

**The Exclusion Principle as a Black Curtain:  
An Inquiry from Theological Anthropology**

Mitsuru Fujimoto

Translated by Cynthia Dufty

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SUMMARY

Fundamentalism is by no means just a current social problem arising in a particular religious group. Rather it is something we humans share in common arising from identity formation and the problem of exclusion. By looking theologically at the common human tendency to exclude that exists as the black curtain (i.e. hidden puppeteer, a force controlling from the shadows) behind fundamentalism we can think more generally about the fundamentalism that is near to us personally.

INTRODUCTION

The term, “fundamentalism”, which is being heard so frequently recently, originally was used for an early twentieth century theological movement that arose in reaction to Christian liberal theology and took a stand for the inerrancy of the Bible and orthodox teaching. However in the last several decades, this term has not been limited to Christians but has been adopted as a label for various movements in today’s society with a certain characteristic tendency. Not only has the phenomenon of fundamentalism been seen within Protestantism and Islam, it also can be seen within Catholicism, Judaism, in the Asian world, among environmentalists and in the natural sciences.<sup>1</sup>

To summarize this trend simply, it is the tendency of various religious or ethnic groups or ideologies that are overwhelmed by insolvable problems and are unable to find persuasive answers as they encounter an uncertain world to try to return to original, traditional, orderly and unwavering principles.

When encountering a complex and uncertain, pluralistic and individualized world, a group with a strong consciousness of its identity may attempt to revive a value system or tradition that existed in the past. When this occurs, not only does this give rise to conflict between conservatism and reform within the same group, it is also undeniable that this way of seeking group identity, because it is a fundamentalism that prioritizes basic principles thought to be applicable to every situation, results in an intense exclusivism that opposes other value systems, ways of thinking and practices. The social threat posed by movements during the last several decades that oppose the modern era and show an extreme rejection of social currents is surely due to this sort of fundamentalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Werner Huth, *Flucht in die Gewissheit: Fundamentalismus und Moderne* (Claudius-Verlag: 1995) 37. Published in Japanese as: 原理主義--確かさへの逃避 translated by 志村恵 (新教出版社, 2002).

Before this word “fundamentalism” became such a hot topic throughout the world, we can recall that “nationalism” had become a problem. [Some examples are] the internal strife in Bosnia representing problems of Eastern Europe, tribal conflicts seen in Asia such as in Indonesia or in Myanmar, the Middle East conflicts, and civil wars in Africa such as in Somalia, Congo, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda. Although they live in the same region and are part of the same country, members of different ethnic groups repeatedly come into conflict. When cultures, religions or languages are different, and differences between ethnic groups are not tolerated, the magma of enmity, bearing a long history of conflicts, erupts in every area of the world. Ethnic conflict is surely not the result of the collapse of the Cold War order because, when we look at world history, we have to say that confrontation between ethnic groups is ubiquitous.<sup>2</sup>

This article will analyze theologically the exclusive mentality that lurks in the shadows behind the fundamentalism, which is not limited to a certain religion, and the ubiquitous ethnocentrism, which are spreading around the world like a wild fire. Neither fundamentalism nor ethnocentrism is merely a problem of present society arising in certain religious groups; rather they both spring from the common human problems of self-identity and exclusivism.

Zygmunt Bauman, an expert on Western Post-Modernism who has taught at Warsaw University and Leeds University, says the following. “Modernity is prominent for the tendency to shift moral responsibilities away from the moral self either toward socially constructed and managed supra-individual agencies, or through floating responsibility inside a bureaucratic ‘rule of nobody.’”<sup>3</sup> If we take up this problem from a Christian point of view, we all the more must examine each individual and moreover must look at what is in the human heart. In response to the fundamentalists of Palestine 2,000 years ago, the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus said it is not some kind of food that defiles a person but it is what is in the human heart and is expressed outwardly that defiles that person. Just as food or systems are not the problem, this article will argue that it is not doctrines or emphases but what is in the human heart that is the root of the problem

Also, as the target of this kind of investigation, we have to apply these things to ourselves. Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, shows discernment in saying that the reason the religious people of that time opposed Jesus and finally had him crucified was not because they were evil people but because they were “the good and just.” These who bore their own sense of being “good and just” were actually prisoners of their own good consciences and so they had to condemn as evil Jesus who rejected their notions of good. Those who were confident of their own righteousness crucified Jesus, who presented an

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 5.

<sup>3</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 99.

alternative righteousness, to support their own consciences.<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche also said “the harm the good do is the most harmful harm.”<sup>5</sup> I want to proceed while keeping in mind this unseen pitfall that threatens when religious people fall into fundamentalism

While taking into consideration these things, the purpose of this article then is to not look at “fundamentalism” as the doctrinal emphasis of a special group but to look theologically at our common human tendency of exclusion, which is the real controlling power behind fundamentalism and to help us think more generally and also more personally about fundamentalism.

## I. THE PRINCIPLE OF EXCLUSION

### I.A. Establishment of Identity

Cornelius Plantinga, a theologian of the Reformed Church in America, in looking at God’s works of creation recorded in Genesis 1, has found a very interesting pattern of “separating” and “binding together”. Everything in the cosmos is without shape when, out of this formless void, God begins to make the world by separating. That is, through separating light and darkness, day and night, water and land, he does his creative work. But also at the same time God binds things together. That is, he binds humans to the rest of creation as its caretakers, and through breathing into humans the “breath of life” he binds them to himself.<sup>6</sup>

At the time of creation, out of a formless void and from a world of chaos through creative separation, God brought forth a variety of entities. This is not only a matter of separating; also through being bound together with things that are different, these entities have their own existence established. In other words, whatever exists individually in this world, through being differentiated from other things, and also at the same time through being bound with other things, is created as an individual having its own distinctiveness. What is brought forth in this way, separated from the other and becoming an individual with their own distinctiveness, is a human being with an individual personality. To exist as a person with an individual identity, it is necessary that that person is clearly differentiated from other people (as well as things in their environment), but that is not enough; they also must exist in relationship with others. What this means is in order to establish individuality, a person must go through a process of excluding some relationships, and being

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<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Translated by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 262ff.

<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is*, Translated by R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1979) 100.

<sup>6</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, *Breviary of Sin: Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 29. Plantinga is currently the president of Calvin Theological Seminary.

distinguished from some things while at the same time accepting some relationships and becoming bound to some things.<sup>7</sup>

### I.B. The Principle of Exclusion

When humans committed sin, it is not the case that the created world returned to the previous formless condition. Rather, through committing sin, the process of establishing distinctiveness through “separating and binding together” became extremely distorted. In this way, the exclusion principle was born. Humans, through two methods come to exclude the other. First, distorting “separating,” we declare our sovereign independence, making ourselves central. With ourselves the center of everything, it’s as if the world revolves around us as the center and we thrust away the other. At the same time, distorting the “binding together” with the other, we take the other into ourselves, making them subordinate. Originally we were meant to live in reciprocal relationship with others but people have come to feel satisfaction in making the other dependent and putting them under their own rule.

For humans who have sinned and are separated from God, “separation” has come to mean not being distinct from others but denying others and binding together has come to mean not relating with the other but dominating the other. Let’s think about the mechanism of this formation of individual distinctiveness in a little more detail.

## II. THE MECHANISM OF EXCLUSION.<sup>8</sup>

### II.A. From Individual Distinctiveness to Exclusion

The German theologian Pannenberg writes that it is in the process of establishing our identity as humans that the seed of sin is sown. As we construct ourselves, our instinctive will to be ourselves is in itself something healthy, but when the seed of sin is sown in the midst of this, we face the tendency for the self to “become the infinite basis and reference point for all objects, thus usurping the place of God.”<sup>9</sup> In these circumstances,

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<sup>7</sup> For references on how self-identity is defined through relation with the other, see first of all, late 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach’s work, *The Essence of Christianity*, then Jewish philosopher Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* and French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas’ *Totality and Infinity*. These works are taken into consideration in analysis of the problem in the theological world as well and have been translated into Japanese. For a more accessible analysis see, Ian A. McFarland, *Difference and Identity: A Theological Anthropology* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) 57-98.

<sup>9</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. By G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) II, 260ff.

humans, in order to assert their selves, establish boundaries, judge the whole of reality from the point of view of the self, and try to use “everything” as a means of asserting the self.<sup>10</sup>

As far as the mechanism by which individual distinctiveness moves to the exclusion principle, the above applies also to social systems. When we try to construct a social group with individual distinctiveness, we inevitably try to distinguish ourselves from the other. Thinking about social groups, for example, if members wear the same uniform, sing the same song, have the same badge attached, and live according to the same rules, values and principles, then it can be said that to the extent these things are unique and thoroughly implemented, the group’s unity is solid. Through doing this, in order for group consciousness to be born, it is necessary to be able to distinguish insiders and outsiders. Because of this, sooner or later antagonism or enmity towards the other develops.

To put it simply, this is a “We” versus “They” picture. Once, Jesus’ disciples, seeing a man who was driving out evil spirits through the name of Jesus but was not “one of us”, rebuked him and told him to stop (Mark 9:38). In this story we can see that they had a strong distinctive “in-group” sense and that this had already moved to a condition of self-righteousness.

It is not a difficult thing for group consciousness and distinctiveness to become exclusiveness. It is a matter of building a wall between self and others, maintaining your boundaries and making yourself master of those boundaries. The world of the other is viewed from within one’s own demarcated world. You can only look at the other’s world from your own point of view and according to your own demarcated value system, sitting in judgment of the whole outside world. Even if a clash doesn’t break out with the other’s boundaries, just through stubbornly holding to one’s own boundaries, a situation of exclusion has already arisen. Because your own boundaries are important, towards the other, especially the other who exists far away and towards the rest of the world, you can’t help but having unconcern. However, on the other hand, if the other begins to invade our boundaries, all at once we become aggressive. This is the exclusion principle.<sup>11</sup>

## II.B. Exclusion as Seen in Cain

Regarding this mechanism of exclusion, there is something we can learn from the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4. Cain and Abel are born of the same parents; eventually Cain becomes a tiller of the soil, and Abel a keeper of the sheep. When both bring a sacrifice, God accepts the sacrifice of Abel, who brought the best part of the best animals (firstlings) but he did not look on the sacrifice of Cain. Because his sacrifice is refused,

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<sup>10</sup> Pannenberg, *Theological Anthropology*, trans. By J. O’Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985) 85.

<sup>11</sup> In Volf’s work in note 8, exclusion is analyzed as attitude towards the other that can be expressed in practices of assimilation, domination, abandonment or indifference. Op.cit. 72-78.

Cain's pride is wounded; he feels humiliated and begins to nurture a fierce jealousy and anger towards Abel. Instead of looking up to God, his face falls. Shutting his ears to God's advice, refusing to change himself, he attacks and kills his brother Abel.

Cain, who couldn't change God's decision and moreover refused to change himself, committed the ultimate act of exclusion of erasing Abel's existence. The essence of his exclusionary act was an egotism of not recognizing his own sin, but obstinately shutting himself up in his own righteousness, losing his way and, at last erasing the other to establish himself. Even when God asked Cain, "Where is your brother?" he said, "I am not my brother's keeper," severing any relationship with the other. God gave him the sentence that he would become "a fugitive wandering about the earth" but for Cain who had cut his relationship to his surroundings, this was already his way of living. An egotistic way of living is to be detached from the world around one and to close one's ears to one's environment. An example of people who prioritize themselves were those who traveling to Jericho, even though they saw an injured man lying in the road, disliking involvement with the other, passed by on the side of the road. Another are those who have a weak and dying person like Lazarus in front of their own house, but banish any thought of them to a corner of their mind to the point where their existence is completely forgotten. This too again is one form of the exclusion principle. At the root of a lack of concern for others is a human egotism that monopolizes one's world with concern for oneself and will not make any place for others.

The spirit of exclusion is the string puller behind "fundamentalism". For example although "principles" are correct, suddenly without notice, if attention is not paid to the exclusivism lurking behind them, an exclusivistic fundamentalism comes about. This danger is similar to the fact that while we affirm that the Law is "holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12), when sin enters the situation, legalism can overcome us. If we don't pay attention to the exclusivism that creeps in behind a principle, when staking a claim on a certain truth (one piece of the whole truth), we persistently build up our own world and then don't allow other truths entry into that world. Therefore the fundamentalist evades the complexity of reality and lives according to one brand of fundamentalism. Not admitting his own sin, he hides his face from a realistic identification and frantically clings to his own fundamental truth. Not admitting that other truths exist in this world, we lose our way. Whether we shut ourselves up in our own castle, or we aggressively try to bring other truths into submission, whichever path we choose, we are stuck with a "We versus Them" type oppositional configuration in a world of exile described in the Bible as "East of Eden."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Old Testament scholar Westman, argues that just as all human beings are Adam and Eve, proposing that each human being is Cain and Abel explains the universality of this story for humanity.

### III. THE CHRISTIAN AND THE EXCLUSION PRINCIPLE

#### III.A. The Depth of Human Sin

Saying, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18), God puts Adam into relationship with Eve. Doing this, in the fellowship of the man Adam with his other called Eve, the establishment of individual distinctiveness took place in the way previously discussed. However, when Adam committed sin, a fissure enters into his fellowship with the other and further, he tries to shift the responsibility for his own sin to his wife Eve. One generation later, Cain rejects Abel (murdering him); later larger scale atrocities seem to follow (Genesis 4:23-24).

For we who are born burdened with this kind of sin, when we receive the salvation of Christ, we are given grace to take a new look at our self-distinctiveness in a healthy way and restore relationships with others. However I want to point out three root problems that can stand in the way of this. We always need to keep in mind that, even though we are Christians, these things still take us captive and become snares for our feet

The first is that we have a tendency to avoid encountering the other. Humans are those who while knowing that God has unmistakably revealed himself through the heavens, dare to substitute idols for God’s glory (Romans 1:18-23). Not only do we close our ears to God’s voice, we make our own gods and want to worship them. There is the self-righteous tendency that when we enter into boundaries that are convenient for us we don’t go out from them and rather than interacting with others, we try to pull them into our system and suppress their truth, trying to force them to accept our personal truth. This is the characteristic mentality of so-called cult groups.

Secondly, as we can see with legalism, there is a tendency when we try to be righteous to rely on the letter of truths, principles, or traditions, etc. This is even truer in a time like the present when values are in flux and we feel drawn to rely on basic principles that make good and evil clear. Rather than living according to the Holy Spirit and the persons who are our brothers and sisters we come to think that “serving the letter” (II Corinthians 3:6) leads to a purer faith.

Thirdly, we lack the power to grasp reality in a complex way. We sacrifice love to support righteousness or sacrifice truth to support love. We have a tendency to jump to conclusions. Also, we focus our passion in a biased way on one problem or principle to the extent that we lose track of other problems and come to be controlled by one principle. Among “environmental fundamentalists” there are some who are ridiculed for concentrating all of their energy into saving the lives of animals but showing no concern for protecting the lives of humans. This criticism does not apply only to them but is a tendency we all have as human beings.

### III.B. Ourselves as Christians

Since up to now we have been looking at the negative side of our distorted identity formation, finally I want to look at a few positive factors in appropriate identify formation as Christians.

First of all, the Lord of the church's boundaries is Christ. Naturally the church has boundaries relative to this world. The individual Christian and the church have to avoid losing their own distinctiveness and being absorbed by the world. If that happens not only can we not preserve our own salvation, but also we cannot give ourselves to the world as "the salt of the earth" or the "light of the world." However, the Lord of those boundaries is Christ, not us.

If we neglect the effort of looking at the world from God's perspective rather than our own, we become caught up in a tendency towards "in-group consciousness, and being a group with such a strong distinctiveness that we become exclusive." Then we become controlled by the exclusive belief that our point of view and set of values are normative and orthodox and that other points of view and set of values are abnormal and heretical. However if the Christian and church live according to the faith that "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20), then as far as our self identity, it is no longer a distorted selfish, self-righteous exclusive thing within ourselves but it becomes something facing outward and open, with space to accept others as we pour out our self in love for others and become bound to a Christ-like distinctiveness.

Secondly, like Abraham, we can separate from our human identity based on the community and family where we were born and become one of those called out by God to be one part of the body of Christ, receiving our citizenship in heaven, becoming children and heirs of God and given a new identify. For we who have clothed ourselves with Christ, we have a new identity: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). It is not that racial or sexual differences have disappeared but that no longer do these become the basis for rejecting others.

We who are clothed with Christ do not brandish about our identity as children of God, dominating others, but are made one with the mind of Christ who took the form of a servant (Philippians 2:6-7). While clearly being conscious of our own freedom and identity, for the sake of the Gospel we do not begrudge the "way of becoming the servant of all people." Then when we give to others and serve others, through others we encounter Christ and we can also serve Christ (Matthew 25:31-46). If we continue to drive away others and remain closed up inside of our own truth, we can neither encounter Christ nor become Christ-like persons.

As far as our new identity as children of God, through being conformed to Christ we are formed on the inside. That is, it is natural that to the extent that we are not open to others like Christ, to the extent that we don't take a self-sacrificial attitude towards others, in the same way the Holy One accepted us sinners, we become far from the appearance of Christians. When the fundamentalist becomes exclusive and the one who believes the

gospel becomes self-righteous, it is doubtful whether the world can recognize us as Christians.

## SUMMARY

As I said in the beginning, self-identity is formed through the process of distinguishing and binding with the other. We can see this again in the Lord Jesus. Jesus always distinguished himself from the religious group within Judaism. But this wasn't only in reference to the group that had enmity towards him; Jesus also contrasted himself with John the Baptist (Matthew 3:11), Abraham (Matthew 8:58), Moses (John 1:17) and also with his relatives (Mark 3:21). On the other hand, Jesus connected himself to sinners (Matthew 9:13), children (Matthew 19:14) and then "the weakest of these" (Matthew 25:31-46). There is always a necessity for the Christian and then the church to try to look back to see from what we have distinguished ourselves, to what we have positively connected ourselves and to what are we opposed. The reason for this is that this is how the church's identity is formed (48).

Surely we, going beyond each church and denomination's identity, and seeking fellowship as the Japan Evangelical Association, having a shared understanding of the faith and mission of evangelism as the evangelical movement in Japan have been trying to share in one common new identity. So within this new, larger identity we can verify our own commonality, so to speak "churchness". That is, while preserving each church or denomination's distinctives, within the larger Christian fellowship we ought to be able to ask each other if our distinctives are becoming self-righteousness or if our own distinctiveness is appropriately inheriting the nature of the "universal church." Also taking an external perspective, as an evangelical association positioned within a larger church, we ought to ask ourselves if we have fallen into exclusivism, or, in maintaining our own distinctives, are we judging others?

Because of our truth and principles, if we are "withholding our affections within ourselves" (II Corinthians 6:12), we should hear the call, "open wide your hearts" (v. 13). If, out of a self-righteous group consciousness, we reject one another, we need to hear the words, "Whoever is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:40) and "If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he" (II Corinthians 10:7), and should be taught to "extend the right hand of fellowship" (Galatians 2:9). Then in every age the church must pray, "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else" (1 Thessalonians 3:12).