-implicating. As the student deepens his or her investigation of the spiritual life, she or he is bound to experience the influence of what is being studied on his or her personal spiritual life. In other words, genuine understanding is transformative."²⁵

1.1 Historical Context and Development of NVC

Just before and during World War II, large masses of Black Americans emigrate to the crowded and barely livable areas of Detroit in order to find some sort of gainful employment. As Whites seek to halt the factories' productions through strikes of refusal to work alongside Blacks and in protest of their counterparts' promotions, resentment explodes onto the streets of this urban setting in Michigan on June 20, 1943. Riots wreak

²⁵ Ibid., 56.

havoc - damaging 2 million dollars' worth of property, taking the lives of nine whites and 25 blacks (17 of whom are at the hands of police while whites are spared), and injuring 675 people. The civil unrest requires 6,000 national troops to quell the violence.²⁶ During these infamous Detroit Riots of 1943, young Rosenberg and his family hole themselves up under curfew for three days to avoid being victims of violence themselves. Escaping this incident unscathed, Rosenberg would not be immune to future barbs of antisemitic language and fists of racist assaults.

Rosenberg does not go through these experiences unscathed. Rosenberg begins to ask two fundamental questions: (1) on the one hand, how people stay connected to their compassionate selves and promote life despite difficult circumstances (i.e., life-serving communication), and (2) on the other hand, how people disconnect from their compassionate selves and express violent and exploitative behaviors (i.e., life-taking communication). Embarking in studying psychology and comparative religion, Rosenberg discovers common ground with faith figures Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., in their nonviolent approach to civil rights. In doing so, Rosenberg develops a positive outlook on human nature and believes humankind to innately possess compassion.²⁷

From this vantage point and through reflective analysis, Rosenberg develops the outlook and process of NVC for a communicator²⁸ to (1) focus their attention on

²⁶ <https://detroithistorical.org/learn/encyclopedia-of-detroit/race-riot-1943>

²⁷ Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 2.

²⁸ From this point forward, I will be using “communicator” to designate the initiator of conversation and the locus of being the one responsible for communication as if the reader could embody such a role, while “the other” is the person with whom the reader could communicate.

connecting with and enriching the life of the other, (2) articulate with honesty what they are observing, feeling, and needing in themselves as well as in the other, (3) request from the other in a way that fosters receptivity, and (4) to receive empathetically the communication of the other.

Motivated by a deep desire for human connection and to positively contribute to the lives of others, Rosenberg spends his career reconciling parties, having begun his work with families and then in race relations in the US.²⁹ His perspective, focus, and method revolutionizes conflict resolution and provides peace in areas of long-standing strife (e.g., between street gangs,³⁰ teachers/principals/students,³¹ Palestinians and Israelis,³² and Christian and Muslim tribes in Nigeria³³). Due to such success, NVC has expanded internationally to 60 countries and formalized teachings into workshops and centers of education.³⁴ With its effect pervasive, NVC has proven essential to repairing “intimate relationships, families, schools, organizations and institutions, therapy and counseling situations, diplomatic and business negotiations, and [in sum] disputes of any nature.”³⁵

²⁹ Marshall B. Rosenberg, “An Interview with Marshall Rosenberg 2015,” YouTube Video, February 10, 2020, 4:17 to 5:51, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pkd8SfO-o-I>.

³⁰ Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict: What You Say Next Will Change Your World* (Encinitas, CA: Puddle Dancer, 2005), 118-120.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 115-116.

³² *Ibid.*, 26.

³³ *Ibid.*, 127-131.

³⁴ “Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D.,” Center for Nonviolent Communication, accessed December 5, 2022, <https://www.cnvc.org/about/marshall>.

³⁵ Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 7.

1.2 The Focus of NVC: Giving from the Heart

Largely influenced by culture and society, habits of violent communication present a significant but surmountable challenge in the face of NVC. As many people act and react in unreflected manners coupled with a win-loss mentality in which the normative belief system designates some people as winners at the cost of others losing, humankind's flow of compassion is impeded. Against convention, NVC intentionally and counterculturally seeks to restore this flow by helping communicators replace "old patterns of defending, withdrawing, or attacking in the face of judgment and criticism."³⁶ Therefore, NVC offers an alternative: to cultivate a mindset and method that leads to greater "respect, attentiveness, and empathy and of engendering a mutual desire to give from the heart."³⁷ NVC has a win-win mentality, as communicators pursue a path in which all parties obtain what they deeply need while acting out of a natural desire to enrich one another's lives. As ideal as NVC may seem, the worldwide testimonies - from educators and students to prisoners and guards to activists and families³⁸ - give incredible witness to NVC's effectiveness throughout the real world.

Through a thorough analysis of its process, one comes to realize that NVC is more than words. In addition to its positive outlook on human nature and win-win mentality, NVC involves a "consciousness and intent... [that is] expressed through

³⁶ Ibid., 3.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Endorsements," PuddleDancer Press, June 16, 2019, <https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/about-marshall-rosenberg/press-room/endorsements/>.

silence, a quality of presence, as well as through facial expressions and body language.”³⁹ In the face of the other who may be speaking at louder volumes in criticism, Rosenberg states that the NVC communicator adopts a stance of receiving “words, not as attacks, but as gifts from a fellow human willing to share his soul and deep vulnerabilities with me.”⁴⁰ Rather than being defensive or taking sides, NVC invites the communicator to deeply listen and to reflect back what is being heard, all the while intently finding the feelings, needs, and requests of the other and within themselves. The end goal is challenging but incredibly rewarding: to make life wonderful to the other, to oneself, and thence to all of creation.

1.2a Life-Alienating Communication

Before delving into the methodology of NVC, Rosenberg finds it helpful to first identify the ways in which humans communicate in a violent manner that is antithetical to who they are. “It is our nature to enjoy giving and receiving compassionately. We have, however, learned many forms of life-alienating communication that lead us to speak and behave in ways that injure others and ourselves,”⁴¹ Rosenberg writes. For those learning NVC, it helps for the communicator to be aware of the five major types of life-alienating statements, expressing (1) moralistic judgments, (2) comparisons, (3) denial of responsibility, (4) demands, and (5) merit-based rewards and punishments. These messages block this natural flow of compassion between the communicator and the other.

³⁹ Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

1.2a.1 Moralistic Judgments

Statements communicating moralistic judgments often paint people as bad or good and assign rightness or wrongness to actions when the other behaves in ways that do not match with the communicator's values. For example, statements such as "She's lazy" or "It's inappropriate" pass moralistic judgments. In this regard, the communicator has their "attention on classifying, analyzing, and determining levels of wrongness rather than on what [they] and others need and are not getting."⁴² According to Rosenberg, the use of this type of language usually puts the other on the defensive, likely providing resistance to any requests placed upon them. If the other does somehow comply with such requests associated with moral judgments, the other usually does so out of fear, guilt, or shame rather than out of freedom or from the heart. Over time, this repetitive acquiescing may end up in decreased compliance and/or resentment.

Importantly, Rosenberg makes a distinction between value judgments and moral judgments. Value judgments refer to the "qualities we value in life... [reflecting] our beliefs of how life can best be served."⁴³ Examples of values are freedom, peace, and honesty. On the other hand, moral judgments suggest wrongness on the part of people and their behaviors when they fail to support value judgments. For example, a communicator may value peace but still pass a moral judgment such as "Violence is bad." However, a nonviolent approach puts the communicator in touch with their responsibility and then invites them to be aware of what they are observing, feeling,

⁴² Ibid., 16.

⁴³ Ibid., 17.

needing, and requesting. Instead, a nonviolent communicator might restate the preceding message like so, “I am fearful [feeling of fear] of the use of violence to resolve conflicts [observing previous acts of violence]; I value the resolution of human conflicts [value of peace] through other means [request to try other means of resolution].”⁴⁴

The harmful effects of violent communication can be found in research. Citing the work of psychologist O. J. Harvey, Rosenberg points out the proportional relationship between the increased use of statements of moral judgments found in the literature of different cultures and their greater rates of acts of physical violence.⁴⁵ As a precautionary tale to the context of the US, Rosenberg warns how in 75% of children’s movies or television shows, the “good hero” beats or kills the “bad villain” as a part of the climax in the storyline, painting a picture to a young audience that certain people deserve punishment.⁴⁶ In this vein of popular culture, violent communication exists.

1.2a.2 Comparisons

Another form of communication that blocks the natural flow of compassion from one human being to another are comparisons. Referring to Dan Greenburg’s tongue-in-cheek *How to Make Your Life Miserable*, Rosenberg reveals how Greenburg constructs social experiments in assisting his audience feel horrible about themselves in terms of achievements and beauty.⁴⁷ As a thought experiment, readers gaze upon perfect models

⁴⁴ Ibid. Terms in brackets are my addition.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Marshall B. Rosenberg, *The Heart of Social Change: How to Make a Difference in Your World* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2005), 6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 18.

of beauty with their compositions, make measurements of their own body parts, juxtapose statistics, and then ponder the differences. The audience also jots down their best accomplishments, only to place them side-by-side to a twelve-year-old Mozart who has already composed some of the most famous masterpieces and spoken with fluency in three different languages. Such comparisons alienate the self by the lack of appreciation of one's specialness.

1.2a.3 Denial of Responsibility

Statements that deny responsibility for one's own thoughts, feelings, and actions fall also into Rosenberg's category of life-alienating communication. Such expressions such as "have to" or someone/something "making" another to feel a certain emotion or act in a specific manner exemplify this denial of responsibility in attributing cause to a force outside of oneself. For Rosenberg, he categorizes several statements:

<u>Attributed Cause/Force</u>	<u>Example Statements</u>
Vague, impersonal forces	“I cleaned my room because I had to.”
Condition, diagnosis, or personal or psychological history	“I drink because I am an alcoholic.”
The actions of others	“I hit my child because he ran into the street.”
The dictates of authority	“I lied to the client because the boss told me to.”
Group pressure	“I started smoking because all my friends did.”
Institutional policies, rules, and regulations	“I have to suspend you for this infraction because it’s the school policy.”
Gender roles, social roles, or age roles	“I hate going to work, but I do it because I am a husband and a father.”
Uncontrollable impulses	“I was overcome by my urge to eat the candy bar.”

* I tabulated these categories and example statements from Rosenberg’s *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*.⁴⁸

Referencing German military officers who unquestionably obey the commands of Nazi authoritarian figures in killing Jews, Rosenberg notes how such communication can be quite dangerous and even deadly. As there seems to be no English equivalent, Rosenberg refers to the original German and Nazi term *amtssprache* to express the ease by which language can harmfully allow for a lack of responsibility.⁴⁹ However difficult it may be to transition from the use of these statements that deny responsibility to ones that acknowledge choice, NVC communicators can discover new levels of freedom if they choose, thereby having a positive effect on the people closest around them.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 20-21.

⁴⁹ Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Teaching Children Compassionately* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2005), 14.

Rosenberg cites the example of a mother who “has to cook” due to her matriarchal role for her family, harboring ill feelings towards such culinary responsibilities. In the aftermath of her stopping to cook and having her need for rest met, her son expresses with relief how the rest of the family no longer hears their mother complain about the obligation to cook. Another example includes a teacher blaming district policy for her “[having] to give grades,”⁵⁰ but she realizes a non-altruistic reason behind her doing so - she wanted to keep her job to meet her need for security.

1.2a.4 Demands

A form of life-alienating communication commonly originating from authority figures are statements of demand, usually accompanied by threats to the other if the demands are not carried out. In Rosenberg’s estimation, people’s deep need for autonomy conflicts with being made to do anything. As previously stated before, when the other does comply, an unintended consequence of resentment or resistance arises when the other complies out of fear or guilt.

1.2a.5 Merited Rewards or Punishments

Referencing theologian Walter Wink,⁵¹ Rosenberg explores both the interlocking philosophical and political roots behind statements that label people as “good” versus “bad”/ “evil.”⁵² A negative outlook on human nature can permeate throughout the culture; some humans are deemed as innately evil and inherently deficient in behavior,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁵¹ Rosenberg, *The Heart of Social Change*, 8.

⁵² Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 23.

and therefore they necessitate educative punishment in order to mature and become good. Politically, the powerful minority of people at the top of a domination hierarchy benefit themselves by enacting laws and policies that paint what is right, wrong, good, and bad in the rules of “shoulds” and “have to’s” to curb the evil of most of humankind and to instruct the masses. Therefore, some merit reward while others merit punishment. Though Wink references the origins of such domination systems to myths found 8,000 years ago, Rosenberg points out that one does not have to go far in the lessons of American history in which the US has been depicted as the good hero coming to annihilate evil forces from abroad.⁵³

Rosenberg concludes that:

At the root of much, if not all, violence—whether verbal, psychological, or physical, whether among family members, tribes, or nations—is a kind of thinking that attributes the cause of conflict to wrongness in one’s adversaries, and a corresponding inability to think of oneself or others in terms of vulnerability—that is, what one might be feeling, fearing, yearning for, missing, etc.⁵⁴

In that vulnerability is the key to overthrowing these domination organizations with a life-serving perspective and process that benefits everyone: NVC.

1.2b The Process of Giving Life-Serving Communication

In a presentation to Montessori educators, Rosenberg reveals clearly his underlying mindset behind the process of NVC, his being “interested in learning that’s motivated by reverence for life, that’s motivated by a desire to learn skills, to learn new

⁵³ Rosenberg, *The Heart of Social Change*, 9.

⁵⁴ Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 18.

things that help us to better contribute to our own well-being and the well-being of others.”⁵⁵ Out of this foundation of care and from the perspective of facilitating this naturally flowing compassion flowing between the communicator and the other, Rosenberg presents four major areas by which an NVC communicator expresses to the other in a manner that decreases criticism, defensiveness, and resistance while increasing understanding, openness, and compliance. Through the priority of connection, an NVC communicator works through these four components of NVC: (1) observation, (2) feelings, (3) needs, and (4) requests.

1.2b.1 Observation

Citing Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti, Rosenberg believes that one of the highest forms of intelligence is ability to separate observation versus evaluation. Observations that are “free of judgment, criticism, or other forms of analysis”⁵⁶ tend to land well on the other. On the other hand, evaluations tend to contain static generalizations unspecific to time and context. Evaluative statements such as criticisms “You never listen” or “Why did you murder my children?” often result in blame and defensiveness. These messages interrupt the natural flow of compassion between the communicator and the other. Once again noting how people learn unconsciously from culture how to communicate, Rosenberg highlights the ubiquitous nature in which observation is blurred with evaluation.

⁵⁵ Rosenberg, *Teaching Children Compassionately*, 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

In workshops and his texts, Rosenberg provides an analysis of several examples in which language reveals how observation has been mixed with evaluation and how they can be separated.

<u>Communication*</u>	<u>Example of observation mixed with evaluation</u>	<u>Example of observation separate from evaluation</u>
1. Use of “to be” verb without indication that the evaluator takes responsibility for the evaluation	“You are too generous.”	“When I see you give all your lunch money to others, I think you are being too generous.”
2. Use of action verbs with evaluative connotations	“Doug procrastinates.”	“Doug only studies for exams the night before.”**
3. Implication that one’s inferences about another person’s thoughts, feelings, intentions, or desires are the only ones possible	“She won’t get her work in.”	“I don’t think she’ll get her work in.” <i>or</i> “She said, ‘I won’t get my work in.’”
4. Confusion of prediction with certainty	“If you don’t eat balanced meals, your health will be impaired.”	“If you don’t eat balanced meals, I fear your health may be impaired.”***
5. Failure to be specific about referents	“Immigrants don’t take care of their property.”	“I have not seen the immigrant family living at 1679 Ross shovel the snow on their sidewalk.”
6. Use of words denoting ability without indicating that an evaluation is being made	“Hank Smith is a poor soccer player.”	“Hank Smith has not scored a goal in twenty games.”
7. Use of adverbs and adjectives in ways that do not indicate an evaluation has been made	“Jim is ugly.”	“Jim’s looks don’t appeal to me.”

*Table is taken directly from Rosenberg's *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*:⁵⁷

**It is important to note here a nuance: sometimes, the terms “only,” “always,” “never,” “ever,” and “whenever” may be used in exaggerations, which fall under the definition of evaluation.

***Furthermore, these observations mixed with evaluation could become separated furthermore if the words such as “balanced” and “impaired” could be more objective. For example, “balanced” can be modified into observations of “equal gram portions of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats” while “impaired” may be observed as a body measurement index of greater than 25 kg/m².

Overall, as the NVC communicator works at developing their capacity to differentiate observation from evaluation, they become more aware of both their own speech and that of others. In the process, NVC communicators shift their language to state observations free from evaluation while inquiring of the other for clarification and differentiation of such.

1.2b.2 Feelings

Reflecting on his experience as a student completing 21 years of schooling up to obtaining his doctorate,⁵⁸ Rosenberg articulates the lack of exploration in personal feelings in the world of academia, describing how this culture influences students to articulate thoughts directed towards the other at the expense of emotions yet to be explored from within the communicator. He tersely writes, “Our repertoire of words for calling people names is often larger than our vocabulary of words to clearly describe our emotional states.”⁵⁹ If a communicator has not begun to explore their feelings, then this

⁵⁷ Ibid., 30-31

⁵⁸ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

same person might find it difficult to express them.⁶⁰ However, the benefits of expressing feelings vulnerably can lead to resolving conflicts, enhancing intimacy between partners, improving relationships between races, and meeting needs between superiors and employees in the work environment.⁶¹ Therefore, Rosenberg invites communicators to expand their emotional vocabulary and advises them to discern when articulation of feelings may not substantively be so.

In the English language, many people articulate feelings when they are really thoughts. More specifically, they use “I feel” statements when they may be more accurately defined as “I think” statements as seen below.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁶¹ Ibid., 38-40.

<u>Objective</u>	<u>How to Identify such</u>	<u>Example</u>	<u>Translation</u>
1. Distinguish feelings from thoughts	Prepositions that follow “I feel” such as “that,” “like,” “as if”	“I feel like a failure.”	“I think I am a failure.”
	Pronouns that follow “I feel”	“I feel that it is useless.”	“I think it is useless.”
	Nouns that follow “I feel”	“I feel my boss is being manipulative.”	“I think my boss is being manipulative.”
2. Distinguish between what one feels and what one thinks they are	An adjective follows “I feel” that is not a feeling but an assessment of self	“I feel inadequate as a guitar player” is an assessment of how they think they are as a guitar player	“I feel disappointed/impatient /frustrated as a guitar player” represents the actual feelings behind the assessment
3. Distinguish what one feels versus how they think others react or behave towards them	An adjective follows “I feel” is not a feeling but an assessment of another’s viewpoint on them	“I feel unimportant to the people I work with” is how one thinks others at work are evaluating them	“I feel sad/discouraged” may be the actual feeling behind how one thinks others are evaluating them
		“I feel ignored”	Interestingly, this example allows for when different emotions of when needs may be met or unmet, such as “I feel relieved” if a person desires comfort or “I feel hurt” if a person desires belonging

* I have tabulated Rosenberg’s exposition on such statements from Rosenberg’s *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*.⁶²

⁶² Ibid., 41-42.

Knowing these situations when people mix up feelings with thoughts, assessments, and behaviors can be very important to a communicator as they explore their own statements of supposed feelings. Furthermore, in this exploration of uncharted territory, the communicator may find an expanding kaleidoscope of emotions to name the nuances in which feelings abound in met and unmet desires. Though certainly not exhaustive, Rosenberg has come up with a list of 106 words associated with feelings from met needs and a corresponding list of 121 words of emotions from unmet needs. By developing this vocabulary of feelings, people can connect through an expression of emotions that may help facilitate compassion and hence reconciliation.

1.2b.3 Needs

Of particular note, Rosenberg's experience in NVC has taught him that only one person in any given interaction needs to be connected to compassion.⁶³ Taking on the responsibility, the NVC communicator can adeptly maneuver through a conversation, as they remain connected to a process in which they differentiate observation from evaluation, name feelings within themselves and the other, discern how those emotions arise from met or unmet needs, and reflect to themselves and the other (when appropriate) to confirm as much. It can be a bit scary for the NVC communicator to vulnerably express himself and make requests of the other even while the other communicates with life-alienating messages. However, there is an ask on the part of Rosenberg for the NVC communicator to trust the process until there is a sense of relief. This occurs after the other receives full empathetic understanding expressed through

⁶³ Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Surprising Purpose of Anger: Beyond Anger Management: Finding the Gift* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2005), 3.

stopping speaking and the release of bodily tension within the NVC communicator themselves.⁶⁴

Part of the responsibility of an NVC communicator comes in noting the different ways in which a person can respond to the other. Therefore, it is important to study the four major ways⁶⁵ in which people react or respond and to choose the way in which compassion can flow freely. The four ways are: (1) blaming themselves, (2) blaming the other, (3) sensing their own feelings and needs, and (4) sensing the others' feelings and needs.

Before analyzing these four options above, it is important first to be aware of communication that attributes causation to one's feelings as opposed to being a stimulus. According to Rosenberg, who the other is and what/how others say/do are never causes but rather stimuli for an NVC communicator's feelings or actions.⁶⁶ In the case of anger, the NVC communicator opts out of blaming themselves or the other. Therefore, they identify blame language such as "You made me angry," "How you did that made me angry," or "What you did made me angry." In doing so, they can proceed to the next important step of looking within oneself in order to articulate the thinking involved with the feeling. The NVC communicator may find themselves mixing observation with evaluation and internally expressing life-alienating communication (e.g., moralistic judgments, comparisons, denials of responsibility, merit-based rewards/punishments). Rosenberg then invites the NVC communicator to invest energy from "going to the

⁶⁴ Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 102.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

head”⁶⁷ and reverse the flow to “go to their heart” (i.e., the territory of needs). There can be a shift in feelings as NVC communicators “see that our feelings result from how we *choose* to receive what others say and do, as well as from our particular needs and expectations in that moment.”⁶⁸

Therefore, when verbally or nonverbally encountering a life-alienating message, the communicator has the choice to opt out of blaming themselves and the other. In doing so, the communicator chooses to avoid feelings of guilt, shame, low self-esteem, anger, and depression that often result from self- and other-centered criticism. Additionally, they can prevent the manifestations of anger. As an example, the other may state, “You’re the most self-centered person I’ve ever met!” First, a communicator can react by blaming themselves in saying, “I should have been more sensitive.” Second, they may blame the other in stating, “You have no right to say that! I am always considering your needs! You’re the one who is really self-centered!”⁶⁹ As an alternative, the communicator chooses the process of NVC to explore their own or the other’s needs. For example, exploring one’s own needs may be articulated like, “When I hear you say that I am the most self-centered person you’ve ever met, I feel hurt, because I need some recognition of my efforts to be considerate of your preferences.” Here, the NVC communicator acknowledges their feelings of hurt as stemming from the need for recognition of their efforts in being considerate. This step is important, “because the more we are able to connect our feelings to our own needs [i.e., desires, expectations,

⁶⁷ Rosenberg, *Surprising Purpose of Anger*, 10.

⁶⁸ Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 49.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 50. Example taken from this text.

hopes, values], the easier it is for others to respond compassionately.”⁷⁰ The NVC communicator may explore the other’s feelings and needs by reflecting back for clarification, “Are you feeling hurt because you need more consideration for your preferences?” The reflection allows the space for the other to self-reflect and the opportunity to clarify what feelings and needs the other has. At this point, the NVC communicator gains a glimpse of how Rosenberg has discovered how NVC communication only requires one party to be focused and skilled in this NVC process.

Moreover, in taking the option of accurately sensing one’s own feelings and needs, it is important for NVC communicators to identify three additional types of statements that mask accountability. Through the following categories and their corresponding examples, the responsibility can be seen as being attributed to something else other than unmet or met needs. Rosenberg invites NVC communicators to shift their statements to connect their feelings to needs in the form of “I feel... because... I need/want/desire/value...”

⁷⁰ Ibid., 51. Bracketed part is my addition from Rosenberg’s clarification of needs.

<u>How to Identify Statements Masking Accountability</u>	<u>Examples of Statements Masking Accountability</u>	<u>Transformation of Statements to Connect Needs and Reveal Accountability</u>
1. Use of impersonal pronouns such as “it” and “that”	“It really infuriates me when spelling mistakes appear in our public brochures.”	“I feel really infuriated when spelling mistakes like that appear in our public brochures, because I want our company to project a professional image.”
	“That bugs me a lot.”	
2. Use of the expression “I feel (an emotion) because ...” followed by a second- or third-person pronoun/noun	“I feel hurt because you said you don’t love me.”	
	“I feel angry because the supervisor broke her promise.”	“I feel angry that the supervisor broke her promise, because I was counting on getting that long weekend to visit my brother.”
3. Use of statements that mention only the actions of others	“When you don’t call me on my birthday, I feel hurt.”	
	“Mommy is disappointed when you don’t finish your food.”	“Mommy feels disappointed when you don’t finish your food, because I want you to grow up strong and healthy.”

* I have myself tabulated these categories and examples from Rosenberg’s *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*.⁷¹

Revisiting the concept of life-alienating communication, now it can be seen in its fullest light that “judgments, criticisms, diagnoses, and interpretations of others are all

⁷¹ Ibid., 51.

alienated expressions of our needs.”⁷² Furthermore, “when we express our needs indirectly through the use of evaluations, interpretations, and images, others are likely to hear criticism.”⁷³ Therefore, the other will likely invest energy in putting up a defense and return messages of self-alienation. To interrupt this cycle, the NVC communicator chooses to speak in a manner that connects feelings with needs, allowing the other to respond in return with compassion. Rosenberg's experience has demonstrated that when parties can identify the needs of one another, they encounter a shared humanity in which they can recognize one another in the other. Therefore, it may be said that these needs are universally human, and, from this place of mutual understanding, they can desire and find ways in which all needs are met. The following table are a list of needs:

⁷² Ibid., 52.

⁷³ Ibid., 52-53.

<u>Need</u>	<u>Expansion of Definition</u>				
1. Autonomy	to choose one's dreams, goals, values				
	to choose one's plan for fulfilling one's dreams, goals, values				
2. Celebration	to celebrate the creation of life and dreams fulfilled				
	to celebrate losses: loved ones, dreams, etc. (mourning)				
3. Integrity	authenticity	creativity	meaning	self-worth	
4. Interdependence	acceptance	appreciation	closeness	community	
	consideration	emotional safety	empathy	love	
	reassurance	respect	support	trust	
	understanding	warmth			
	contribution to the enrichment of life (to exercise one's power by giving that which contributes to life)			honesty (the empowering honesty that enables us to learn from our limitations)	
5. Play	fun			laughter	
6. Spiritual Communion	beauty	harmony	inspiration	order	peace
7. Physical Nurturance	air	food	shelter	touch	water
	movement, exercise		sexual expression		rest
	protection from life-threatening forms of life: viruses, bacteria, insects, predatory animals				

* I have myself tabulated these categories and examples from Rosenberg's *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Ibid., 54-55.

Furthermore, the capacity to express needs connected with feelings to others leads to a better probability of those needs being met.

Rosenberg's presentation on feelings and needs provides the foundation upon which NVC communicators can notice how societal roles and expectations have hindered a human being's capacity to be in touch with and express their feelings and needs. As a first example, men are typically groomed by society not to have feelings. Recalling an experience in which as a nine-year-old boy hiding at school from bullies, an impressionable Rosenberg who reveals his feelings of fear receives this instruction from a teacher who finds him, "Big boys don't get frightened."⁷⁵ In a collection of transcripts from workshops focused on the relationship between partners *Being Me, Loving You*, Rosenberg further states the education of men as warrior types has not included expressing clearly what is going on within them.⁷⁶ Rather, cultural archetypes (e.g., John Wayne characters, Clint Eastwood characters, and "Rambo" in movies) show how little men are to speak of their interior emotions but rather how much they are to label exteriorly others with life-alienating communication. Therefore, men may not be conversant in their language around feelings and needs. As a second example, women undertake a different path to end in a similar place. Seen as caretakers, women are judged as loving in their capacity to sacrifice, which often means to deny their own needs so that they can attend to the needs of others. Consequently, women come to think that

⁷⁵ Ibid., 37.

⁷⁶ Rosenberg, *Being Me, Loving You: A Practical Guide to Extraordinary Relationships* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2005), Kindle Edition location 72 of 1230.

they possess no genuine right to their needs and that their needs are unimportant.⁷⁷ Furthermore, if women do not value their needs, others around them may not as well.⁷⁸ Taking these first two examples in the context of a partnership such as marriage, then there are societal pressures on what constitutes a “husband” and a “wife” and what they “should” or “must” do out of a sense of guilt, fear, or duty rather than giving and receiving from the heart.⁷⁹ The third example includes any relationship where there can be a potential for a communicator to exercise a type of “power-over”⁸⁰ the other. To illustrate his teaching, Rosenberg uses numerous examples that include administrator-teacher, teacher-student, parent-child, police-suspect, and guard-prisoner in which the communicator can choose NVC to exercise “power-with” the other. In the world of teaching, Rosenberg counsels teachers to avoid life-alienating terms such as “right, wrong, good, bad, correct, incorrect, slow learner, fast learner.” The result of these judgments has potentially detrimental effects on how students perceive themselves. Rosenberg gives an example of how a third grader gets an answer “wrong,” then proceeds to cry out of shame, and then evaluates themselves as “stupid.”⁸¹ To help teachers shift from a mindset of evaluating performance to making life wonderful, Rosenberg proceeds to go in and out of classrooms to demonstrate the use of NVC to see

⁷⁷ Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 55-57.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁹ Rosenberg, *Being Me, Loving You*, 121.

⁸⁰ Rosenberg, *Teaching Children Compassionately*, 12.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

beauty in people empathetically, which means to constantly hear feelings and needs. It does not take long for the educators to see the benefits of NVC.

For people who live with needs being unmet, it can be quite painful. NVC can help liberate people from this pain in helping to have their needs met. NVC communicators can help themselves and others by moving to a place of operating to meet the other's needs out of a nonviolent (i.e., compassionately, from the heart) versus a violent (e.g., fearing punishment, rewards, guilt, shame, obligation)⁸² means. Life can be wonderful for everyone.

1.2b.4 Requests

After learning the first three components of NVC to get to this point, the next step is for the communicator to be able to make a request in a manner that helps the other continue to operate from a space of compassion in order to meet the needs of the communicator. The requests function best when there is clarity and completeness.

In terms of clarity, NVC asks its communicators to use positive action language. "Positive" refers to telling what is wanted as opposed to what is not wanted. The unintended consequence of using negative action language may be confusion and/or resistance, thereby stopping this flow of natural compassion. For example, when a wife asks her husband to spend less time [negative action language] at work when she really wants him to spend time with her [positive action but not requested], he may use that

⁸² Ibid., 12-14.

time now available on his own pursuits separate from her.⁸³ As another example, a child may respond to a mother saying, “Stop throwing food,” by tossing drinks instead.

By “action,” these requests are concrete so that others can complete given tasks, without following “vague, abstract, or ambiguous phrasing.” For example, using the phrase, “Please help” in the kitchen may be interpreted as a number of actions such as supervising, washing the dishes, organizing the napkins, etc. Furthermore, “vague and abstract language can mask oppressive interpersonal games.”⁸⁴ Therefore, making requests in positive action-clear language can reveal underlying needs. When a father and son come to Rosenberg for counseling, the father articulates that he wants the son to be more responsible. When Rosenberg asks what the father means, the father explains that when he asks his son “without question - to jump when I say jump, and to smile while doing it.”⁸⁵ Additionally, people “often use vague and abstract language to indicate how we want other people to feel or be without naming a concrete action they could take to reach that state.”⁸⁶ For example, a boss tells his employees to “feel free” to come to him for any issue leading them to confusion, but when he could ask them the following to provide clarity, “I’d like you to tell me what I might do to make it easier for you to feel free to express yourselves around me.”⁸⁷ Finally, vague language can lead to internal

⁸³ Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 67.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

confusion.⁸⁸ Therefore, an NVC communicator can help the other by empathizing and helping to mine language that provides clarity.

Taken together with the other components of NVC, making a request can lead to an enrichment of all lives involved. However, when separated and isolated, they can fall short of the desired outcome. For example, a communicator who expresses solely feelings to the other leaves the other uncertain on what to do in response. When a wife says to her husband, “I’m annoyed you forgot the butter and onions I asked you to pick up for dinner,”⁸⁹ he does not know whether she wants him to return to the grocery store or whether she wants him to feel guilty. Therefore, Rosenberg asks NVC communicators to make their requests in the present. Another example of isolating components of NVC is making a request without expressing feelings and needs, which results in sounding like demands.⁹⁰ This sound of a demand usually comes in interactions with authority figures. For example, a parent may say to their child, “Why don’t you go and get a haircut?” For it not to be received with defensiveness, it may be phrased with feelings and needs, such as “We’re worried that your hair is getting so long it might keep you from seeing things, especially when you’re on your bike. How about a haircut?”⁹¹ Furthermore, a request never turns into a demand when empathy - connecting feelings with needs - is employed. “Choosing to request rather than demand does not mean we give up when someone says

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 72.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 73.

⁹¹ Ibid., 74.

no to our request. It does mean we don't engage in persuasion until we have empathized with what's preventing the other person from saying yes."⁹²

What helps in the facilitation of mutual understanding is the request to have the other reflect to the NVC communicator what they have heard, especially if there may be hints of lack of comprehension. Rather than state "Is it clear?" a request for reflection can help the NVC communicator clarify any discrepancies or omissions, such as "Could you tell what you just heard me say?" Furthermore, it can help continue to foster compassion in expressing gratitude for the need to connect, the desire to articulate more clearly, and then finding new ways to communicate with clarity. Sometimes, the other may use life-alienating communication at the request for clarification. Any resistance is simply an expression of a feeling resulting from an unmet need. Therefore, it is for the NVC communicator to simply return to empathy towards the other, to sense the feeling and need and reflect them back, until there is sufficient connection to move on. Once understood, the NVC communicator can then shift to ask how the other is feeling, what the other is thinking, and whether the other is willing to fulfill the request.

Interestingly, though requests are made, the point of NVC is not to get what one wants. It is about establishing a quality of connection where an honest exchange through empathy allows for everyone's needs to be met.⁹³

⁹² Ibid., 80.

⁹³ Ibid., 85.

1.3 The Focus of NVC: Receiving Empathetically

Thus far, the analysis of Rosenberg's components of NVC has involved the first action of expressing honestly. As one grows accustomed to the former and hears the world in terms of feelings and needs, the second action - though certainly not less important - involves receiving empathetically. What this reception requires is no less than "emptying our mind and listening with our whole being"⁹⁴ and "shed[ding] all preconceived ideas and judgments"⁹⁵ in hopes to "give to others the time and space they need to express themselves fully and feel understood."⁹⁶

As opposed to being wholly present with people, there are numerous responses that block empathy, tabulated below:

⁹⁴ Ibid., 91.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 92.

<u>Type of Responses that Block Empathy</u>	<u>Examples of Responses that Block Empathy</u>
1. Advising	“I think you should...” “How come you didn’t... ?”
2. One-upping	“That’s nothing; wait’ll you hear what happened to me.”
3. Educating	“This could turn into a very positive experience for you if you just...”
4. Consoling	“It wasn’t your fault; you did the best you could.”
5. Storytelling	“That reminds me of the time...”
6. Shutting down	“Cheer up. Don’t feel so bad.”
7. Sympathizing	“Oh, you poor thing...”
8. Interrogating	“When did this begin?”
9. Explaining	“I would have called but...”
10. Correcting	“That’s not how it happened.”

* I have tabulated Rosenberg’s exposition on such statements.⁹⁷

One sentence from Rosenberg’s main text sums up, “When we are thinking about people’s words and listening to how they connect with our theories, we are looking at people - we are not with them. The key ingredient of empathy is presence: we are wholly present with the other party and what they are experiencing.”⁹⁸ Therefore, NVC is not about intellectual understanding of what the other is thinking but rather what they are needing.

Often, the other expresses in a manner that is a gift wrapped in life-alienating language, being an opportunity for the NVC communicator to connect with the other

⁹⁷ Ibid., 92-93.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 93.

through a variety of means at their disposal. First, they can use the tool of paraphrasing, which allows for the other to reflect on what they have said and be given the opportunity to clarify and correct. Steering away from simply information gathering, paraphrasing follows along the components of NVC in repeating back to the other (1) what the other is observing, (2) what the other is feeling as a result of unmet or met needs, and (3) what the other is requesting. At times, getting information is needed, and it is best to do so with preceding revelation of the NVC communicator's feelings and needs. In certain cultures, paraphrasing may be deemed as inappropriate; however, internally connecting to the other's feelings and needs without voicing them can still provide immense benefit. Even though some people believe that paraphrasing is a waste of time, it has been shown to save time.

In NVC, communicators persevere in their empathetic reception of the other, allowing them to fully express themselves. If the other questions the NVC communicator's motives, it may be helpful for the communicator to reflect on their paraphrasing as to ensure the goal is to genuinely connect with the other rather than go through the mechanics of NVC. The payoffs of this empathetic approach can be extremely rewarding as the NVC communicator enriches the life of the other. With persistence until the other has completely exhausted all their feelings around an issue, there can follow a sense of relief and release in both the communicator and the other's responses, most notably felt in softening of muscles in their bodies and silence.

At times, there may be situations where there is a strong emotion when a need has not been met. In this case, the communicator may find themselves unable or unwilling to empathize. At that point, it may be necessary to give self-empathy, as one listens to what

is going on within themselves. Citing Dag Hammarskjold, Rosenberg states “the more faithfully you listen to the voice within you, the better you will hear what is happening outside.” In other words, the more empathy the communicator gives to oneself, the more they are able to give it to others. At times, there may be limits in the communicator’s capacity to be present to the other, in this case the option to remove oneself from the situation may be best in order to give the time and physical space to provide self-empathy and then return to the other when ready.

1.3a The Power of Empathy

Empathy allows us to perceive our world in new ways, allowing for different feelings and choices of actions to emerge. In the process of NVC, the improved capacity to connect with the other lies in how one discovers the universality of feelings and needs found in the depth of every human being.

Compassion comes more easily with others who have had struggles that can be easily identified with, especially in the poor and powerless. However, it may be more challenging to practice NVC with the rich and powerful. Showing compassion to oneself is an equally daunting task. Though it may be easier to show empathy towards the other, Rosenberg argues that compassion must first be gifted fully to oneself. Otherwise, the other may be able to sense the inauthenticity of the communicator, as there can exist an internal violence toward the self in them. Therefore, NVC communicators are invited to

do this self-work and connect to the source of divine energy that sees the beauty within⁹⁹ and to choose what leads to making life wonderful for themselves.¹⁰⁰

According to Rosenberg, “In our language, there is a word with enormous power to create shame and guilt. This violent word, which we commonly use to evaluate ourselves, is so deeply ingrained in our consciousness that many of us would have trouble imagining how to live without it. It is the word *should*, as in ‘I should have known better’ or ‘I shouldn’t have done that.’”¹⁰¹ Because of this “should,” communicators resist the natural human condition in gravitating towards and operating out of freedom. Rosenberg further states that “we were not meant to succumb to the dictates of should and have to, whether they come from outside or inside of ourselves.”¹⁰²

Towards this goal of empathy towards oneself amid internal self-alienation, Rosenberg suggests a strategy to connect compassionately with oneself. The first step is to recognize this internal dialogue. The second step involves intentionally stopping, pausing, and breathing in order to slow down this dialogue. Third, it is to identify the specific thoughts that lead to the self-alienation. Fourth, the NVC communicator asks what feelings and unmet needs – sometimes existing on multiple layers – are being expressed through these messages. Complete self-empathy allows the NVC to be aware and notice shifts in their bodies, as tensions release. Because of this appreciation of self,

⁹⁹ Ibid., 130.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 131.

¹⁰² Ibid.

NVC communicators may feel new emotions that replace previous shame, guilt, and depression, and they may pursue distinct strategies to meet their needs.¹⁰³

Another empathic tool an NVC communicator utilizes is mourning, in which they can fully connect with a past unmet need. Linking the present condition with the previous act, the NVC communicator asks themselves, “When I behaved in the way which I now regret, what need of mine was I trying to meet?”¹⁰⁴ According to Rosenberg, “We are compassionate with ourselves when we are able to embrace all parts of ourselves and recognize the needs and values expressed by each part.”¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, from this place of compassion, an NVC communicator becomes able to fully embrace the needs of both themselves and the ones for whom they are caring.

1.3b The Ultimate Freedom

As Rosenberg argues that the flow of compassion finds resistance when actions are performed out of guilt, shame, obligation, a sense of duty, or approval, the solution to unlock that flow is simple. “Don’t do anything that isn’t play!”¹⁰⁶ exclaims Rosenberg, as he argues making choices are purely to enrich life and engender compassion. For example, when one can see the underlying energy behind an “I have to” statement like the teacher above giving grades because they want to keep their job and be employed, they can clearly identify the need that is being satisfied. Similarly, this clarity may come to NVC communicators as they become more capable of distinguishing supposed needs.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 132-133.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 133.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 135.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 135-136.

For example, money itself is not a need but rather a means to meet a true need. Once seeing that money is a means to meet a need, the NVC communicator can then assess that need and become creative in the types of strategies to meet such a need. In this enlightenment, there can be ultimate freedom.

1.3c The Practice of NVC

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.¹⁰⁷

In these words, attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, the poet personally begs the Lord to “make *me* an instrument of your peace” and to “let *me* sow love... pardon... faith... hope... light... joy,” these manifestations of met needs in a land of the unmet needs of “hatred... injury... doubt... despair... darkness.... sadness.” Furthermore, the pray-er understands the nature of enriching another’s life may well help meet their own needs, as in the act of giving consolation will consolation to them come, in the act of giving understanding will understanding be received, and in the act of loving will love to

¹⁰⁷ ThoughtCo, “The Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi,” (Learn Religions, March 8, 2017), <https://www.learnreligions.com/prayer-of-saint-francis-of-assisi-542575>.

be given them. Abundance abounds in which all parties involved are satisfied, “born to eternal life.”

As if in communion with this saint of the 13th century, Rosenberg explicitly writes how the compassionate communicator takes upon oneself this perspective of personal responsibility, to always remain connected to this divine energy of love and follow its process to allow it to flow. The witness seen in its modeling as the teaching done by example goes beyond any explanation. It does not happen all at once, as Rosenberg writes, “Practice is essential, because most of us were raised, if not on the streets of Detroit, then somewhere only slightly less violent. Judging and blaming have become second nature to us. To practice NVC, we need to proceed slowly, think carefully before we speak, and often just take a deep breath and not speak at all. Learning the process and applying it both take time.”¹⁰⁸ And it is time well worth it in bringing reconciliation and peace to one another and to the whole world. Equally worthwhile is delving deeply into the exploration of the theological foundations of the lived experience of NVC.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 153-154.

Chapter 2: Theological Foundations of NVC

With the first chapter's exposition on the mindset and method of the experience of NVC, this chapter shifts to explore and expand on previous studies of the theological foundations in NVC. In various writings, Rosenberg notes how the tenets of his practice fit well within a variety of religious contexts. Some of these tenets include acting only from a place of play,¹⁰⁹ a willingness to enrich life,¹¹⁰ and how to manifest love.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Rosenberg affirms how religions "agree somewhat about how we are meant to live,"¹¹² "willingly contributing to life."¹¹³

At the same time, Rosenberg has witnessed a disparity between religion and NVC. With experience of teaching NVC to religious groups in conflict,¹¹⁴ Rosenberg discovered research that demonstrates how most of the religious faithful exhibit less compassion than the general population.¹¹⁵ However, data also reveals how the remaining minority in these religions have become "very close to that which NVC is intending to serve;"¹¹⁶ as these people exhibit significantly higher levels of compassion than the norm. Rosenberg concludes that people "exposed to various religions... have

¹⁰⁹ Rosenberg, *Practical Spirituality*, 3.

¹¹⁰ Rosenberg, *Getting Past the Pain Between Us*, 24.

¹¹¹ Rosenberg, *Practical Spirituality*, 5.

¹¹² Rosenberg, *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict*, 24.

¹¹³ Rosenberg, *Practical Spirituality*, 3.

¹¹⁴ Rosenberg, *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict*, 128.

¹¹⁵ Rosenberg, *The Heart of Social Change*, 19.

¹¹⁶ Rosenberg, *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict*, 26.

[been taught] to stifle their anger, to calm down and accept whatever is happening”¹¹⁷ whereas the way of NVC allows for its practitioners to empathically connect with their feelings and express them truthfully and openly in a way that serves life.

In fact, the compassionate religious have reflected to Rosenberg that he has not innovated anything as Muslims, Jews, and Christians find NVC as applied forms of their respective religions.¹¹⁸ Though Rosenberg is nonsectarian with NVC as he sees its universality present in the best practices of religions, one can see the Christian theological foundations via research. Most prominent in connecting theology with NVC, the work of Reformed theologians Deborah Van Deusen Hunsinger and Theresa Latini provide a wonderful starting point, as this chapter of this thesis systematically categorizes their theological insights. This chapter also makes further connections by examining the work of other prominent theologians in the systematic categories of hermeneutics, paterology, Christology, pneumatology, theological anthropology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

2.1 Hermeneutics

In their book *Transforming Church Conflict: Compassionate Leadership in Action*, Hunsinger and Latini recognize the presence of conflict in the complexity of church life immersed in a culture that advocates for moral judgments and winning at all costs,¹¹⁹ and the choice involved in going against culture. Among all the options in the

¹¹⁷ Rosenberg, *The Surprising Purpose of Anger*, 16.

¹¹⁸ Rosenberg, *The Heart of Social Change*, 2.

¹¹⁹ Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger and Theresa F. Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict: Compassionate Leadership in Action* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 2.

world to communicate, these two authors take Rosenberg’s NVC as a hermeneutic to the Christian life to faithfully strive for peace in every situation “as ambassadors of reconciliation.”¹²⁰ Aware of the violence found in daily interactions that takes away life, Christian NVC communicators elect to proceed in the world in a manner that serves life. For Hunsinger and Latini, “NVC gives [the church] tools for discernment and listening to God as well as to our own hearts and the hearts of those with whom we live.”¹²¹ In the first step of NVC, the communicator becomes acutely aware of how they mix observation with evaluation and then learn to differentiate the two. In the process, they discover how ubiquitous evaluation is. Another aspect of self-awareness is the desire of an interaction to get what one wants in terms of means rather than needs. In NVC, communicators employ the intention of connecting with the other and God, on whom Rosenberg bestows the name “Beloved Divine Energy.”¹²² When an interaction has the other become defensive, returning to the goal of connection has the communicator in touch with this God within them and the other.

The study of hermeneutics is key to our understanding of NVC as a way of seeing the world. On the meaning of the word *theology*, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza describes the ambiguity in its etymology and questions how the “discourse” (*logos*) of “God” (*theos*) may pertain to either God’s own discourse or the human discourse about God.¹²³

¹²⁰ Ibid., introduction.

¹²¹ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 18.

¹²² Rosenberg, *Practical Spirituality*, 2.

¹²³ Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, “Systematic Theology: Tasks and Methods,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, eds. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 3.

In this regard, Schüssler Fiorenza writes how the sixth-century Dionysius the Areopagite favors the former, as the Holy Scriptures are God's very own speech, a premise that occupies a central role leading up to medieval times. In parallel, the fifth-century St. Augustine of Hippo writes of the latter definition that later combines with and complements Dionysius' definition and arrives at a more comprehensive analysis of God's salvation economy. As Schüssler Fiorenza writes on the history of theology, he almost immediately notes how one must consider how both definitions of discourse about and of God in Christian Scripture are interpretations.¹²⁴ For example, Augustine interprets the Bible from a Neoplatonic background. Beginning with the rise of the historical-critical method in the nineteenth century, "a multiplicity of hermeneutical theories [affecting] our practices of interpretation"¹²⁵ erupt in today's scene. Schüssler Fiorenza comments that the Scriptures themselves "are not simply sources of theological reflection but themselves examples of theological reflection,"¹²⁶ as the gospel authors reflect upon their faith in their context and then communicate a certain theology to their audience.

This reflection upon one's own faith has implications for us as modern interpreters as we acknowledge the role of our contexts on our interpretations. In *A Nonviolent Theology of Love*, Sharon Baker reveals her self-involvement. Citing nineteenth-century philosopher Soren Kierkegaard's concept *thrownness*, she writes "the fact that people are born into the contexts of family, society, culture, and worldviews that

¹²⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 5.

predate their existence,”¹²⁷ lends to the way in which humans form “perceptions, ideas, and beliefs.”¹²⁸ Baker argues that one’s *thrownness* influences the way they interpret Scripture, leading to presuppositions about God and the world. For example, she cites how interpreters of Scripture have presupposed the inferiority of African people with dark skin, thereby justifying slavery and racism. Similarly, Scripture authors themselves cannot escape their *thrownness* and the ramifications on their presuppositions. Despite this, referencing Roman Catholic theologian Mary O’Neill, the Protestant Baker recognizes God’s revelation still breaking through cultural conditions.¹²⁹ For herself, Baker admits a nonviolent perspective influenced by her interpretation of Scripture’s “God is love,”¹³⁰ never permitting for violence upon another. Baker proposes a pair of questions in her book, questions that she also puts to her students of “who benefits from this doctrine or belief, and [how to] interpret it differently in ways that benefit humanity as a whole.”¹³¹ For Baker, this interrogation implores humankind’s ethics, allowing for choice and responsibility of how to behave in ways conforming to this God of love; thereby, such an “alternative to violence [allows for the inbreaking of] God’s kingdom of

¹²⁷ Sharon L. Baker, *A Nonviolent Theology of Love: Peacefully Confessing the Apostles' Creed* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 20.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³⁰ 1 John 4:8.

¹³¹ Baker, *A Nonviolent Theology of Love*, 24.

mercy, justice, and love”¹³² exists. NVC can allow for such a way of seeing that leads to a behaving in the world.

2.2 God

In his introductory-level volume *Systematic Theology*, Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Rausch recovers the idea of the divine mystery of What and Who God is in terms of God’s transcendence and immanence. St. Catherine of Siena mentions the human person cannot exhaust themselves in knowing this transcendent God, and, in return, God desires to be known, revealing God’s self to humanity in a relational and personal way.¹³³

God has used Scripture as a mode of revelation, and humankind has theologized in an attempt to know more deeply God’s transcendent self. First, the Bible demonstrates God as being totally infinite, perfect, other, and unknowable when brought into juxtaposition to any creature’s finiteness and imperfection. For example, in the Old Testament, the ancient Israelite people refuse to construct any image to represent God.¹³⁴ In theology, the eleventh century St. Anselm of Canterbury refers to God as “inaccessible light... no one apart for [God’s self] can enter it and fully comprehend.”¹³⁵ More recently, the later writings of 20th century theologian Karl Rahner reveal his increasing thought that God as Absolute Mystery is incomprehensible.¹³⁶

¹³² Ibid., 12. Bracketed portion of the sentence is a rearrangement of Baker’s writing to fit the syntax of current writing.

¹³³ Rausch, *Systematic Theology: A Roman Catholic Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), Kindle location 1062.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 1076.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 1101.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Hunsinger and Latini critique Northern American culture as viewing needs as “weak;”¹³⁷ these words may be difficult for hearers to describe a typically viewed omnipotent God as having “needs.” In Rosenberg’s exposition of NVC, he uses the terms “needs” and “values” interchangeably in the human person but not of God. However, Hunsinger and Latini invite their audience to instead view these “needs” as “life-serving values”¹³⁸ or “gifts,”¹³⁹ “sources of strength.”¹⁴⁰ When doing so, one’s perspective and language can shift toward desire, “transferring from what I *don’t* want to what I *do* want.”¹⁴¹ Articulating God as “the ground and source of every human need,”¹⁴² this God is the origin and creator “of every good and perfect gift.”¹⁴³ Therefore, this God is indeed needy (i.e., value-driven, desirous) but not in terms of lacking anything. God is all-powerful and is pure act,¹⁴⁴ as God “needs nothing else, is nothing else, will be nothing else, other than this same, one God for all eternity—without beginning and without end.”¹⁴⁵

¹³⁷ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 27.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁴² Ibid., 34 and 112.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁴⁴ Baker, *A Nonviolent Theology of Love*, 62-64.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 63.

To the extent that God seems to be incomprehensible or totally other, Scripture reveals God also as close and wanting to be in relationship with the human person.¹⁴⁶ Rausch alludes to this personal God in the way God calls Abram and promises to be a Father to his people, establishes and renews the covenant with multiple chosen people throughout ancient Israelite history, sends prophets to lead God's people back to God, and promises a shared future. Though Rausch references Michelangelo's famous artwork "The Creation of Adam," Scripture itself depicts this God as creating humankind in God's image,¹⁴⁷ forming and breathing life into man,¹⁴⁸ saying a blessing over humankind to "be fertile and multiply,"¹⁴⁹ and partnering with man to name every creature.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, Scripture shows God as creator and source of these needs/values/desires within the human person. In looking at needs in NVC language, God creates within each human person the desire for autonomy, celebration, integrity, interdependence, spiritual communion, play, and physical nurturance.

As the creator of such needs and out of God's love¹⁵¹ and compassion,¹⁵² God wants to connect and contribute life to every creature but especially to humanity. In

¹⁴⁶ Rausch, *Systematic Theology: A Roman Catholic Approach*, 1189.

¹⁴⁷ Genesis 1:27.

¹⁴⁸ Genesis 2:6.

¹⁴⁹ Genesis 1:28.

¹⁵⁰ Genesis 2:19-20.

¹⁵¹ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 98.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Hunsinger and Latini’s words, “our needs matter to God.”¹⁵³ These authors refer to the Gospel writer Luke in that it is God the “Father’s good pleasure to give [humankind] the kingdom.”¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, “Paul reminds us that God ‘will satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.’”¹⁵⁵ Writing of humankind’s embracing or rejecting God’s gift of grace, Rausch states that God appears weak in the face of humans’ freely choosing their destiny for themselves.¹⁵⁶ However, God’s supposed debility reveals God’s true power of benevolence – not that of control but that which respects freedom.¹⁵⁷ All humankind has to do is be in touch with the met/unmet need with oneself and the other, and then they can make a request of this God. As Pope Francis tweeted on his Twitter account on February 18, 2023, “God waits for us to ask Him to give us a hand.”¹⁵⁸

2.3 Jesus the Christ

From the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as a result of ecumenical councils in 325 CE and 381 CE, *Jesus Christ* is proclaimed as “true God from true God,” the composite of a historical figure *Jesus* who exists in time and place with the universal

¹⁵³ Ibid., 33.

¹⁵⁴ Luke 12:32.

¹⁵⁵ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 35.

¹⁵⁶ Rausch, *Systematic Theology: A Roman Catholic Approach*, 3167.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Pope Francis (@Pontifex), “God Never Leaves Us on Our Own. God Waits for Us to Ask Him to Give Us a Hand. We Need to Learn How to Distinguish God's Voice through Silent #Prayer and Intimate Dialogue with Him, Treasuring in Our Hearts That Which Does Us Good and Gives Us Peace.,” Twitter, February 18, 2023, 4:30a.m., <https://twitter.com/Pontifex/status/1626921974659452929>.

Christ who is confessed as Lord by his believers.¹⁵⁹ More succinctly, it concludes that “the Son is fully God.”¹⁶⁰ Similar to the Creed, Baker’s treatment of the systematic theology of nonviolence and Rausch’s approach in his book *Systematic Theology* both begin first with a treatment of explaining Who and What God is before transitioning to Jesus. However, David Tracy abandons such a progression as he states succinctly early on in his excerpt, “God, for the Christian, is the one who revealed decisively who God is in and through the message and ministry, the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of none other than Jesus the Christ.”¹⁶¹ It is towards this very Jesus that Hunsinger and Latini set out in applying Rosenberg’s compassionate communication. These two authors “are committed to placing NVC into a specifically Christian context so that it will support the ministry of the church. [Their] overriding aim in this book is to bring the skills and consciousness of compassionate communication into the worldwide church so that the church can more faithfully live out the gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹⁶²

At the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, the Son of God is further “acknowledged in two natures”¹⁶³ in the fullness of his humanity and divinity. As Baker uses the Johannine “God is love” to provide insight to her hermeneutical lens, Tracy cites the

¹⁵⁹ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1994), 400.

¹⁶⁰ Anthony J. Godzieba, “The Trinitarian Mystery of God: a 'Theological Theology',” in *Systematic Theology Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. John P. Galvin and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 167.

¹⁶¹ David Tracy, “Approaching the Christian Understanding of God,” in *Systematic Theology Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. John P. Galvin and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 113.

¹⁶² Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 121.

¹⁶³ Thomas P. Rausch, *Who Is Jesus?: An Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 161.

same verse to describe God's acting and disclosing God's self fully in the love of Jesus Christ, "metaphor" and "parable of God."¹⁶⁴ Though narrative theologian Hans Frei and Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann have centered God's *kenosis* on Jesus' passion and crucifixion, Tracy expands that notion to include Jesus' incarnation, his ministry in the daily activities of life, his proclamation of the message of the kingdom of heaven, and his resurrection. Jesus Christ is this God who is "radically relational (and, therefore, personal) origin, sustainer, and end of all reality."¹⁶⁵ From the revelation of Jesus Christ, Tracy ends up where many theologians start in their explanation of Who God is in terms of using human reason to reflect on the Mystery of God.¹⁶⁶

This expansion to the entirety of Jesus' life on earth is vital to nonviolent theologian Baker's argument that Jesus' unity with God the Father manifests love and nonviolence.¹⁶⁷ Jesus the Son does "not covet that place of privilege" as God but "[relinquishes] that position in order to live as a human being, voluntarily limiting himself by emptying himself into a human form."¹⁶⁸ While he may be shown at times to give up divine attributes of full omnipotence and omniscience, he manifests other attributes such as divine love as he heals the sick, offers mercy to the sinner, and preaches to the marginalized and powerful alike. As part of his partial omniscience, "the Gospel narratives state that Jesus saw people as they were; he saw them clearly and truly (Jn

¹⁶⁴ Tracy, "Approaching the Christian Understanding of God," 115.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Rausch, *Systematic Theology*, 242.

¹⁶⁷ Baker, *A Nonviolent Theology of Love*, 76.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 119-120.

2:25) ... [such that] ... among humans, only Jesus has the capacity to see others without his own prejudice distorting his view.”¹⁶⁹

In being both the proclaimer and the proclamation of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is the Christ event that practices peace¹⁷⁰ and models the “ethics of the God’s kingdom.”¹⁷¹ For example, he “sternly warns against calling another person ‘fool’ (Mt 5:22)... tells us to love and pray for our enemies (Mt 5:43–48; Lk 6:27–36), to forgive (Mt 6:14–15), and not to judge others (Mt 7:1–5; Lk 6:37–42).”¹⁷² Jesus as God sees truly and has within his power the capacity to morally judge, but, at times, he refrains from doing the latter. When the woman is caught in adultery which would have allowed the crowd to stone her to death, Jesus sees the woman and the crowd clearly in their sin yet rejects violence as an option by asking the people to look within themselves and recognize how they have all fallen short and therefore not able to judge in casting the stone;¹⁷³ they see that their universal need to comfort and security. Even up to his death upon the cross, Jesus asks for forgiveness for those who do not understand him.¹⁷⁴ After his resurrection, he does not retaliate but instead desires peace with those he visits.¹⁷⁵ Similarly, Rosenberg invites communicators to refrain from labeling the other and

¹⁶⁹ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 64.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 120.

¹⁷² Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 63.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 64.

¹⁷⁴ Luke 23:34.

¹⁷⁵ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 64.

designating moral judgments but to manifest love in the perspective and process of NVC as opposed to purely defining love such as an emotion. When NVC communicators tap into these universal needs/values/desires, they see each other as human and needing compassion.

Jesus embodies this God that willingly fulfills the desires/values/needs of the people that surround him, as compassion is God's divine response to humanity's request to many of its needs.¹⁷⁶ Hunsinger and Latini write that Jesus "does not leave us alone to suffer the anguish of loss and death, nor the consequences of our sin, but actively intercedes on our behalf."¹⁷⁷ Jesus' true humanity allows for him to also be in touch with his own needs and deepest desires/values/needs. For example, he personally experiences the need for physical sustenance as he is tempted as he hungers in the desert for 40 days,¹⁷⁸ possesses a deep desire to celebrate the loss of a friend as he feels grief and mourns at the funeral of his friend Lazarus,¹⁷⁹ and values autonomy as he expresses to his mother and father at a young age how he has chosen a plan for fulfilling his dream of being in his Father's house when he is found at the temple.¹⁸⁰ In the multitude of the others' requests, he responds to his mother's request for more wine to celebrate the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 72.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 112.

¹⁷⁸ Matthew 4:1-11.

¹⁷⁹ John 11:35.

¹⁸⁰ Luke 2:49.

wedding at Cana,¹⁸¹ feeds the five thousand to satiate their physical hunger,¹⁸² and to heal the sickness of the hemorrhaging woman through touch.¹⁸³ As Tracy writes, “for Jesus, God’s rule transforms situations of negativity, suffering, and dehumanization into situations of positivity, joy, and surprising human flourishing beyond any human accomplishment.”¹⁸⁴ As a person imbued fully with the gifts of the Spirit and unity with God the Father, Jesus manifests this compassion authentically in the fullness of his divinity and humanity.¹⁸⁵

2.4 Theological Anthropology

In citing Reformed theologian Karl Barth, Hunsinger and Latini uncover how “Jesus Christ not only reveals true God to us but also true humanity... [as He is] the only one who perfectly reveals the nature of true humanity... because he is the only one without sin.”¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, though Hunsinger and Latini do not use the term *kenosis*, they explain how Jesus Christ “shows us what our created existence was meant to be: a human being for and with others because *self-giving* love marks his entire life.”¹⁸⁷

Barth’s arguments on what constitutes a human being forms the foundation upon which Hunsinger and Latini construct connections between theological anthropology and

¹⁸¹ John 2:1-11.

¹⁸² Matthew 14:15-21.

¹⁸³ Mark 5:31-34.

¹⁸⁴ Tracy, “Approaching the Christian Understanding of God,” 143.

¹⁸⁵ Romans 12:8.

¹⁸⁶ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 14.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. Italicized portion is done by me to connect to “self-giving” to *kenosis*.

Rosenberg's outlook and process in developing NVC. Citing Rosenberg's use of the term "compassionate connection" to describe the intent of an NVC communicator who does so by "connecting with [theirs and the other's] 'divine energy,'"¹⁸⁸ Hunsinger and Latini reference the *imago Dei* of human beings as being created in the image and likeness of God. The human person is not self-sufficient in the work of salvation but rather interdependent in "being redeemed for life together... in rich fellowship... [which] will be made manifest in the kingdom of God."¹⁸⁹ In a few words, Hunsinger and Latini allude not solely to theological anthropology but also to other areas of systematic theology, such as ecclesiology, soteriology, and the study of the Trinity.

Citing Barth's term *mitmenschlichkeit* ("being-in-encounter"), Hunsinger and Latini state that "we are only fully human in relation to others."¹⁹⁰ These two authors make the connection respectively between Rosenberg's four steps of NVC in (1) differentiating observation from evaluation, (2) articulating feelings in terms of (3) identifying met versus unmet needs, and (4) providing a request with Barth's own four steps of what marks humankind's encounter, which consists of mutual (1) seeing, (2) hearing and speaking, and (3) assisting one another, (4) all with gladness.

First, regarding Barth's mutual seeing, revelation of oneself as well as the intent and effort to know the other is integral to what it means to be human.¹⁹¹ For Hunsinger and Latini, to truly know the other is to perform Rosenberg's first step of observing

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 96.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 15.

without judgment.¹⁹² Secondly, referring to Barth's mutual hearing and speaking, these two authors emphasize the revelation with vulnerability that an NVC communicator is able to both reveal their own feelings and needs as well as to identify them in the other.¹⁹³ Third, corresponding with Barth's mutual assistance, the underlying theological principle is that human beings are created with this need for one another and to offer help in meeting those needs.¹⁹⁴ Echoes of Roman Catholic cardinal Walter Kasper resonate here as systematic theologian Anthony Godzieba cites that "the person... exists 'only in mutual giving and receiving.'"¹⁹⁵ Fourth, relating to Barth's exposition on gladness and freedom qualifying the mutual seeing, hearing and speaking, and assistance, Hunsinger and Latini notes the connection with Rosenberg's explanation how all the above is done by the NVC communicator without a sense of obligation but play and from the heart.

Further drawing from Barth, Hunsinger and Latini state that the human person cannot look to their own experience of being human in order to understand what it means to be human but rather needs to look outside oneself toward the truest human, Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁶ Departing from Barth but similar to Rosenberg's positive philosophical anthropology, Roman Catholic theologian Rahner adopts an optimistic viewpoint of humanity, as creation is fundamentally good;¹⁹⁷ in the *imago Dei*, the human person

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 16.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Godzieba, "The Trinitarian Mystery of God: a 'Theological Theology'," 189.

¹⁹⁶ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 15.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 97.

displays an inherently graced nature, as they have “spiritual aspects, their capacity to know, choose, and especially to love.”¹⁹⁸ Regardless of the difference between the Reformed and Roman Catholic theologians, humankind can participate in Christ’s true humanity in that it can bear one another’s pain and suffering as Christ had suffered for humankind.¹⁹⁹ In doing so, humankind lives out God’s intent for human interconnectedness.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, the NVC communicator is invited to “avoid judgments that dehumanize those created in God’s image.”²⁰¹ Additionally, by looking at Christ as a part of the fellowship of the Trinity, one can see how humankind itself is made for connectedness as humankind reflects this relational image of the triune God.²⁰²

However, this compassion is not just reserved for others but is to be used toward oneself as well, to recognize the *imago Dei* in oneself.²⁰³ For Rosenberg, being compassionate or the act of love is concrete,²⁰⁴ as it adopts the mindset and method of NVC. Therefore, being in touch with one’s feelings and needs is part of loving oneself. Similar to how Rosenberg had noted the cultural influence on gender roles and how one should behave at the expense of being in touch with their feelings and needs, Scripture

¹⁹⁸ Rausch, *Systematic Theology*, 5367.

¹⁹⁹ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 14.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 67.

²⁰² Ibid., 170.

²⁰³ Ibid., 72.

²⁰⁴ Rosenberg, *Being Me, Loving You*, 933. For Rosenberg, love is concrete and manifests itself in intention to connect and vulnerability of articulating observations, feelings, needs, and requests and receiving such empathetically.

can be used to “‘deny ourselves,’ (Mt 16:24) ‘hate even life itself,’ (Lk 14:26)... ‘put to death the deeds of the body’ (Rom 8:13)... [and to] ‘do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than [ourselves] (Phil 2:3)’²⁰⁵ in order to justify ignorance of feelings and needs by playing to role of “good Christians.” However, Hunsinger and Latini invite their readers to fulfill the second commandment of loving others as one loves their very self as intimately intertwined with the first commandment of loving God with everything. In other words, as individuals love themselves and others, they love God. Moreover, as all have “fallen short of glory of God,”²⁰⁶ humankind is invited to not judge one another but, furthermore, to see that God desires to meet everyone’s needs out of abundant love, reflecting a win-win mentality and abundance.²⁰⁷

2.5 Pneumatology

In the introduction of the first two chapters of their book, Hunsinger and Latini quote Scripture as they allude to the Third Person of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit. Referencing Romans 12:2, they write how leaders can improve in approaching conflict within their congregation, uplifted by the power of the “Spirit of God to renew their minds as they learn how to speak (and listen to) the truth in love.”²⁰⁸ Similarly, citing St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, Hunsinger and Latini exhort their readers to “be strengthened in [their] inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 96.

²⁰⁶ Romans 3:23.

²⁰⁷ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 158.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 2.

dwell in [their] hearts through faith, as [they] are being rooted and grounded in love.”²⁰⁹

In his exposition of the Holy Spirit, Godzieba highlights the importance of this Advocate’s role in the early church, as “after Easter, believers claimed that the action of the Spirit (*pneuma*) was the source for their continuing participation in God’s power (*dynamis*) that Jesus had promised to those who have faith.”²¹⁰ However, Godzieba notes how the Spirit’s role in the lives of the People of God has dated back to the origin of the world. Reviewing the Hebrew Scriptures, Godzieba follows how this same power makes itself present through its creative force over the formless void,²¹¹ presiding through the prophet’s words for those in need,²¹² and giving life to its people.²¹³ Similar to how Christ can be reduced to the functionality of his incarnation, death, and resurrection without paying attention to the way he lived, the Spirit can be reduced to functionality without a deeply personal and relational character. Oftentimes, the Spirit has been viewed as such, a holdover from the mentality in Old Testament times.²¹⁴ However, disciples from the past and present have felt this personal power to speak and to reach out as a community from its origin in the upper room.²¹⁵ In today’s world, Scripture states that “likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we

²⁰⁹ Ephesians 3:14.

²¹⁰ Godzieba, “The Trinitarian Mystery of God: a ‘Theological Theology’,” 147.

²¹¹ Genesis 1:2.

²¹² Isaiah 61.

²¹³ Job 33:4.

²¹⁴ Godzieba, “The Trinitarian Mystery of God: a ‘Theological Theology’,” 147.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”²¹⁶ Connecting NVC language to Scripture, Hunsinger and Latini write that “in prayer we connect to God as the source of our needs, to Christ as the one in whom all our needs are fulfilled, and to the *Spirit* who searches our hearts and enables us to pray from the depths of our need.”²¹⁷

With the theology coming forth as evidenced in the New Testament, the Spirit finds itself in continuation of Jesus’ own personal relationality with his early disciples, and that notion spreads itself to the church today.²¹⁸ Hunsinger and Latini articulate such in their own personal experience of NVC as they have enjoyed the “delight of fellowship in the Spirit, which comes both as a gift and from a common commitment to seeing and hearing one another, bearing one another’s burdens, and participating in one another’s healing and growth.”²¹⁹ As these words echo Barth’s approach to theological anthropology, NVC communicators become more truly human and more like Christ.

Similar to the difficulty of speaking of God without the mention of Jesus, the Christian faith demands a trinitarian theology that proves equally challenging not to include the Spirit.²²⁰ In citing Roman Catholic cardinal Kasper, Godzieba views the church as a community reflected from Trinity, as it is “known the eternal communion of love, life and reciprocal glorification between Father, Son and Spirit, in order that through this revelation the disciples and, with their help, [hu]mankind may be drawn into

²¹⁶ Romans 8:26.

²¹⁷ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 111-112. Italicized emphasis placed by me.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, introduction.

²²⁰ Godzieba, “The Trinitarian Mystery of God: a ‘Theological Theology,’” 146.

this same communion of love and life.”²²¹ The relationship of the Holy Spirit with humankind allows for “the believer’s ability to recognize Christ as Lord and confess him as such.”²²² And as duly noted beforehand, to know Christ is to know God.

Interestingly, Hunsinger and Latini invite the audience to ponder the role of the Spirit in affectivity. In particular, Hunsinger and Latini highlight how “the Holy Spirit worked in and with Jesus’ feelings (not against Jesus’ feelings and not in spite of Jesus’ feelings).”²²³ This affirmation of emotions comes likewise in Robert Louis Wilken’s remembrance of Jesus’ weeping²²⁴ and Michael McClymond’s documentation of the Spirit’s gift of holy tears traced from the desert fathers through the present day.²²⁵ It is this Spirit that allows for Jesus to compassionately communicate with the other, as “the Spirit enabled Jesus to see people as God sees people... stirred up Jesus to action, enabling Jesus to act with the compassion of God in response to the sin and suffering of those around him.”²²⁶ Similarly, the Spirit is the foundation out of which humankind can communicate nonviolently, as the Spirit allows for this connection to Jesus and hence God. In sum, “feelings are essential to this life of *koinonia*—to our union and

²²¹ Ibid., 151.

²²² Ibid., 153.

²²³ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 54.

²²⁴ Robert Louis Wilken, “Blessed Passion of Love: The Affections, the Church Fathers, and the Christian Life,” in *The Spirit, the Affections and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Dale M. Coulter and Amos Yong (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 34.

²²⁵ Michael J. McClymond, “Holy Tears: A Neglected Aspect of Early Christian Spirituality in Contemporary Context,” in *The Spirit, the Affections and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Dale M. Coulter and Amos Yong (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 88.

²²⁶ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 54.

communion with God and each other—for emotion moves us toward encounter with others and with God.”²²⁷ Historical theologian Elizabeth Dreyer has written how medieval mystics invite others to participate in this affective connection with Christ and in how Christ cared for others through the mystics’ experience and the prayer methods they employed.²²⁸

2.6 Ecclesiology

As Hunsinger and Latini write from the perspective of ordained ministers presiding over their churches, they describe concrete examples of a local community undergoing conflict – a murder performed by a youth group member,²²⁹ arson committed by a church leader,²³⁰ and infidelity between couples.²³¹ Therefore, Hunsinger and Latini work in the capacity of a physical locale in which NVC may be used to transform the way in which the daily interactions of life can unfold. In this regard, the ecclesiological viewpoint can find itself leaning towards the “mystical communion,” one of six ways of being church as presented by Roman Catholic cardinal and theologian Avery Dulles in his book *Models of the Church*.²³²

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Elizabeth A. Dreyer, “The Transformative Role of Emotion in the Middle Ages: Deliverance from Lukewarm Affections,” in *The Spirit, the Affections and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Dale M. Coulter and Amos Yong (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 115-116.

²²⁹ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 174.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid., 142.

²³² Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York, NY: Image Books, 2014), 39. Dulles emphasizes the characteristics of a small number of people with face-to-face interactions leading to intimacy among the people.

In their description of the church, Hunsinger and Latini use the term *koinonia* that Dulles reserves for this specific model, as he does not use this word in any other instance in his book.²³³ For Hunsinger and Latini, they refer to *koinonia* to describe three levels of communion: (1) within God as the Trinity, (2) communion between human beings and God, and (3) communion among human persons. In the fourth century, theologians such as St. Gregory of Nyssa articulate the immanent Trinity in identifying the unity of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit into the shared *ousia* (“essence”) while articulating the *hypostasis* (“person”) as what is proper to each person of the Trinity, though these terms found frequent confusion in those times.²³⁴ Since then, more contemporary theologians have drawn upon these same early Cappadocian fathers to discuss “social trinitarianism... [a] theory that the perichoretic relationship of the Trinity... [provides] the model for relationships in human society. According to this argument, the Trinity can be shown in this way to have direct implications for everyday life... coupled with a theological anthropology that emphasizes the human person as *imago Dei*.”²³⁵

The way in which we understand a certain category of systematics (e.g., the Trinity) affects our ecclesiological views. Until the Second Vatican Council, the church had been predominantly operative as Dulles’ institution model of the church, reflecting a type of monotheism in which God the Father’s very being is viewed as authoritative over the Son and the Holy Spirit. However, Moltmann refers to the *perichoresis*, a Greek term

²³³ Ibid., 50-53.

²³⁴ Godzieba, “The Trinitarian Mystery of God: a ‘Theological Theology’,” 173.

²³⁵ Ibid., 190.

that describes the mutual-indwelling and self-donation of the Persons of the Trinity. With the Trinity seen through a lens of equality and mutuality, Moltmann envisions an egalitarian model of a fellowship church, which is more closely aligned with the Dulles' model of the mystical communion than the hierarchical one.²³⁶ This *perichoresis*-communion works against a monotheistic domination system and embodies a viewpoint resonant with Rosenberg's involvement in NVC as a similar counter-narrative. More specifically, Rosenberg has critiqued his own field of psychology as having a power dynamic of one above the other with labels; his alternative of NVC allows for mutual vulnerability, expression of feelings, and shared needs/values/desires. Though Hunsinger and Latini do not source their theological insight, this social trinitarianism that leads to a mystical communion ecclesiology is apparent in their writing. Using the term *koinonia*, they write about this interplay between the relationship within the Trinity, the Trinity with humankind, and the relationships within humankind:

Koinonia means that we exist in the greatest possible intimacy with God and each other. It is an intimacy that has its origin in the very being of God and thus permeates God's work of creation, reconciliation, and redemption. *Koinonia* describes the mysterious union and communion of the Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in a union and communion of free, self-giving love, knowledge, and creative action. From this *koinonia* flows new life. The abundant, overflowing love of God creates human beings for another kind of *koinonia*, a relationship of loving, communicating, and knowing between God and humanity."²³⁷

Dulles notes that *koinonia* can be ambiguous in its definition of "the Church as a network of friendly interpersonal relationships and the Church as a mystical communion

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid., 170-171.

of grace.”²³⁸ The former is the emphasis on the intimacy found in the associations people have with one another. The latter receives Dulles’ full attention as he argues that “the primary factor that binds the members of the Church to each other is the reconciling grace of Christ.”²³⁹ This grace has a vertical aspect as God breathes life in the individual, with the Spirit filling them up. The result of this communion between God and the individual translates into grace of the horizontal and interpersonal connection and concern.²⁴⁰

For Dulles, there is a subtlety which leads to a point of departure from Hunsinger and Latini in the articulation of the *telos* of *koinonia*. For the latter two, the personal communion with God and the interpersonal communion with God are both the *telos*, or goal, of life towards which human beings strive.²⁴¹ In such, there are eschatological undertones as human beings and creation catch a glimpse of something here and yet its fullness is still coming. When tapping into the Spirit as the “Beloved Divine Energy” among persons, Hunsinger and Latini believe that human beings can use NVC as a tool to facilitate authentic dialogue as a pathway to how they define *koinonia*. All humans participate in some degree. However, for Dulles, the reality is more immediate and fuller in what the Church is in both function and ontology, as:

The Church aims to lead [humankind] into communion with the divine. But that goal is not simply the reward of a life well lived. To some extent it is given with the very existence of the Church. Wherever the Church is present, [humankind is]

²³⁸ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 53.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁴¹ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 170.

already united with God. In the oft-quoted phrase of Irenaeus, ‘Where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every grace.’²⁴²

In this capacity, one may be able to see how Rosenberg already recognizes this “Beloved Divine Energy” already existing within the human person regardless of faith background. The only prerequisite necessary is the openness of one individual to come together with the other to communicate in a manner that allows for compassion to flow freely. As noted previously, compassion is a gift vivified by the Spirit, a notion supported by Dulles as he recognizes *koinonia* in the Book of Acts and the Letters of St. Paul the “theme that God has fashioned for himself a people by freely communicating his Spirit and his gifts.”²⁴³ With the ecclesiology of the mystical communion sometimes being monikered “The Body of Christ,” Dulles comments how this type of ecclesiology allows for more ecumenical discussion, and, when used with the term “The People of God,” it may lend itself to interfaith cordiality through the “informal, personal, and communal.”²⁴⁴ Hunsinger and Latini comment on how even people outside of the Church practice aspects of *koinonia* better than and provide an example to Christians.²⁴⁵ In that regard, the Church is constantly looking to fulfill Jesus’ desire for communion, “so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one.”²⁴⁶

²⁴² Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 50.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 51.

²⁴⁵ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 172.

²⁴⁶ John 17:22-23.

In unity with God’s Spirit that outflows to the use of compassionate communication, the Church manifests and displays certain attitudes. First, it communicates in terms of requests in which demands are not set as there is a belief in God’s abundance in which all can have their needs met.²⁴⁷ Opposing a mindset of scarcity, biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann invites his readers into the counter-world of the psalms, commenting on how anxieties and fears dissipate from viewpoint of God’s abundance. Especially in Psalm 145, God “fulfills the desires of all... [as God] ... hears their cry.”²⁴⁸ Second, the Church imitates its God in its hearing of the people, where everyone is valued and listened to.²⁴⁹ In this listening, the Church taps into the universal feelings and needs/values/desires. Referring specifically to NVC’s exposition of a need/value/desire of mourning, Hunsinger and Latini writes of the Church’s unity,

The body of Christ—Christ’s presence on earth in the power of the Spirit—weeps with those who weep. This is the church’s vocation: to bear the burdens of those who feel defeated, to be compassionately present with the brokenhearted, and to wait prayerfully for the fullness of reconciliation.²⁵⁰

In his book on pneumatology, Roman Catholic theologian and priest Denis Edwards cites St. Basil of Caesarea in his use of the word *koinonia* to refer to a “communion of mutual sympathy... meaning of ‘feeling with others,’”²⁵¹ which is the gift of the Spirit to the

²⁴⁷ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 74.

²⁴⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 16-17.

²⁴⁹ Hunsinger and Latini, *Transforming Church Conflict*, 193.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

²⁵¹ Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 29.

Church. In this sympathy, the NVC communicator listens deeply to the needs/values/desires connected with the feelings. In Jesus' commandment to love one's enemies,²⁵² the NVC communicator loves not by the definition of a transient feeling of love but rather by proceeding with perspective and method of NVC, thereby dispelling any judgment of "enemy." Additionally, the NVC communicator displays a "love [that] does not insist on its own way"²⁵³ and has freedom in the variety of strategies to meet the underlying need/value/desire. Third, the Church reflects hospitality, support, peace, and bearing burdens in all its life – worship, prayer, and service.²⁵⁴ As the sacraments find their basis in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection with the Scripture revealing God's self, sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet notes the interplay of grace that manifests itself in the ethical life of the believer as part of the ecclesial body.²⁵⁵

2.7 Eschatology

Though the focus of eschatology has been at times reduced to (1) judgment, (2) death, (3) heaven, and (4) hell, Rosenberg's writings and workshops rarely speaks of such. From a Reformed perspective, Hunsinger and Latini highlight and contrast theological connections that frame NVC in another major eschatological theme: the Kingdom of God. According to McBrien, Jesus preaches this central message of the Kingdom of God, "an apocalyptic symbol referring to God's final act of redemption at

²⁵² Luke 6:27 and Matthew 5:44.

²⁵³ 1 Corinthians 13:5.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

²⁵⁵ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 28.

the end of the world, and so... a symbol filled with hope.”²⁵⁶ The Kingdom transmits a tension of already being present and still coming.²⁵⁷

In terms of the Kingdom, different theologies have developed along different timeframes, but the “Catholic Church has never officially defined the meaning of the Kingdom of God.”²⁵⁸ First, there are a variety of thoughts on the Coming of the Kingdom with respect to when it comes about as some believe it already has, is coming in the present, or is coming in the future; the Coming of the Kingdom may be a combination of any of the above. Regarding a futuristic eschatology, the Coming of the Kingdom may have differing views on the immediacy of the arrival of such a Kingdom. Second, four main currents of interpretation of the Kingdom involve the (1) eschatological (as already described), (2) spiritual-mystical (focus on spiritual gain of the individual), (3) political (identification of political structure), and (4) ecclesial (Church as being the Kingdom of God versus a distinction as “Kingdom of Christ”).²⁵⁹ Third, the variation of theologies lies in whether and how humankind is involved in the Coming of the Kingdom. For example, St. Augustine of Hippo believes that the Kingdom of God is totally on God’s initiative, not considering any of humankind’s effort.²⁶⁰ Understanding

²⁵⁶ McBrien, *Catholicism*, 450.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1158.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1132.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1133.

these variations allow for comprehensions of Rosenberg's own thoughts on the Kingdom of God, even without his articulating them as such.

Referencing Jesuit paleontologist and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Rosenberg believes that "a peaceful world is not only possible, it's inevitable... evolving in that direction"²⁶¹ but takes a point of departure. "[Chardin] wasn't naïve about all the violence that's going on now, but he saw the violence as just an evolutionary snag," Rosenberg writes, "I'm not as patient as he is. I can't wait thousands of years for it, so I'm interested in how we can speed it up."²⁶² In this inevitability of a "peaceful world," Rosenberg likely is referring to Teilhard de Chardin's belief of the Kingdom of God as the *Omega Point* – the goal towards which "all of reality, the whole of the cosmic order, is moving toward."²⁶³ As Rosenberg states of his interest in affecting the coming of this "peaceful world," he embodies the "theology of hope" inspired by Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch where humankind is "called to participate in the struggle to bring the future kingdom into the present, to narrow the gap between justice and injustice, freedom and oppression... [where] the Kingdom of God becomes equivalent to the Kingdom of humankind."²⁶⁴ Interestingly, Rosenberg's trust in the perspective and process of NVC may be more along the lines of twentieth-century Catholic thought on the Kingdom, in which it "is the product of divine initiative and human collaboration alike."²⁶⁵ In this

²⁶¹ Rosenberg, *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict*, 177.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ McBrien, *Catholicism*, 139.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 1136-1137.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 1180-1181.

regard, the already existent “Beloved Divine Energy” allows for humankind to cooperate and connect with such that leads to compassionate communication.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the theological foundations in the experience of NVC with respect to seven categories drawn from systematic theology. From the knowledge that it can be a choice among many options to potentially provide peace in the world, it is with humility that this thesis now turns to how NVC can be a helpful hermeneutic to the world of biblical scholarship.

Chapter 3: The Lived Experience of NVC Contributing to Biblical Scholarship

In his book *The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Nonviolence*, Roman Catholic priest John Dear provides evidence that “the God of Jesus is the God of nonviolence”²⁶⁶ and explores how humankind may respond to such a God, as “God calls humanity to nonviolent resistance.”²⁶⁷ Similarly to Baker’s systematic exploration of theology to support nonviolence in general, Dear’s work bolsters this thesis, which has been focused on the theological foundations of nonviolent communication. The first chapter focused on the lived experience of NVC while the second chapter allowed for a critical theological reflection of such. Together, the first two chapters provide the basis for any person of good will, and, more specifically, for any Christian to live out NVC and adopt its mindset and method towards building peaceful relationships with whomever they desire authentic connection – whether it be in their local church, families, friendships, workplaces, or schools. Wherever the Christian interacts with another human person, the possibilities for which NVC to help make life wonderful are endless.

By nature of its academic ends, this thesis expands in a constructive manner, now specifically to the realm of biblical scholarship; NVC can provide some considerable insight. In the likes of peace activist Wink, many theologians and biblical scholars have demonstrated how the Bible has been used to promote violence. In his book *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament’s Legacy*, Eric Seibert refers to numerous Scripture passages and ways in which violence has been advocated. Seibert

²⁶⁶ John Dear, *The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Nonviolence* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 30.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

writes that the authors of the Bible and its interpreters have justified war, legitimated colonialism, supported slavery, encouraged violence against women, harmed children, condemned gays and lesbians, and distorted the character of God.²⁶⁸ Aware of how violence can be perpetuated among well-intentioned people, Wink warns for his audience to not become not what they hate.²⁶⁹ That is, to not become violent in the act of working against violence.

To break such a cycle of violence, Siebert and other Scripture scholars have proposed a nonviolent reading of violent Scripture. Therefore, this thesis hopes to show how the lived experience of NVC adds to the field of contemporary biblical scholarship – in shifting from thinking in the mind to giving and receiving from the heart. Therefore, this thesis calls for its readers to empathize both with the people (i.e., characters in Scripture) who enact and who are victims of violence in Scripture. In this manner, the NVC communicator does the work of reconciliation.

3.1 Defining and Detecting Violence

First, it may be helpful for readers of this thesis to know how violence may be defined, with Rosenberg providing a specific criterion for violent communication. In his contribution to the edited volume *Coping with Violence in the New Testament*, Jan Willem van Henten explains the importance of a common language around violence, specifically to involve definitions that include the concept of power and its role in both

²⁶⁸ This series of observations are taken from the headings outlining the misuse of the Bible in Siebert's book *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament's Legacy*.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 208.

physical and non-physical violence.²⁷⁰ As previously reviewed, Rosenberg claims that violence finds its origin in the exercise of power “over” the other rather than “with” them.²⁷¹

An existing mindset (i.e., thoughts) can lead to non-physical (i.e., words) and physical violence (e.g., physical assault, rape, murder). The latter seems to be what Seibert has focused upon. From his time teaching NVC in the prison systems, Rosenberg tells of an episode in which a prisoner who – upon learning the difference between cause and stimulus – expresses remorse. He says, “Marshall, I wish you had taught me two years ago what you taught me this morning. I wouldn’t have had to kill my best friend.”²⁷² Rosenberg sadly sums up, “All violence is the result of people tricking themselves, as did this young man, into believing that their pain derives from other people and that consequently those people deserve to be punished.”²⁷³

According to criteria outlined by Rosenberg,²⁷⁴ the NVC communicator can detect violence through the words revealed by the other as well as in their very own selves. As NVC would normally work in dialogue, the NVC communicator’s medium shifts from the spoken to the written word with Scripture. However, what stays similar with the NVC communicator is the capacity to detect observations mixed with

²⁷⁰ Jan Willem van Henten, “Religion, Bible, and Violence,” in *Coping with Violence in the New Testament*, ed. Pieter De Villiers and Henten Jan Willem van, vol. 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 1-21, 5-7.

²⁷¹ Please refer to p. 32 of this thesis to review Rosenberg’s explanation of “power over” versus “power with.”

²⁷² Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 147.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Please refer to p. 12-17 of this thesis to review the criteria of life-alienating communication.

evaluations and guessing/ascertaining/identifying the feelings, underlying met/unmet needs, and requests of the other.²⁷⁵

3.2 The Earliest Occurrence of Violence in the Bible

Echoing biblical scholar André LaCocque's words, our attention is drawn to "the story of Cain and Abel [as it] is so well and so universally known."²⁷⁶ Many biblical scholars and laypeople alike agree that the first story of violence in Scripture happens at the beginning of the fourth chapter of Genesis: Cain murders Abel. Interestingly, Schwartz argues that the term *original sin* is misappropriated to the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Schwartz argues that *original sin* be attributed to the "original violence"²⁷⁷ found in humankind's first two sons. This pericope of Cain and Abel is the first place in the Bible the word "sin" is used.²⁷⁸ With this story of these two siblings alongside the Lord, this pericope will be the subject of our study among various biblical critics.

3.3 Biblical Scholarship in Response to Violence in Scripture

In the realm of Biblical scholarship, there has been a variety of methods to approach a Scriptural text. In their book *To Each Its Own Meaning*, editors Steven McKenzie and Stephen Haynes have made such types of Biblical criticism easily accessible to their readers. Traditionally, historical methods have included source, form,

²⁷⁵ Please refer to p. 18-36 of this thesis to review the method of NVC.

²⁷⁶ LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 1.

²⁷⁷ Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 2.

²⁷⁸ Genesis 4:7.

tradition-historical, and redaction criticism as they “emphasize the historical, archaeological, or literary backgrounds or roots of a text, and the development of the text through time.”²⁷⁹ Expanding upon these historical methods have been social-scientific, canonical, and rhetorical criticism. Lastly, literary methods such as structural, narrative, reader-response, and poststructuralist criticisms as well as liberation hermeneutics found in feminist and socioeconomic criticisms go beyond or do not necessarily consider historicity. In the following four examples of biblical scholarship, our authors Schwartz, LaCocque, Nyasha Junior, and Seibert use several methods but differ in how they focus their response.

3.3a Plenitude as a Response to Violence

In her 1997 book *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*, Schwartz concerns herself with the Bible because of its enormous influence on the culture of Christendom, which has had a prolonged history of advocating violence.²⁸⁰ As if tapping into Wink’s theory of domination systems which helps form the theological basis for Rosenberg’s approach in NVC, Schwartz uses a number of approaches (e.g., historical, socioeconomic) to articulate how “violence is not only what we do to the Other [but] the very construction of the Other... [as]... outsider...”²⁸¹ This allows one to understand how a non-physical violent mindset can lead to a physically violent outcome.

²⁷⁹ Stephen R. Haynes and Steven L. McKenzie, eds., *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 7.

²⁸⁰ Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*, 6.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

Like Rosenberg and Brueggemann, Schwartz refers to a scarcity mindset that affects how human beings proceed in the world and writes, “When everything is in short supply, it must all be competed for – land, prosperity, power, favor, even identity itself... Everyone does not receive a divine blessing. Some are cursed – with dearth and with death – as though there were a cosmic shortage of prosperity.”²⁸² Referring more specifically to the story of Abel and Cain, she notes how the Lord possesses only enough favor for and therefore only accepts one offering from one of the two brothers. Consequently, the Lord sets up the first sibling rivalry, resulting in a truly deadly competition in which one brother dies at the hands of the other.²⁸³

From this first Biblical story of violence, Schwartz then focuses her text on how people use God to form collective identities (e.g., tribes, ethnicities, nations) in the creation and exclusion of the other. God’s covenant with a certain group of people establishes a nation, thereby inventing a boundary between them and the other. The covenant bestows a land to this divinely chosen nation. Therefore, in a world with a scarcity mindset, God gives reward or punishment through securing/holding/gaining or losing a territory respectively, usually by a violent means. Throughout its history, Israel has been narrated as a people set apart and saved by God while others have been destroyed.²⁸⁴ Though Schwartz has used the Bible for liberative reasons for oppressed

²⁸² Ibid., xi.

²⁸³ Ibid., 2.

²⁸⁴ In her introduction to her book, Schwartz tells of an anecdote that helps motivate her to explore this theme of violence seen in the Scriptures. As she is teaching a course on how God liberates an oppressed people, an undergraduate student asks her astutely how the salvation of one nation led to destruction of another, “What about the Canaanites?” Schwartz then questions further about other groups such as the Amorites, Hittites, and Moabites.

people, she has also discovered its “complicity, for [how] the Bible tells stories of a people who inherit at someone else’s expense.”²⁸⁵ Advancing from ancient Israelite to current times, Schwartz highlights how contemporary Western Christendom uses the narrative of the Bible to intertwine monotheism with nationalism to promote and justify violence to others.²⁸⁶

In her work in analyzing this mix of monotheism and nationalism, Schwartz interrogates the very concept of God. Referring to the story of Cain and Abel, she asks, “What kind of God is this who chooses one sacrifice over the other?” Emphasizing confusion, she wonders, “In this *cryptic* narrative, each brother offers a sacrifice to God, but for some *mysterious* reason one sacrifice is deemed unacceptable while the other is well-received.”²⁸⁷ She articulates again this point when she brings up Jacob’s blessing of Isaac without any leftover grace to bestow upon Esau. She explicates,

Again, in that story, the parental deity inexplicably preferred one of the siblings to the other and favored one of their sacrifices over the other... *Inexplicably*. That motiveless favoritism is precisely the point, for all we know that, just as some unexplained scarcity makes a human father have only one blessing to confer but two sons to receive it, so some obscure scarcity motivates a divine Father to accept only one offering from two sons. The rejected son inevitably hates his brother.²⁸⁸

In her questioning, Schwartz communicates her desire for an answer in which Scripture is not used to exclude, morally judge, and justify violence to other. Rather, she

²⁸⁵ Ibid., x.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 2. Emphasis in italics made by me.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 82-83.

longs to view Scripture as a promoter of an ethic of being with and for the least and marginalized (e.g., the widow, the orphan, the poor). Schwartz examines a God who would embolden, rather than destroy, the brotherhood between these two siblings. She asks, “Why would God condemn Cain’s sacrifice? What would have happened if God had accepted both Cain’s and Abel’s offerings instead of choosing one, and thereby promoted cooperation between the sower and the shepherd instead of their competition and violence?”²⁸⁹

Against the violence, Schwartz pushes for an inclusive view of God in Scripture, thereby encouraging separate peoples to erase boundaries²⁹⁰ between themselves and the other. Henceforth, they would unite as one people under one abundant and caring God.²⁹¹ She invites her audience to remember and emphasize such Scripture passages apart from the story of Abel and Cain.²⁹² She writes, “My re-vision [of Scripture] would produce an alternative Bible that subverts the dominant version of violence and scarcity with an ideal of plenitude and its corollary imperative of generosity.”²⁹³

3.3b Freedom and Grace as a Response to Violence

In his book *Onslaught against Innocence: Cain, Abel, and the Yahwist*, LaCocque takes a different path in leading his audience to deal with the violence in the Bible. As opposed to Schwartz who looks at the question of God and the formation of a collective

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 3.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 35.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 20.

²⁹² Ibid., 187.

²⁹³ Ibid., 176.

identity, LaCocque focuses more on theological anthropology and the topic of morality. Looking at the story of Cain and Abel, LaCocque uses historical criticism, reader response criticism, literary criticism, and psychology to explore more deeply the themes of God and grace.

Applauding the Yahwist (J) – author of the story of Cain and Abel, LaCocque praises (J) for being a “daring thinker... a great poet... a singer of tales who keenly observed human nature.”²⁹⁴ By “daring,” LaCocque mentions how (J) writes God as immanent in using anthropomorphisms and imbues Cain with “impure desires, inclined to rebellion against God, to envy, jealousy, fratricidal impulses.”²⁹⁵ With the idea of a God Whose character could display human qualities²⁹⁶ and Cain with whom the reader can identify, (J)’s artistry with its spacious brevity gives permission to and allows room for the reader to immerse themselves into the text and respond in a personal and authentic manner. The reader becomes authorized as an interpreter as she tells “the story of the minstrel... [in which] her interpretation is respected.”²⁹⁷

This self-involvement of the reader is important as the text speaks directly to how a person is afforded the freedom to choose to follow the model of Cain or not. LaCocque writes, “(J)’s basic conviction is that the human beings are free. Cain can do well and he can also not do well.”²⁹⁸ Using both a psychological approach and focusing theological

²⁹⁴ LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 7.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 8.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 97.

anthropology, LaCocque highlights humankind's free will in the choice of any human person to become like Cain or Abel.²⁹⁹ LaCocque also embraces God's attribute of mercy, as the human person possesses the opportunity to turn their lives towards God despite previous wrongs, even in the instance of Cain's fratricide.³⁰⁰ LaCocque's message applies to all of us in stating, "Cain is said to be *capable* of overcoming his propensity to sin."³⁰¹ Particularly evident of God's mercy is how LaCocque points out how God continues to communicate with Cain even after his murderous act. God does not put Cain to death but protects him with a mark, showing God's persisting care for Cain.³⁰²

Like Rosenberg, LaCocque invokes both Gandhi and King, Jr., in being aware of how violence can perpetuate itself. LaCocque recognizes the violence continuing in humanity from Cain. In a footnote, LaCocque writes, "As strongly stated by Gandhi, 'Retaliation cannot end violence... There is no alternative but to adopt non-violence. Love alone can conquer hatred.' 'For, through violence you may murder a murderer, but you cannot murder murder,' said Martin Luther King Jr." For LaCocque, to break this cycle is to choose to "do well"³⁰³ (i.e., love) as the option was afforded to Cain.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 14.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 75.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 37.

³⁰² Ibid., 6.

³⁰³ Genesis 4:7.

³⁰⁴ LaCocque, *Onslaught against Innocence*, 219.

3.3c Appreciation as a Response to Violence

In her article “The Mark of Cain and White Violence,” Nyasha Junior contributes to the field of biblical scholarship in addressing violence in an indirect manner. She comments on the originality of Black theologians who have been able connect violence to the story of Cain and Abel. In the past, Whites have interpreted the story to identify the first human beings as White with the mark of Cain designating Blackness. This type of reading emerged to justify slavery.³⁰⁵ On the other hand, Junior argues that Black theologians have proposed the opposite, with the origins of humankind as Black and the mark of Cain as Whiteness. In fact, these Black theologians relate how a Black Cain was stricken White with fear, horror, and guilt of his fratricide.³⁰⁶

More importantly, Junior notes how these theological developments have come about independently of – not as a reaction to – anti-Black theology.³⁰⁷ She cites theologians whose original ideas link Whiteness with violence.³⁰⁸ Going beyond racial dynamics between Blacks and Whites, Black theologians have also autonomously proposed how greed and envy – regardless of race – have marked the foundation for violence.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁵ Nyasha Junior, “The Mark of Cain and White Violence,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 139, no. 4 (2020): 662-663, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1394.2020.2>.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 667.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 663.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 670.

In all, Junior encourages her audience to note the unique contributions of Black theologians to this reading of Abel and Cain. In this regard, we can appreciate the voices that speak against out against a certain reading that has perpetuated violence. Exiting out of arguments of one point of view versus the other as demonstrated here in the White versus Black narratives, Junior invites us to focus on the issue at hand – to explore violence by inspecting its causes.

3.3d Critique and Embrace as a Response to Violence

In his writing, Seibert breaks significant ground in biblical hermeneutics in proposing a specifically nonviolent method to reading violent texts in the Bible. Even after noting all the violence in the Scripture and how various peoples have supported it, Seibert does not opt to censor the violence. Instead, Seibert invites us to confront such violence, taking the lead from liberation hermeneutics which interprets the Bible from the viewpoint of the oppressed and marginalized. From this foundation of liberation hermeneutics, Seibert partitions five steps of a method to (1) name, (2) analyze, (3) critique, (4) use constructively, and (5) transcend the violence in Scripture.

First, regarding naming the violence, Seibert recommends articulating the specific type of violence (e.g., rape, genocide) contained in a certain pericope. Furthermore, he advocates pinpointing how the Scripture has been used to justify violence.

Second, in analyzing the violence, Seibert encourages us to ask (1) what divine or human agent is enacting the violence, (2) what reasons motivate the violence, (3) who benefits from such violence, (4) how the violence is either approved or condemned, and (5) what role violence plays in the literary arc of the Bible and its subsections. For

Seibert, the end goal is to determine whether the violence in the Bible is sanctioned or not.

Third, about sanctioned violence, Seibert invites the reader to critique it. He requests that the reader (1) search for critiques of violence within the same very text that seems to sanction it, (2) use nonviolent voices to undermine the often dominant, violent ones, (3) study the text with the victims (e.g., the silent, the unseen, the oppressed) of violence in mind, (4) read the passages alongside with others who feel marginalized, and (5) appeal to current norms of morality of when objecting to violence.

Fourth, after critiquing the violence in Scripture, Seibert asks how we might use it constructively to help humanity. In naming, analyzing, and critiquing the violence, the audience may be able to identify the ways in which they themselves may be involved in violence. As victims themselves, to name violence takes the first step towards liberation from it. As perpetrators/assailants, our awareness of being such may lead to our repentance and, consequently, a desire to prevent any more harm. Lastly, in our current surroundings, we can use violent Scripture to provide a palatable entry to discuss difficult themes (e.g., racism, femicide) with others.

Fifth, Seibert suggests transcending the violence in Scripture by investigating ways in which we can still recover valuable lessons from such texts. Moreover, the reader may use their findings through the first four steps of Seibert's method to discern the next invitation to study and reflect more. For example, such discoveries can expand their understanding in the realm of theology involving violence.

Overall, Seibert pleads with his audience to consider how they may arrive at a place where they can fully critique the violence in the Bible while embrace its positive aspects as well.

3.4 Reader Response Literary Criticism as Entryway to NVC

As opposed to the historical critical method of reading the Bible in which there is a consensus that may be reached by informed readers,³¹⁰ reader response literary criticism affords us the approach in which “the reader’s final focus is... upon the text in the contemporary context of reading.”³¹¹ Therefore, the reader’s values, attitude, and response come as the reader admittedly bring themselves to the text in interpretation.³¹² From a literary standpoint, the reader’s attempt to make sense of the pericope before them as a unit among the larger arc of the Bible.³¹³

As previously revealed through the theological foundations of the lived experience of NVC, a belief pervades through NVC and nonviolent theology that the world is working towards more peace.³¹⁴ Similarly, there is a progression of bad to good as “the thrust of the bible is in the direction of the comic”³¹⁵ as opposed to the tragic that goes from good to bad. Therefore, even as the NVC communicator reads a violent

³¹⁰ Edgar V. McKnight, “Reader-Response Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, ed. Stephen R. Haynes and Steven L. McKenzie (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 233.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 239.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 230.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 240.

³¹⁴ Refer to p. 74 of this thesis to see explanation of progressive peace.

³¹⁵ McKnight, “Reader-Response Criticism,” 239.

pericope, it is read through a lived experience that calls the whole person to a mindset and method of growth toward greater compassion as the world has seen through the revelation of Jesus Christ and the guidance of the Spirit as nonviolent.³¹⁶

3.5 NVC as a Response to Violence

The goal of NVC is to make life wonderful for the NVC communicator and to the other through the desire for authentic connection as well as the awareness and implementation of how to communicate in a manner that allows compassion to flow freely between the NVC communicator and the other. As we begin to look at how the lived experience of NVC may be additive to what may be missing in biblical scholarship, we are invited to remember that the mindset of “creating connection between people is the most important thing”³¹⁷ in NVC. For us today as we approach these Scriptural texts that contain violence, we ask ourselves how we might have that intention of connection within us and with the other found in the text.

3.5a Naming the First Violence in the Bible

In his book *The Joy of Compassionate Connecting: The Way of Christ through Nonviolent Compassion*, Prieto expresses his thoughts on the Christian lived experience of NVC, admitting his “spiritual but not religious”³¹⁸ intention of living authentically and wholly in the integration of the teachings of Jesus with NVC. For Prieto, NVC has allowed him to see the world in a manner that contributes to the way the Bible can be interpreted. In this regard, it is befitting that he arrives at a conclusion that offers an

³¹⁶ Refer to p. 44 of this thesis to see explanation of how practice is essential to mastering NVC.

³¹⁷ Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 161.

³¹⁸ Prieto, *The Joy of Compassionate Connecting*, 673-897.

alternative to the Schwartz's previous conclusion of violence being first found in the story of Cain and Abel.

Referring to the pericope at the beginning of the third chapter of Genesis, Prieto opines that the communication between the serpent, Eve, and Adam around the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil embodies the first violent acts that reveal violent mindsets. In analyzing the speech, Prieto notes how God told Eve and Adam they would die by eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. However, the serpent tells humankind's first couple something much different: they would know the difference between good and evil, being like God. Prieto writes, "Ever since then we have lived under the illusion that we have the power to judge and evaluate others... Adam and Eve [morally] judged themselves... lost their connection with God."³¹⁹ Prieto interprets that this couple's hiding from God comes from their closure to vulnerability and from their own hearts, themselves, and God. In other words, there is alienation of life. As their offspring, we continue to perpetuate this disconnectedness and life-alienation, and we manifest it in the ways we judge others as "sinners" and therefore deserving of violence.³²⁰

As our remedy, Jesus comes to show the way back to life, free of judgment and helping us reconnect to our own selves, each other, and God.³²¹ Prieto demonstrates how NVC is this way.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 687.

³²⁰ Ibid., 921.

³²¹ Ibid., 783.

In a creative manner, Prieto crafts an alternate reality to retell the narrative between Eve and Adam in which the two use NVC – a dialogical process that leads them to avoid the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, retreat to another part of the garden to enjoy nature’s beauty, and resolve to later speak with God about their confusion.³²² This choice of how to communicate demonstrates how we elect to choose life daily. In a way, Prieto is inviting his readers to read against the violence that the Bible offers by choosing to create a counternarrative of seeing observations, feelings, needs, and requests. In a similar manner, we will be choosing to focus on the mindset and method of NVC to read the text, specifically with the story of Cain and Abel.

3.5b Applying NVC to the Story of Cain and Abel

For ease, we have the story of Cain and Abel here:

Abel became a herder of flocks, and Cain a tiller of the ground.

In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the ground, while Abel, for his part, brought the fatty portion of the firstlings of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So, Cain was very angry and dejected.

Then the Lord said to Cain: Why are you angry? Why are you dejected? If you act rightly, you will be accepted; but if not, sin lies in wait at the door: its urge is for you, yet you can rule over it.

Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out in the field.” When they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord asked Cain, Where is your brother Abel? He answered, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” God then said: What have you done? Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground! Now you are banned from the ground that opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. If you till the ground, it shall no longer give you its produce. You shall become a constant wanderer on the earth. Cain said to the Lord: “My punishment is too great to bear. Look, you have now banished me from the ground. I must avoid you and be a constant wanderer on the earth. Anyone may kill me at sight.” Not so! the Lord said to

³²² Ibid., 603-660.

him. If anyone kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged seven times. So, the Lord put a mark on Cain, so that no one would kill him at sight. Cain then left the Lord's presence and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.³²³

When reviewing the pericope, we reflect on the ways in which the other is found in these characters of Abel, Cain, and the Lord. As we do so, it is important to pay attention to these others and ask what may be alive in them as well as in us – to be attentive to feelings, needs, and requests. As we had learned from Rosenberg in the first chapter of this thesis, we look for how compassion flows freely or is blocked by the criteria of life-serving or life-alienating communication respectively.

3.5b.1 Life-Alienating Communication throughout the Story of Cain and Abel

Throughout this pericope, we may be able identify life-alienating communication in those statements that impede the flow of compassion from one to the other. First, there is the question of whether the Lord's looking on with favor denotes a type of approval, possibly placing on Cain and Abel moral judgments. More specifically, to receive the Lord's favor may mean that Abel is morally good versus the lack of the Lord's favor may mean that Cain is morally bad or evil. In the case of the two siblings, one wonders if the Lord's lack of favor predicts or reveals the Lord's judgment on Cain's moral character, found further in the judging of his killing Abel.

Second, in terms of communication that blocks the flow of compassion, the difference in the way the Lord looks on one with favor or not sets up the potential for a comparison.

³²³ Genesis 4:1-16.

Third, these questions and scenarios that the Lord places upon Cain may come off as demands, as the Lord comes from a position of power. In the previous chapter of Genesis, the Lord has just displayed the Lord's power by making the birthing process painful for humankind,³²⁴ cursing the ground,³²⁵ making work laborious,³²⁶ and banishing Adam and Eve from the garden with the tree of life.³²⁷ Therefore, these "if" clauses may come be interpreted as demands for Cain.

Despite this pericope's revelation of the first three types of statements that impede compassionate communication, no obvious language reveals the fifth type – denial of responsibility. However, a glimpse of it manifests when Cain dismisses his role as his brother's keeper. With people who have routinely operated out a sense of obligation for other's people's feelings, Rosenberg states that they may undergo a growing freedom and undergo an "obnoxious stage," where they exercise their liberty in speech that sounds off-putting.³²⁸ Though Cain does not use NVC, his response of, "I don't know [of Abel's whereabouts]. Am I my brother's keeper?"³²⁹ may reveal his growing freedom from the desire to gain the Lord's favor or approval.

Lastly, in terms of assessing people as deserving reward versus punishment, the Lord chastises Cain as being morally bad. Instead of looking at Cain's needs, the Lord

³²⁴ Genesis 3:16.

³²⁵ Genesis 3:17.

³²⁶ Genesis 3:19.

³²⁷ Genesis 3:23-24.

³²⁸ Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 58.

³²⁹ Genesis 4:9.

punishes Cain by preventing the ground from further producing for him. The Lord also banishes Cain to wander without a home. Even in his response to Cain's plea to preserve his life, the Lord seeks judgment upon Cain's potential murderers and further punishment by threatening to exact vengeance on them sevenfold. In this regard, Rosenberg would contradict LaCocque's opinion of the mark of Cain as protective. Rosenberg would view this force used by the Lord as punitive, as punitive force tends to focus on the consequences rather than the needs.³³⁰ Rosenberg states there is a philosophical and political reason as there exists a dynamic in the culture that allows for a class of people to teach another class by moral condemnation and punishment.³³¹ On the other hand, if the Lord would have used protective force such as sending Cain with a protective shield, then we might see more readily the value of physical nurturance.

3.5b.2 The Process of Giving Life-Serving Communication and Receiving Empathetically

At this point, we transition from identifying life-alienating communication to giving life-serving communication and receiving empathetically in the story of Cain and Abel. We go through the method of NVC in identifying (1) observations, (2) feelings, (3) needs, and (4) requests found in the three characters of Cain, Abel, and the Lord.

3.5b.2a Observation versus Evaluation in the Story of Cain and Abel

First, we distinguish observations from evaluations found in the story of Cain and Abel. Observations may include the following: (1) the brothers' occupations as Abel

³³⁰ Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 188.

³³¹ See first chapter of thesis for a previous explanation.

herds flocks and Cain tills the ground, (2) the contents of the offerings as Cain and Abel bring the fruit of the ground and the fatty portions of the firstlings of flock respectively, (3) the act of Cain killing Abel, (4) the words that (J) uses to express the communication between Cain and the Lord, and (5) (J)'s words in the articulation of Cain's feelings (e.g., anger). For the latter two observations, we realize that (J) may be writing out of a specific theology and that these words are used as such.³³² Therefore, these words may not be truly of Cain and the Lord, but we are assuming that the words of the text to be so for our analysis of its communication. As for the evaluations, their presence may be in (1) the theme of favor as the Lord looks on Abel with such but not on Cain and (2) Cain feeling "dejected."

More specifically, when looking at the evaluations, it can help lead us to inquire about what Cain may be interpreting, as in the case of what it means for the Lord to look on with favor or not. Since the Lord adopts certain anthropomorphic characteristics as the Lord speaks in questions and ends sentences with exclamation points, there could be a wondering if either Cain or Abel observe actions about God from which they come to evaluate, diagnose, and make judgments. For example, possibly God has a furrowed eyebrow turned towards Cain that Cain interprets as not looking on him with favor; given his reported silence, Cain does not reflect to God what he is observing and feeling. Interestingly, LaCocque uses a psychological approach to arrive at an independent from but similar conclusion. LaCocque writes, "The text tells only that Cain's countenance fell, hence indicating that the pessimistic conclusion came from Cain's interpretation of

³³² Please refer to p. 48 of thesis to read how Scripture is itself a written theological reflection.

the events. Cain is the one who transforms the brotherly communion into an antagonistic competition.”³³³

Furthermore, with the verb “deject” meaning to make depressed, the use of its past participle form “dejected” to describe Cain may attribute cause to the other. In this case, it might be reasonable to conclude that Cain blames the Lord or Abel for his feelings. At the same time, it is not unreasonable to see how Cain could blame himself or his parents for the condition in which he is in, especially if he regrets his decisions to pursue the life of a tiller (i.e., the need of autonomy) or for even his life’s existence (i.e., the need of physical nurturance).

3.5b.2b Feelings and Met/Unmet Needs

Admittedly as we begin to ascertain feelings and needs in the characters of Cain, the Lord, and Abel, one limitation in an NVC reading of Scripture is the inability to ask for confirmation and clarification of the other’s feelings, needs, and requests. Despite this limitation, the NVC communicator practices at becoming quite adept in and open to ways to hypothesize the characters’ feelings and needs, which are universal among humankind. Not being limited to the scope of Scripture in their practice of NVC, they possess a multitude of interactions that provides valuable data in which they have that confirmation and clarification of the feelings and needs in the other.

3.5b.2b.1 Feelings and Met/Unmet Needs in Cain

Cain’s feelings of anger are articulated by the writer, but they do not reveal outright what needs go unmet in Cain. Furthermore, in words of Rosenberg, Cain’s act of

³³³ LaCocque, *Onslaught Against Innocence*, 109.

violence is a “tragic expression of an unmet need,”³³⁴ and, though the victim is Abel, it is unknown if the anger is a feeling in which he, the Lord, Cain himself, all the above, or neither are the stimuli. For example, it could be that Cain’s desire is to harm God, by means of killing Abel.³³⁵ The NVC communicator then guesses the unmet need for Cain’s anger; the needs include (1) autonomy – perhaps he is upset at not having the choice to this path of a tiller, (2) celebration – he might have hoped to commemorate together with his brother in their both receiving favor but the Lord does not express it in a way that Cain recognizes, (3) integrity – as Cain would have wanted the Lord to approve of them equally in seeing their unique giftedness, (4) interdependence – as he would have desired support and reassurance from the Lord, (5) play – maybe Cain does not resonate with the Lord’s sense of humor as perhaps the Lord is playing a surprise, (6) spiritual communion – as Cain might have desired togetherness with God and Abel and not to be singled out, and (7) physical nurturance – Cain may have hoped for some of the offerings of Abel in exchange, but it does not happen.

In the exploration of Cain’s needs, it may be helpful for us to pause and see how the Lord could have responded to Cain with compassionate compassion when asking about Abel’s whereabouts. Cain claims ignorance even though he ought to be able to locate Abel, as Cain has recently killed Abel in the field. At that point, the reader might conclude that Cain is a liar, a judgment from which Rosenberg would caution. As a father to three children, Rosenberg witnesses this type of behavior. When his younger

³³⁴ Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*, 132.

³³⁵ LaCocque, *Onslaught Against Innocence*, 143. LaCocque proposes this idea.

son takes a fifty-cent piece from his sister's room, Rosenberg asks his son if he has taken the coin without asking.³³⁶ When his son denies doing so, Rosenberg is left with four options: (1) blame his son by calling him a liar, (2) blame himself by thinking that, if he would have had more respect, his son would have told him the truth, (3) sense his own feelings and needs, and/or (4) sense his son's feelings and needs. The first two choices lay down moral judgments, leading towards a direction in which likely compassion would not flow and none of their needs would get met. More assuredly, the two parties would increase in defensiveness and aggression. Blaming others also likely results in self-fulfilling prophecies; when people tell the truth and are punished for it, then they doubt whether telling the truth would meet their needs (e.g., security).³³⁷ However, with the sensing of feelings and needs in oneself and the other, the NVC communicator is more likely to arrive at a place where everyone's needs are met. As Rosenberg chooses to deal with his son with empathy, he correctly guesses his son's fear and his son's need for security as to protect himself from punishment. As Cain denies knowing where his brother is, the NVC communicator is invited to see how the Lord could have empathized as Rosenberg has done with his son. As an example of an unmet need, we can extrapolate the fear experienced by Rosenberg's son unto Cain's own feelings. On the other hand, for the sake of demonstrating a met need, we may say that perhaps Cain felt joy in this expression as to fulfill his need for autonomy. Interestingly, the Lord does not take the path of empathy but instead punishes Cain when hearing Abel's cry.

³³⁶ Ibid., 147.

³³⁷ Ibid., 148.

We can continue empathizing with Cain as he receives the news of his punishment. Cain may be feeling overwhelmed, as he states being cut off from the Lord is too much to bear. Cain also fears the threat of other people, as his needs may originate in physical nurturance (i.e., protection from life-threatening forms of life) and interdependence (e.g., community) as to not receive the Lord's protection and communion.

3.5b.2b.2 Feelings as Met/Unmet Needs in the Lord

Next, it may help us to ask whether the phrase "looking on with favor" or not respectively corresponds with met versus unmet needs in the Lord. As such, we can explore the various categories of needs regarding the character of the Lord: (1) autonomy – the Lord perhaps feels hopeful in continuing to work with humankind, especially with at least Abel, (2) celebration – the Lord may delight in the type of gift that Abel has brought but not with Cain's offering, (3) integrity – along the lines of creativity, the Lord might feel a sense of joy as he continues in his act of creation with the being of Abel but not with Cain, (4) interdependence – out of the Lord's desire to enrich life, the Lord feels content at the herd that he has been able to create of which Abel makes use of to the Lord's satisfaction but not so with Cain, (5) play – the Lord may have had fun seeing Abel create and work with the herd but does not experience the same with seeing Cain with the ground, (6) spiritual communion – the Lord feels content with the inspiration fulfilled with Abel giving the fatty portions of his firstlings while Cain gives whatever he has, and (7) physical nurturance – perhaps the Lord feels relief as he wants more rest after the creation of the universe and punishing Eve and Adam that he appreciates Abel's cooking so that the Lord does not need to do so. Again, this guessing done on the part of

the NVC communicator requires an exploration of the other, to see what the other may be observing that leads to the feelings. This ability to confirm with the other is not possible in an NVC reading of Scripture.

Nonetheless, the benefit for us as NVC communicators in the exploration of these feelings and needs of the other is the self-identification of similar feelings and needs, which leads to a unity with the other; in this case, it is the Lord. As the Lord comes from a position of power, it is important to see how NVC is a spirituality that seeks reconciliation with everyone – the poor and the powerless, the rich and the powerful. Moreover, it is the recognition that Cain and Abel are not the cause of the looking upon with favor or not, but it is something that is deep within the Lord. From that realization, compassion flows from the NVC communicator to the Lord, and the realization that the actions or characteristics of Cain and Abel are only stimuli but not causes to how the Lord looks on with favor or not. In NVC, we would resist any effort to label Cain and Abel as evil and good respectively. Rather, the NVC communicator sees the tragic expressions of unmet needs of the Lord.

3.5b.2b.3 Feelings and Met/Unmet Needs in Abel

The Lord says that Abel's voice cries out, but we wonder from out of what needs Abel's cries come. Again, in the framing of the seven categories of universal needs and possible resultant feelings, it may have been: (1) autonomy – perhaps Abel is upset at no longer being able to continue to choose and plan to fulfill his dreams, (2) celebration – he might be consoled in mourning the loss of his life out of a desire to celebrate it, (3) integrity – perhaps he feels confused sees himself as not being valued for his self-worth by Cain's killing him, (4) interdependence – as Abel feels downhearted as he would have

desired that trust from Cain as the older brother leading Abel to the field, (5) play – as he is disgusted at no longer having the capacity to laugh in this life, (6) spiritual communion – perhaps Abel feels brokenhearted as he might have hoped for harmony, peace, and order in which all of them might have been together, and (7) physical nurturance – as he feels pain from suffering from the death given at the hands of his brother in being desirous of that protection.

3.5b.2c Requests

If any of these feelings and needs could have been explicitly expressed by any of the characters, compassion could have flowed between and among all of them. Similarly, if there could have been some sort of request of one party to another, it could have led to a place where peace and reconciliation could have occurred at the end of this story. Instead of requests, there are demands as the powerful Lord bans Cain from reaping fruitfulness from the land and forces him to be a constant roamer, though Cain ends up settling in the land of Nod. Cain's settlement despite the Lord's command to wander may well prove Rosenberg's point that "we can never make people do anything."³³⁸ There is no reconciliation as Cain does not express regret for the murder of Abel nor does he mention Abel to the Lord. Instead, Cain is sent off away from the Lord.

Just like these characters' lack requests, Christians do so today. Prieto notes that Christians may not articulate fully their feelings, needs, and their requests to God, reasoning that "Your father knows what you need before you ask."³³⁹ Prieto argues that

³³⁸ Ibid., 22.

³³⁹ Matthew 6:8.

the Christian can gain clarity in the articulation of their requests and witness the ways in which joy and freedom materialize in the giving, receiving, and fulfilling of requests, in themselves and in others.³⁴⁰ Even more so, in the company of a community of believers, the Christian can hear how the Spirit speaks through the other in how the prayer is reflected³⁴¹ in times of mourning, celebration, and connection.³⁴² The whole community can unearth such treasure when they seek for everyone's needs to be met.

3.6 Conclusion

In this third chapter, we present how four different Biblical scholars propose a response to the violence contained in the story of Cain and Abel. We then demonstrate the use of NVC to compassionately connect with the characters of Cain, Abel, and the Lord. In that regard, we strive to hear observations, feelings, needs, and requests among the tragic expression of unmet needs, recognize within us and these characters a shared humanity. Therefore, there is no judgment upon the Lord or Cain in their violent communication but understanding from the level of the heart – something that may add to the field of Biblical scholarship.

³⁴⁰ Prieto, *The Joy of Compassionate Connecting*, 2213.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2220.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 2224.

Conclusion

An Admission of Self-Implication

About six years ago, I discover NVC and apply it increasingly over the years, allowing me to be a better listener as a friend and spiritual companion. As I begin to formulate this proposal that would eventually become this thesis, I originally ponder how NVC could contribute to the realm of spiritual direction. In doing that initial research, I reach out to the only known spiritual director to have authored articles about her directing experience with NVC. When I speak with her, she explains how she had lived out NVC more recently that she no longer does spiritual direction as she had been previously trained. Her accompaniment of folks shifts from spiritual direction to using NVC to hear their observations, feelings, needs, and requests. Moreover, her lived experience of NVC does not isolate itself to only spiritual direction but seems to play out in almost all her interactions with people.

When I return to the proverbial drawing board and dialogue with mentors, they believe that NVC embodies a Christian lived experience and encourage me to research NVC and its theological foundations. In lieu of completing a thesis only for the sake of meeting a deadline, I realize my own need for authenticity: to do a work on the spirituality of NVC while being open to how it could do its work on me. I arrive at this conclusion even before reading Schneider's words that are worth repeating here, "Spirituality, like some other fields like psychology and art, is self-implicating. As the student deepens his or her investigation of the spiritual life, she or he is bound to

experience the influence of what is being studied on his or her personal spiritual life. In other words, genuine understanding is transformative.”³⁴³

Writing the third chapter, I transition from the use of the third person to more of the first-person perspective. I outrightly admit my self-implication as I live out the Christian experience of NVC. As if following her permission, I find refreshing Schneiders’ challenge to modernism’s hope for objectivity, writing, “All inquiry is self-implicating and all knowledge is personal to some degree. The only truly critical approach to the knowing process is self-knowledge and honesty about our social location and presuppositions, and methodological control of their effects.”³⁴⁴

Avoiding Self-Implication’s Pitfalls

Admitting my self-implication, I am also aware of its pitfalls, as Schneider comments, “... as we are aware, self-implication can lead to methodological narcissism. Personal anecdotes, no matter how numerous, interesting, or supportive of one’s prejudices, do not constitute evidence.” Therefore, it has been important to this thesis to outline a comprehensive review of NVC, include Prieto’s text to highlight the *Christian* lived experience, analyze the work of Hunsinger and Latini while interfacing it with multiple other theologians to support NVC, and to demonstrate NVC’s construction to the field of Biblical scholarship.

³⁴³ Ibid., 56.

³⁴⁴ Schneiders, “The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline,” 20.

Proposing a Further Look into Biblical Scholarship

As has been throughout this thesis, there has been reference to the NVC communicator and the other. Though we had focused on the characters of the Bible in the third chapter, it may be equally important to identify who else might be “the other.” To help us in this task, we might again find insight from Schneiders.

In her work *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, Schneiders offers a framework to help identify “the other.” She invites her audience to view a scriptural pericope from three world views: (1) of the text, (2) behind the text, and (3) before the text. Though her focus is on the Christian Scriptures, there is much to be learned that applies to the whole Bible as Schneider delves into many facets of learning who is involved. First, in the world of the text are the characters of *God* and *man*, to whom we have already applied NVC. Specifically appropriate to the story of Cain and Abel, some interpreters may even include nature as a character such as the garden and the ground. Secondly, *God* - with whom the *writer* is in relationship, the *community* out of which the writer comes, and the *original audience* for whom the writer has in mind exists in the world behind the text. Though we recognize this world, it falls out of our applied purview in this thesis. Thirdly, in the world before the text, the NVC communicator is present alongside other readers and interpreters, which includes our fellow Biblical critics of Schwartz, LaCocque, Junior, and Seibert. What might it look like to read their work through the lens of NVC? It might valuable insight to explain to the various voices (i.e., many strategies to achieve the seven categories of needs) found in Biblical scholarship that Schwartz knows too well, as she writes:

To know anything at all about the Bible is to know that it is heterogeneous and that, in the history of biblical exegesis, the same text has been understood to

convey widely divergent meanings, used to justify widely divergent theologies and policies, and used to justify oppression of peoples and liberation of peoples, often the same peoples, usually the same verse.³⁴⁵

NVC's Growing Construction

To save souls, to listen, to be more empathetic, to leave others in consolation, to work towards the common good, to answer the call to be a minister of reconciliation... a call from Christ, passed through St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits, to us today. Of all the options out there, how might we choose to proceed?

The impact of NVC has been growing as it has gone globally in the minutiae of different spheres of life. Research now supports NVC's outreach, with recent studies showing its effectiveness in increasing compassion in populations of parolees³⁴⁶ and medical students.³⁴⁷ As the former relates to the people being ministered to and the latter as a similar helping profession, Christian ministers may benefit from some sort of exposure to the spirituality of NVC to be of benefit to the other. As we have demonstrated NVC's construction to address violence in the Bible through compassionate connection with its characters, religious sister and theologian Mary Lilian Akhere Ehidiamhen has recently written on how NVC could be constructive as an effective

³⁴⁵ Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain*, 17.

³⁴⁶ Elizabeth Marlow, Nyamathi Adeline, William T. Grajeda, Newt Bailey, Amanda Weber, and Jerry Younger, "Nonviolent Communication Training and Empathy in Male Parolee" in *Journal of Correctional Health Care* 18, no. 1 (2012): 8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078345811420979>.

³⁴⁷ Justinem Epinat-Duclos, Alexandre Foncelle, François Quesque, Eric Chabanat, Alexandre Duguet, Jean-Baptiste Van der Henst, and Yves Rossetti, "Does Nonviolent Communication Education Improve Empathy in French Medical Students?" in *International Journal of Medical Education* 12 (2021): 205. <https://doi.org/10.5116/ijme.615e.c507>.

synodal method to resolve conflict in the Roman Catholic Church around issues such as gender justice and reproductive rights.³⁴⁸

The Christian lived experience of St. Ignatius' of Loyola continues to manifest an attitude of peace and reconciliation. Recently confirmed by decrees the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in 2016³⁴⁹ and further by the 2019 Universal Apostolic Preferences,³⁵⁰ this mission is for all people of good will who desire justice in the world. The spirituality of NVC just be the way to construct such a mission.

³⁴⁸ Mary Lilian Akhere Ehidiemhen, "A Synodal Alternative for Ecclesial Conflict: Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication," *Journal of Moral Theology* 11, no. 2 (2022): pp. 45-64, <https://doi.org/10.55476/001c.37341>.

³⁴⁹ "Documents of General Congregation 36 of the Society of Jesus," Documents of General Congregation 36 of the Society of Jesus, accessed April 25, 2023, https://jesuits.eu/images/docs/GC_36_Documents.pdf.

³⁵⁰ "Universal Apostolic Preferences: Introduction," The Society of Jesus, accessed April 25, 2023, <https://www.jesuits.global/uap/introduction/>.

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