

The Other and others as heart of the church

A theological study on inclusivity, exemplified by the policy of the Church of South India



As a requirement of the three-year master program in theology at the Protestant Theological University
Amsterdam, this masterthesis is offered to:

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Date: January, 6, 2020

Words: 25.063

“As the lamp is lit, let us pray that the flame of God’s loving presence may spring up in our hearts and transform us by the knowledge of his glory”.

Opening prayer in the liturgy of the Church of South India

The painting on the front of this masterthesis, is an oil canvas made in 2004 by Jyoti Sahi, an Indian Catholic artist from Bangalore. The title of the canvas is: “Jesus, offering the light”.¹

¹ <http://jyotiartashram.blogspot.com/2007/10/jesus-light-of-world.html>, accessed September 16th 2019.

Summary

This study discusses the theological meaning of inclusivity, specifically focused on how inclusivity influences the life of people in Christian congregations and the church as an organization, community and place of worship. Sexual minorities are taken in this study as a *pars pro toto* to make a clear illustration of how a lack of inclusivity problematizes the life of people in congregations in different aspects. This study is done in an international context, due to the fact that fieldwork has been done in India, with a focus on the policy regarding inclusivity of the Church of South India.

The research question in this study is *“What role does inclusivity play in congregations and how is this experienced by sexual minorities”*. This question is answered by the use of a literature review, the creation of a conceptual framework, fieldwork in the form of interviews and contextual exploration, an analysis of the boundaries of (congregational) inclusivity by contrasting the literature review and the findings of the fieldwork and lastly a theological elaboration on how inclusivity affects three central sides of the church. The conclusion in this study is that inclusivity serves both a theological and sociological role that influences the church deeply. To promote an inclusive environment within congregations, practical and theoretical solutions are needed, in the form of concrete measures within the hierarchy and life of the congregation, but also a spiritual change in the congregants on how they interact with others, as well as further research in the fields of systematic and practical theology, to further understand inclusivity theologically.

Keywords: Christian, church, congregation, congregational studies, ecclesiology, exclusive, exclusivity, hierarchy, inclusive, inclusivity, India, practical, sexual minorities, systematic, theology.

Statements

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Acknowledgements

It is difficult to know where to start my acknowledgements after a study that took me to the other side of the world, doing research on a topic that is so close to my own identity, experiences and dreams. It is something that I will always remember as an unexpected blessing. I hope that this study can be of help to those interested in this complex and sensitive subject. A subject that in my opinion is (at) the theological core of the church, affecting the lives of all people involved.

I would like to start my acknowledgments by thanking my two supervisors dr. Rein Brouwer and prof. dr. Heleen Zorgdrager. Both of them have been very helpful during the entire process of my research not only by giving feedback on my written drafts and sharing their advice throughout the whole process, but also on the fact that they wholeheartedly supported my journey to the other side of the world.

I would also like to thank my partner Jesse Bassant for the many times he supported me when inspiration and zest for work in the process of writing this study was hard to find. I am especially grateful for the fact that he travelled almost 8000 kilometers from the Netherlands to India to join me in my adventure and that he was available for long distance emotional support during my whole stay in Mumbai and Chennai. This is equally true for my two dear friends Pieter van der Woude and Joël Vlasblom, both supported me in many ways, including reviewing my writings from time to time (and both of Whom I made jealous by being the first of us three who went to India).

I am also grateful for several people in India that helped me with my research and who welcomed and accompanied me during my stay there, especially those who made time for me to interview them and who helped me to made this study possible. I specifically want to mention the names here of fr. Thomas Ninan for providing me with relevant contacts to start my research, Rōmal Lāisram who took me with him to experience Chennai, Ramki from Orinam for inviting me to several activities and Jessica Richards who shared a ton of information about the Church of South India with me. I want to thank you for the warm contact I had with you all and for your involvement in my study.

I would also like to thank the following organizations for supporting me financially, for without it, this study could not have been done: Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, Stichting De Honderd Gulden Reis, Ridderlijke Duitse Orde Balijs van Utrecht, Stichting Zonneweelde, Studiefonds van de Confessionele Vereniging.

I also would like to thank God, to whom I pray, that I will be and remain of help to my fellow brothers and sisters, both in Your church and in the world. That Your love, may break all chains and liberate all who are hurt.

I wish everyone a pleasant reading of my study.

Stijn Jephtha van der Woude

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Chapter 1: Introduction

§1.1. Reason for investigation

A few years before I started my study in theology at the University of Utrecht, I came across a Bible passage that struck me and which I always will remember. It can be found in 1 Timothy 1:5 and reads as follows *“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith”*.

For me it has always been a perfect description of our task as Christians. Preach and practice love, with a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. Especially given the fact that humans can differ enormously and conflicts can arise quickly. Although we are the body of Christ, the awareness that we are interdependent and are in desperate need of an inclusive, inviting and welcoming church, sometimes seems far away. It sometimes is even dismissed as *“an uncritical importation of the human rights agenda into the church”*, according to Giles Goddard, with critics who *“sought to reduce its significance by identifying inclusion with a liberal, secular agenda without scriptural foundation, going on to say that it is neither biblical nor justified by the tradition of the church”*.²

There are many people and groups in the church who are pushed to the periphery of the church or are subject of a discussion in the church. Although we are used to repeat that there is no perfect Christian and that God loves all humans, the heterosexual man and women with children often are an unspoken standard. People who are poor, single, gay, bisexual, lesbian, transgender, handicapped, or in any other way differ from an unspoken standard, are often a minority in communities and treated as such. Although they are not always rejected as part of the community, they are often seen or treated as different. Positive treatment occurs, such as placing a ramp for people who are forced to use a wheelchair, or installing an audio induction loop for people who have difficulties with hearing the service, but it can also be negative in the case of sexual minorities who are rejected to partake in communion, or who are denied a blessing over their wedding. Especially sexual minorities are often the subject of intense and long discussions in church. Their inclusion differs from church to church and from denomination to denomination. Some denominations such as the Metropolitan Community Church are famous for their focus on sexual minorities,³ others such as the Roman Catholic Church, are known for their conservative view on sexual minorities.

²Goddard, G. (2008). *Space for grace – Creating inclusive churches*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, p.7.

³ The website of the church states: “Founded in 1968, Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) has been at the vanguard of civil and human rights movements by addressing issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, economics, climate change, aging, and global human rights. MCC was the first to perform same-gender

As a homosexual man who is in a relationship with another man, the discussion about inclusivity in the church is a personal one, relating to my own experiences.⁴ In the whole duration of my study the relationship between sexuality and the church has been a subject that drives and inspires me. Questions as “*how can we speak about the love of Christ if we reject our own brothers and sisters*” and “*why do we frown upon the people whom Jesus focused on*”, drove me to keep looking and studying these topics. When one of my supervisors mentioned that through the network of the World Council of Churches she knew a priest working for inclusivity programs in the National Council of Churches in India, who told her that any student of hers was welcome to explore the field in the Indian context with him, I did not hesitate one moment. Full of curiosity I travelled to Mumbai and Chennai to learn about the Indian church. Although the LGBTQI-community is certainly an important group of people in the light of congregational inclusivity, several other groups of people could also benefit from a more inclusive church, so the targeted people who are related to this theme are more diverse than sexual minorities. This masterthesis is the result of research in an international context, on a problem that concerns the worldwide church. I hope that it will be of interest for anyone who is interested in this field of theological research and that it can be of use for any church that is struggling with the question on how to grow into an inclusive, diverse and welcoming community of sincere believers.

§1.2. Research question

The research question in this masterthesis will be: “*What role does inclusivity play in congregations and how is this experienced by sexual minorities*”? This question will be answered and exemplified by a focus on the policy of the Church of South India,⁵ when it comes to inclusivity towards sexual minorities and to a lesser extend towards other targeted people such as women and Dalits.^{6,7} As mentioned before, LGBTQI-persons are one group of people who are closely linked to this theme, but certainly not the only group who is influenced by (a lack of) inclusivity. Because my personal interest and expertise however is with the LGBTQI-community, this community is taken as a *pars pro toto* in this study for minorities in general.

marriages and has been on the forefront of the struggle towards marriage equality in the USA and other countries worldwide”, see <https://www.mcccchurch.org/>, accessed August 7, 2019.

⁴ This has mostly to do with my sexuality, not in the case of my gender, because I identify as cisgender (identifying with the biological sex I am born with, in contrast to transgender, someone who does not identify with the biological sex he or she is born with).

⁵ In chapter four more background information will be given about the history and identity of this Indian church.

⁶ In chapter four it will become clear that these groups of people are the main groups who are dealing with discrimination in Indian churches, hence there is a special focus on these groups in this study.

⁷ Dalits are the people in India who do not belong to the caste system, the traditional hierarchy in India. They are not placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, but rather outside of it.

§1.3. Scope of the research

This study can be summarized as an attempt to explore the field of inclusivity and theology, with a special focus on the practical possibilities, challenges and consequences it has for Christian communities and churches. Although there exists literature and research that is dedicated to this subject,⁸ the scope of this study is mainly limited to contemporary known problems and tension, as a prime example the exclusion of LGBTQI-persons.⁹ Therefore the study on inclusivity in this masterthesis is more focused on sexual minorities in churches, but one of the goals of this study is also to try to broaden inclusivity towards different people or groups in churches, something that is at the same time the weakness of the already existing literature. This can be illustrated in the difference between the questions “*how do we include more people*” and “*how do we include people who are outside the social standard norms*”. Most of the literature in this study has to do with the second question. Sexual minorities are, in this study, taken as an example because they are people who generally stand out in a more or less uniform group of people, but of course they can be seen as a symbol for other minorities as well. Both aspects will have a place in this study, so to broaden the contribution to the contemporary academic vision on inclusivity.

The fieldwork that that has been done for this masterthesis can be seen as an example of the object of research, but on a meta-level, is also illustrative of several other examples, likewise the discrimination of sexual minorities has certain relationships and similarities with other phenomena of discrimination. Although the term will not be discussed further due to the scope of this study, we could speak of a form of *intersectionality* here,¹⁰ for example because of a patriarchal system.¹¹

However, the number of interviews as well as the persons involved in the focus group is limited in quantity. Because the study is done in an international and interdenominational context only, there is a limited amount of focus for challenges and problems that arise or are linked to only that specific context.

⁸ This literature consists for a large part of feminist theology and queer theology, such as Russel, L. (1993). *Church in the round: feminist interpretation of the church*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, or Tonstad, L.M. (2018). *Queer theology beyond apologetics*, Eugene/Oregon: Cascade Books. However, literature that explicitly deals with inclusivity without a specific ‘targeted audience’, is still scarce.

⁹ For recent works on the tension between churches and homosexuality in the Indian context, see Ninan, T., & Gaikwad, R. (2017). *A theological reader on human sexuality and gender diversities: envision inclusivity*, Delhi: ISPCK.; Zachariah, G., & Rajkumar, V. (2015). *Disruptive faith, inclusive communities: church and homophobia*, Delhi: ISPCM/CISRS.

¹⁰ Although the meaning of the notion differs and grows and the phenomenon it points to is broad, one could say that it has to do with the “multidimensionality of marginalized subjects’ lived experiences”, see Crenshaw, K. (1989). *Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Legal Forum, p.139.

¹¹ Patriarchy is a concept that is used often in queer and feminist theories/theologies. Roughly it can be defined as the social system that enforces, upholds and favors the rule of (heterosexual) men over other humans. Giddens, A., & Griffiths, S. (2006). *Sociology*, 5th ed., Cambridge: Polity, pp.473–474.

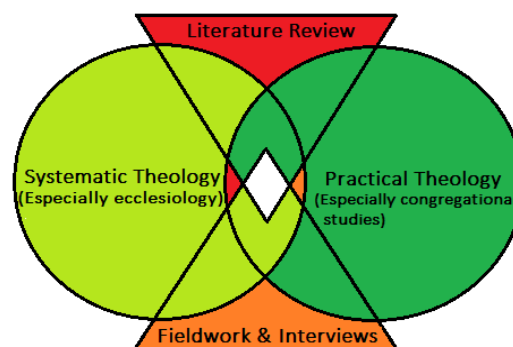
More accurate and context sensitive conclusions are of course possible with more research and can also show the subtleties and nuances that are influencing that specific context.

§1.4. Social, ecclesial and academic relevance

The relevance of a theological and academic analysis of inclusivity can hardly be denied. If there is one discussion in the contemporary world church that drives a wedge between believers,¹² it certainly is the discussion about the LGBTQI-community and to what extent they are part of the church, what role they (can) play and how their sexuality is related to scriptures and tradition.¹³ Even more important, their position in the church addresses a broader, complex question that is at the core of our Christian duty: how do we interact with and include people who are outside of the social norm and what does God say about it? Moreover, in many countries, the relationship between the church or religion and a large part of the secular society is often tense, because of conflicting values or different visions on religious freedom. This masterthesis therefore tries to shed a light on this complex and sensitive issue, by analyzing the notion of inclusivity theologically and by describing the difficulties and challenges that exist and arise in practical reality. This study also attempts to contribute to the academic field, by analyzing and using a concept that, as the literature review in chapter two will show, is not yet present in mainstream (theological) literature.

§1.5. Structure of the research

This masterthesis starts with a review in chapter two of relevant literature surrounding theology and inclusivity. Special attention will be paid to the position of ecclesiology and congregational studies. Chapter three will discuss the methodology that is used, including the fieldwork and interviews that have been done for this study. Chapter four will discuss the theological content of the notion of inclusivity from chapter two, by comparing it to the findings of the fieldwork and interviews in chapter three. In this chapter a focus is placed on the boundaries of inclusivity, both theoretically, theologically and practical. In chapter five an



¹² For some examples from large churches or congregations across the world, see for an American example <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/26/us/united-methodists-vote.html>; an European example <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47302817>; an African example <https://www.christianpost.com/news/south-african-court-rules-dutch-reformed-church-gay-marriage-ban-unconstitutional.html>; an Asian example <https://thegroundtruthproject.org/south-koreas-conservative-christians-odds-growing-lgbt-movement/> and an Australian example <https://theconversation.com/after-a-long-struggle-the-uniting-church-becomes-the-first-to-offer-same-sex-marriage-102842>, accessed July 8, 2019.

¹³ For an example of how Indian churches deal with these tensions, see <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/01/17/indian-churches-call-for-the-decriminalisation-of-homosexuality/>, accessed July 8, 2019.

overview will be presented of the practical consequences of a lack of inclusivity in churches. The focus of chapter five however is not to give a practical guide of rules and tips about implementing or promoting inclusivity, but is focused more on presenting how a lack of inclusivity influences the church as an organization, community and place of worship. Summarized the content and focus of this study can be illustrated as following in the model on the right.

Chapter 2: Conceptual framework and literature review

§2.1. Introduction

This study is based on various fields within practical theology with some extensions to systematic theology. Because of the methodological decisions in this study, in particular because of the interviews that were conducted, the study has a more qualitative than quantitative character and resembles most closely the field of practical theology. Within the field of practical theology this study makes use of a few sub-categories, such as congregational studies, social policy and emancipatory theories and methods such as the queer theology and feminist theology. These last two however give this study also a systematic theological focus, because they investigate the underlying theology that shapes the practices and interactions between people in congregations. Therefore one could argue that systematic theology also plays a part in this study in the form of ecclesiology.

In this study all fields are bound together by the notion of inclusivity, which plays a central role in this thesis. The various theological fields highlight the importance of inclusivity for the church in different ways and show that it not only has branches in practical theology, but that it extends to various theological trunks. For example inclusivity as a practical theological notion focuses on the way congregations and people in them interact with people of various social and financial backgrounds, while inclusivity as a systematic theological notion, shows that the underlying theology is of great influence on the norms that congregations have and (what in fact) people in those congregations practice and preach.

In this first chapter we explore the theological meaning of inclusivity by means of a literature review. This review will however not give a refined definition of what inclusivity means in a theological context, but rather introduces the reader to the field of theology and inclusivity. One of the goals of this study is namely to further enhance our understanding of inclusivity as a theological concept, because the existing literature surrounding inclusivity touches the subject through other fields of research, rather than analyzing it in depth. This can sound counter-intuitive, working with a concept that is not yet fully defined, but because the concept touches various contexts, theological fields and situation, the meaning of the concept is broad and therefore difficult to define. We will however start with a working definition which, as the study progresses, will become clearer and more refined. The goal of this study is especially

focused on the understanding of inclusivity in the context of congregations. For a working definition I define (congregational) inclusivity, in the form of a *stipulative definition*,¹⁴ to be:

“a social environment existing in a congregational context, which gives all people belonging to that congregation, the same ecclesial rights and practical chances, to – if they desire so out of their own initiative – be actively involved in formal and informal activities of that congregation; and to be connected to both the social and liturgical life of the community belonging to that congregation”.

I define congregation here as group of Christians who come together as a community, often in the context of a church, that is: a single, independent church, although it can be part of a larger denomination that is higher in ecclesiastical hierarchy. When I use the word church, I am therefore referring to, in the first place, a local church. In the second place as the institutionalized form of a sum of certain denominational Christians, or as all Christians in the form of the body of Christ. In this study I will make this distinction clear in the context of which I use the word. Although this can be considered a broad definition, as a working definition this will suffice for now, because by bringing this notion in contact with different contexts and academic fields, the meaning of inclusivity within the context of congregations will become clearer.

The results of this literature review will serve as a framework upon which the analysis of inclusivity as a theological notion will be build further. That is also the reason why the term *conceptual framework* is chosen in this study over *theoretical framework*, because this chapter will not result in theory which will be used to interpret empirical data. This also makes the relationship clear between the conceptual framework and the methodology. More will be explained about the methodology in the next chapter, but for now it suffices to conclude that the conceptual framework will give guidance to the interviews and the kind of questions that will be asked and moreover, the conceptual framework will present us with the *status questionis* in the theological debate surrounding inclusivity.

§2.2. What and to Whom: Theology and inclusivity

If we want to say something about theology and inclusivity, there are two questions that immediately appear: what is inclusive theology and to whom does theology (and therefore we as Christians) need to be inclusive? There are different ways to answer these questions. Steven Shakespeare and Hugh Rayment-Pickard claim for example that inclusiveness in theology, can be an attitude. An inclusive theologian, they claim:

¹⁴ “A declaration of a meaning that is intended to be attached by the speaker to a word, expression, or symbol and that usually does not already have an established use in the sense intended”, see <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stipulative%20definition>, accessed August 8, 2019.

*“is open to the full resources of human culture and not merely the teachings and narratives of his or her own religion. The ideal that theological truth is confined to the Church is doctrinally absurd, because it limits the freedom of God to reveal truth in other ways. Rather than lock herself in a Christian citadel, the inclusive theologian breathes the fresh air of a cosmos full of opportunities for theological encounter. Moreover, the inclusive theologian is open to the theological possibilities of human culture and history. Creation is not static, after all, but unfolds in and across time”.*¹⁵

Inclusive theology, likewise the inclusive theologian, is for Shakespeare and Rayment-Pickard therefore above all something creative, not afraid to look beyond (artificial) boundaries in church and theology, something that values the interaction between theology and the church with her people, the reciprocity between already existing theology, shaped by history and tradition and between honest believers who create new theological insights. For them God is not contained in church language, but open to reveal Himself in a great variety of ways, because just like in the stories we read in the Old and New Testament, God touches people in lives that are rich in experiences. For them the travels of the apostle Paul are an example of the fact that the Christian faith is always practiced in the lives of people that take risks, people that travel and break through the expected and ordinary patterns of life.¹⁶ One could therefore say that for theology to be inclusive in character, the inclusive theologian needs to be adventurous. If one dares to do inclusive theology, one can encounter a God that includes unexpected people in an unexpected way. Therefore inclusive theology, Shakespeare and Pickard claim, is not a theology with certain characteristics, but rather doing theology inclusively, just like *“the exploration of the inclusiveness of God happens as lived experience: the experience on the one hand of living in the radically inclusive created order; and the experience on the other of trying to live out the gospel values of inclusion”*.¹⁷ One could therefore conclude that Shakespeare’s and Rayment-Pickard’s use of inclusivity is moulded into their socio-theological interpretation of God and humans throughout the Bible and at the same time a normative view on how Christians in turn, in this time, should communicate with others. The answer to the second question, to whom we need to be inclusive, flows directly from the answer to the first question: if the dialogue between theology and humans and their specific culture is of the utmost importance, we cannot claim to reject certain people, because how would we know if they could enrich theology? The only way to know that is to be inclusive to every human being, whoever that might be, or as Stephan Hans quoting the famous theologian Thomas Merton says: *“our job is to love others without stopping to inquire whether or not they are worthy. That is not our business and, in fact, it is*

¹⁵ Shakespeare, S., & Rayment-Pickard, H. (2006). *The Inclusive God – Reclaiming Theology for an Inclusive Church*, Norwich: Canterbury Press, p.9.

¹⁶ Shakespeare, S., & Rayment-Pickard, H. (2006). *The Inclusive God*, p.10.

¹⁷ Shakespeare, S., & Rayment-Pickard, H. (2006). *The Inclusive God*, p.103.

nobody's business".¹⁸ In theory every human being can be of value to others and be an enrichment of theology, even the people we do not expect to. After all, when we read the New Testament, it often seems to be the people who are not part of the inner circle of the apostles, such as the desperate centurion or the leper, who are being used by Jesus as an example to teach the apostles. Of course there are challenges when it comes to this, certainly in communities where many different people are gathered.

It is to be predicted that most congregations consist of people from various backgrounds, apart from the fact that there will be some form of majority. For example, people can come from different financial backgrounds, a few will be richer than most people, some will have to rely on state benefits and others are simply depending on their salary to make ends meet financially. Probably there will be many people who are living in the same city as their congregation and a part of that group has always been living there. Some will be from a village or city near the congregations and some will come from a whole other part of the country or even from another country or continent. There will be people with different educational backgrounds, different sexualities, gender orientations and skin color. In many cases the demographic consistency of the congregation reflects that of the place where it is situated. Therefore, one could conclude that the diversity of the congregation automatically leads to a balanced focus on all these different kinds of people, because if they are a community shouldn't everyone be equal? Unfortunately, that is not the case in many congregations. Implicit or explicit preferences will always come to the surface. We will investigate this theme in chapter five, for example in the way the church service is celebrated, the church manages and invests its finances or whoever is holding a position in the church council. In most cases these things depend on the people who are responsible for them and the personal preferences and background of these people also play an important role. The problem in many of these cases is that the personal preferences of certain individuals or small groups in a congregation, will have tremendous effect on the congregation as a whole, but an underlying, often invisible problem is that people are not always aware of this. Inclusivity therefore will never appear in a congregation where it is not actively pursued and practiced. We will investigate this theme in chapter five, where the church as an organization will be discussed.

Literature surrounding theology and inclusivity is still not mainstream.¹⁹ Indirectly literature is available when one sees queer theology, feminist theology and liberation theology as inclusive theology, but I

¹⁸ Although the quote is frequently assigned to Thomas Merton, a primary source of this quote seems hard to find. The only online source seems to be present in Hans, S. (2005). *Catholic Voices in a World on Fire*, Morrisville: Lulu.com, p.180.

¹⁹ Inclusive as a term in theological literature is present, but in many cases does not touch the real and practical life of congregations. For such an example see Burrige, R.A. (2007). *Imitating Jesus: an inclusive approach to New Testament ethics*, Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans.

would argue that although these could be characterized as inclusive, they are rather a form of protest against exclusive environments, than always inherently inclusive for the church as a whole. Linn Marie Tonstad illustrates this tension in an article about the limits of inclusion in queer theology. According to her there are three elements that limit the extent to which queer theology is inclusive and promotes inclusion namely *“firstly by contrasting one’s own inclusiveness with the other exclusivism (particularly when such contrasts activate anti-Semitic tropes), secondly by ignoring the affective life of binaries and thirdly, by the presentist or legitimating recourse to origins”*.²⁰ In particular the first element is of importance in light of the discussion about inclusivity.

Often the goal of queer theology is to liberate the church from traditional patriarchal ideas and tendencies that tend to oppress certain groups of people.²¹ It has the reputation to be radical inclusive, often by portraying Jesus as a liberator who is strikingly disruptive in an exclusive world, that is suspicious of or aggressive to minorities or to those who live in the periphery of society. Which leads one to say that *“queer theology is therefore a way of doing theology that, in the words of the Magnificat, brings down the powerful and lifts up the lowly”*,²² and therefore it is deconstructive in nature. One could even say that queer theology itself has an urge to disrupt or mess with the status quo. This is for example visible in the used language, with Marcella Althaus-Reid’s book as a stunning example.²³ An often addressed theme in queer theology is the relationship between ‘the’ majority and ‘the’ minorities, however, as Tonstad mentions, if queer theology does not succeed in moving beyond the simple binary of a majority who oppresses and the minorities who is oppressed *“the inclusive queer-theological project dissolves too quickly into a claim for a transgressive and radical position that in fact merely repeats and remains within the terms it seeks to subvert, inverting rather than undoing them”*.²⁴

This is also my standpoint in the discussion around inclusivity: the problem of exclusion is not solved if the radical inclusion of the minorities means restricting the majority, or if the majority and minorities are simply placed together. If one group of people include another group of people, those who include will keep a higher place in the social hierarchy, while the group who is included is placed into a submissive role. It is important however that for example the LGBTQI-community and their experiences are recognized in the church, although inclusivity for the church does not only mean that minorities are included, moreover that an inclusive environment is created where every person is seen and can flourish. In creating such an environment it is important that there is a special focus for people who are

²⁰ Tonstad, L.M. (2015). The limits of inclusion: queer theology and its others, *Theology and Sexuality*, vol.21(1), p.2.

²¹ Cheng, P. (2011). *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, New York: Seabury Books, p.9.

²² Ibid.

²³ Althaus-Reid, M. (2000). *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*, London: Routledge.

²⁴ Tonstad, L.M. (2015). *The limits of inclusion*, pp.2-3.

in general disadvantaged by the majority, but rather than inverting the context, a realization of interconnectedness and equality is needed.

An example of literature in the light of this theme are the books created by the Inclusive Church.²⁵ The series contains six books that are designed for groups to gain a greater understanding of mental health, disability, gender, poverty, sexuality and ethnicity and to what extent an inclusive approach to these themes could benefit the church.

An example is the approach of Susannah Cornwall on inclusive sexuality. Cornwall states that *“for people of faith, sexuality also has a spiritual dimension as well as an emotional and physical one, but even so important, the relationship of these people also reaches out beyond couples as isolated units”*.²⁶ She argues that the stable relationships of individuals are important for the (social) well-being of a (religious) group, because individual problems can influence the stability of the group as a whole. She states that for example a divorce between two people can influence the broader social circle around the couple, because people feel the need to choose between one of the two partners. This phenomenon however can also be seen the other way around, she states, because a healthy relationship can also promote a broader flourishing of the participants. An inclusive approach on sexuality can therefore open people’s mind about problems that they in theory could face themselves, which causes them to learn from the people around them. Although Cornwall does not say so explicitly, in my opinion an inclusive sexuality where queer relationships are included, could prove to be beneficial for heterosexual couples in particular. Imagine for example that there is a heterosexual couple in church who are having problems with the division of roles in their relationship, an inclusive approach to sexuality and relationships could help them to learn from the relationship of a gay couple. This calls for a shift from a heteronormative standard, to a more general approach where not the gender or sexuality is taken as central, but rather certain qualities that are necessary for a good relationship.

An example of why specifically queer relationships can be helpful to heterosexual relationships is found in the field of family therapy, coming from Jaqueline Hudak and Shawn Giammattei. They claim that we should make family a verb, instead of a noun, because in that case *“more focus is placed on the performative aspects of ‘doing family’, such as responsibility, love and care and the discussion is broadened to non-traditional couples as well”*.²⁷ This would create an opportunity for churches to include sexual minorities, because the majority of churches does talk about how to uphold a relationship

²⁵ An educational charity consisting of different denominations who are encouraging churches to become more inclusive, see <https://www.inclusive-church.org/about-us> accessed June 4, 2019.

²⁶ Cornwall, S. (2014). *Sexuality: The Inclusive Church Resource*, Darton: Longman & Todd, pp.99-102.

²⁷ Hudak, J., & Giammattei, S. V. (2014). Doing Family: Decentering Heteronormativity in “Marriage” and “Family” Therapy, *Critical Topics in Family Therapy*, p.114.

and what family values are important, but focuses solely on heterosexual couples, while the values are the same for both sexual minorities and heterosexuals.

Another example from the Inclusive Church Resource is the inclusive approach on gender of Rosemary Lain-Priestley. She states that *"if we do theology from the point of view of a group which has historically been excluded, such as women who bring with them some profound experiences of exclusion, we will encounter pressure points and triggers that make us think again about our language and concept, and therefore our understanding of God"*.²⁸ In my opinion taking it one step further could be even more beneficial. If we ignore the traditional gender binary of man and woman and include different forms of gender (identification) such as transgenders, our theological understanding of gender could deepen even more. Many of us will agree with the fact that God is only portrayed masculine, for example when we pray the Lord's Prayer, but that God is not masculine itself. The fact that the last word in the previous sentence probably felt a little bit uncomfortable, proves that the need to gender confirm God, runs deep. Of course one could address God in a prayer with mother, but the same problem will remain.

In light of inclusivity and theology, an important difference also needs to be made between hospitality and inclusivity. The reason why this is such an important issue, is that a majority of churches will have a text on their website, or in one of their leaflets, which will say something like *"we are a diverse community who like to welcome everyone who wants to celebrate with us in our service"*. On its own there are few people who would protest against something like this, because many people would say that hospitality is indeed an important Christian value. There is however a hidden consequence by seeing and welcoming people as guests compared to including them, which I will illustrate. Feminist theologian Russel claims for example that in light of diversity in the church *"one possibility would be to speak of hospitality and diversity rather than unity and diversity. In this way we move away from chosenness as a basis for unity in Christ toward the metaphor of compassion and hospitality as a basis for unity"*,²⁹ in other words, the boundaries of whom to welcome are stretched out by moving away from an undue focus on being Christian as an decisive identity marker in itself, to *"a self-understanding of the church as one body, ... in terms of the purpose of that unity in mission"*.³⁰ In this way being Christian could be the reason for welcoming and including others instead of a pre-requisite to do so.

Although I agree with her that hospitality is an important element of a healthy and flourishing church, in a certain way hospitality is also a hollow form of inclusivity, because the person who is welcomed as

²⁸ Lain-Priestley, R., & Callaghan, B. (2015). *Gender: The Inclusive Church Resource*, Darton: Longmann & Todd, pp.108-109.

²⁹ Russel, L. (1993). *Church in the round*, p.173.

³⁰ Ibid.

a guest, is and in most cases will remain a guest. Hospitality as a characteristic in itself is not the problem, but problems arise when we speak about it in light of inclusivity and minorities. A simple example will illustrate this.

When we invite someone we know into our homes for dinner, we will not hesitate to remind people to make themselves at home. If however, people do something that was not expected for example place their feet on the table to make themselves comfortable, a tension arises between guest and host. Make yourself at home does not literally mean: do as you would do in your own home. It is a sign of hospitality, but certain rules and boundaries will remain for the guest. If we look at this in the context of a church a problem arises. Of course hospitality is of great importance to new people in a community, because people will never be fully included during their first visit. Inclusion will happen in a natural way to most people if they behave in a normal way and treat others with respect, but the Christian community has a distinctive feature: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"*.³¹ How could we welcome others whom we are one with in Christ Jesus? Of course we could welcome others, but the relationship between a guest and a host, is not present in a Christian community. All are one in Christ, so if people are not fully included, but only welcomed, accepted or tolerated for example because of the color of their skin, their caste or their sexuality, a tension arises. Are there certain requirements apart from baptism, to be one in Christ? Does one for example need to be heterosexual? Or are children a necessity? Or perhaps a certain amount of money? Or does one need to be from a certain caste? For true inclusion, hospitality, even radical hospitality, can only be the prelude to inclusion, but never the solution itself. Therefore it is essential that we keep examining the social distribution and power dynamics in our churches and Christian communities, because differences are often made by humans and not pre-given by God, or in the words of Letty Russel: *"... our theologies need to be subverted over and over, in order to prevent the contradictions between free gift from God and privilege of the elect from becoming an excuse for racism and exclusion"*.³²

So what is inclusive theology? We can conclude that an inclusive theologian at least has to have some form of curiosity. An attitude where one remains curious about what the other could contribute and who this is, because the other is often someone through which God speaks, there are numerous stories in the Bible that attest to this. The strangeness of the other should therefore not be a reason to keep us from exploring but rather a reason to do so, because some have entertained angels unaware.³³

³¹ Text from Galatians 3:28 in the English Standard Version from <https://www.esv.org/Galatians+3/>, accessed June 19, 2019.

³² Russel, L. (1993). *Church in the round*, pp.172-173.

³³ See Hebrews 13:1-2, consulted November 1 2019, <https://www.esv.org/Hebrews+13/>, referring towards the story of Abraham who unknowingly invited messengers of God.

Not only can everybody contribute to the church with his or her own unique personality and qualities, because God can speak to and through all of us, but also to listen to the other is therefore to open oneself up to the Other, to God.

In the field of academic research, inclusivity as a religious or congregational matter is still not mainstream and the number of studies on this topic is small. In queer theology and feminist theology the topic can be found, often with a strong striving for liberation, which unfortunately also creates certain puzzles that need to be solved. An important distinction has also been made between hospitality and inclusivity, which showed that for determining real inclusion the social context and position can be decisive. One can see also that multiple theological fields come together here. The question what the church is, how we want to organize the church as a community and how we perceive the church to be a reflection of what Jesus preached, is one that needs to be answered and recalibrated constantly, summarized in later words as "*ecclesia semper reformanda*".³⁴ The need to cleanse the church of social differences and injustice is the ultimate justification to keep reforming. The relationship between ecclesiology, theology and inclusivity will therefore be discussed in the next paragraph.

§2.3. Ecclesiology, Congregational Studies and Theology (of Inclusivity)

Before we investigate the relationship between ecclesiology, theology and inclusivity, let us first focus on the definition of ecclesiology, because the way we define ecclesiology and therefore look at the church, can be of great influence on how we see inclusivity and exclusivity. For example the image of the church as an organization evokes different thoughts than that of a group of people characterized by a more or less uniform belief system. The way we see the church and its people therefore can lead to different conclusions about inclusivity. The same is also true for the way we study the church. A study of the church from a sociological point of view will focus on different aspects than one from the perspective of theological research. An interdisciplinary approach could help to deepen our ecclesiological understanding of the church (and congregational inclusivity).

According to the Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology, ecclesiology can be defined as the discipline that is concerned with "*comparative, critical, and constructive reflection on the dominant paradigms of the identity of the church*",³⁵ but in a further, secondary and derivative sense, "*ecclesiology includes the comparative and critical study of the identities of the various particular churches, often called 'denomination'- how they see themselves and how other churches see them*".³⁶ In light of inclusivity in

³⁴ This version is in my opinion more suitable than the other version: *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*, because the need of constant reformation should be a need of the universal church, not just a reformed part of it.

³⁵ Avis, P. (2018). Introduction to ecclesiology, in Avis, P. (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology* (p.3), New York: Oxford University Press.

³⁶ Ibid.

the church the first definition is an important one, because it focuses on dominant paradigms and if inclusivity is to be promoted, it has to focus on the dominant patterns in churches and congregations that suppress inclusivity. Just as feminist theologians strive to show the relationship between patriarchy and the oppression of certain groups of people, the inclusive theologian needs to show the relationship between dominant patterns of exclusivism and the suppression of inclusivity. In that way the feminist theologians (and likewise the queer theologian) shares some characteristics with the inclusive theologian, because they strive for the completion of the same goal and in most cases, patriarchy is also the shared problem. Examples of dominant patterns of exclusivism are for example an unfair distribution of power in church councils because men are overrepresented, or a focus in the public debate on theologians who belong to a certain majority, such as a higher caste (in contrast to for example Dalit theology).

Although the first definition of ecclesiology is an important one, one could get the idea that ecclesiology is only about the church as a theological phenomenon, or as a body of religious ideas and thoughts. Of course this is an exaggeration, because if there is anything that constitutes the church, it is believers who are creating it. The identity of the church is not simply narrated by a voiceless tradition, but is animated by living believers who carry on the heritage of their predecessors, and whose own lives and actions are shaping their contemporary church and in turn the church of the future believers. Just like the identities of humans differ and change, so does the identity of the church. The fact that the identity of the church is something that is fluid, in the sense that each church and generation of believers identify as church in a different way by mirroring themselves to their predecessors and the first church(es), shows that there must be people who are shaping and influencing it, but who are they? In light of the remarks about dominant patterns, the most logical answer would be: the majority, or the people in power. However that may be true, I suggest we skip this descriptive task and move to a more normative question that is even more important, namely: who *should* influence the identity of the church? Who should have a casting vote about what happens in the church? We will come back to this in the last chapter of this study.

This brings us at the difference between systematic and practical ecclesiology, which in a sense, is comparable to the difference in focus and method between practical and systematic theology, but in this context, with ecclesiology as research topic. According to Harald Hegstad, if ecclesiology is more concerned about the visible church, rather with the invisible, it will influence the way we do ecclesiology. Firstly *“it will result in a lessening of the gap between a theological understanding of the church and other academic disciplines and secondly, which means that theology cannot simply see the church as a*

doctrinal topic".³⁷ Hegstad argues that if we want to define what ecclesiology is, the influence of humans and their experiences cannot be underestimated or denied. A practical ecclesiology acknowledges the importance of a 'living church' as the body of Christ, something that according to Hegstad "counterbalances the more institutional understanding of the church, that was dominant in many church traditions in the twentieth century".³⁸ However for a good understanding of how to promote congregational inclusivity, both of these aspect of the church are important. This will be discussed further in chapter five, where we will speak about the church as an organization and the church as a community.

In this light Russel mentions the interesting term *liberation ecclesiology*. According to her the phenomenon of Christ as identifying with the poor and oppressed is growing since Vatican II, likewise the focus on a self-understanding from underneath with the poor and despised. Russel makes the claim that although there are many forms of feminist theology "an ecclesiology that is shaped in the round and committed to the struggle to stand with those on in the margin, is both a feminist and a liberation theology at one and the same time".³⁹ Whether this focus is still present in the (Roman Catholic) church or if interest is rising again, for example because of the remarks from Pope Francis about moving to the peripheries,⁴⁰ is the question, but the topic is nevertheless of importance. The model that Russel mentions, that of a round table, is indeed an interesting one in the search for an ecclesiological model of justice and equality. The fact that a round table has no head where the most important person of a company can take a seat, seems to indicate that the people surrounding it are equals. However, there is a fundamental prerequisite to this equality, Russel claims, namely that "it is not the table itself that makes people equals, but that is rather a sign of the coming unity".⁴¹

In light of this study I would like to take a closer look at Russel's claim of the *coming unity*. This eschatological understanding of the round table points forward to a time when humans will be finally free and equals, but such a time is not yet realized. In light of Russel's own remark about *liberating ecclesiology*, the round table therefore seems to be a sign of a liberated and egalitarian church. I would agree with the attribution of sign to this table, but the important question here is, how does the round table in itself promote liberation and egalitarianism in a church? In my opinion the round table can be a way to reach this goal, but a round table without a head, does not in itself mean that the people sitting around it will not assign a person as head of the table. In a certain way Russel also claim this, by saying

³⁷ Hegstad, H. (2013). *The real church - An ecclesiology of the visible*, Church of Sweden Research Series vol.7, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, p.3.

³⁸ Hegstad, H. (2013). *The real church*, p.25.

³⁹ Russel, L. (1993). *Church in the round*, p.43.

⁴⁰ <https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2016/10/24/pope-francis-calls-on-jesuits-to-go-to-the-peripheries/> accessed July 9, 2019.

⁴¹ Russel, L. (1993). *Church in the round*, p.43.

that the table in itself does not make people equals. It is indeed not the table alone that makes people equals, but moreover people that make each other equals. If that has been done, the round table is more a proof of this equality than a necessity, although ecclesiological or congregational initiatives and structures that promote egalitarianism between people in churches, can help them to reach out to each other. If we would summarize this in other words, we could say that the round table is the way people organize a church, but that is precisely the core problem of this issue: many people cannot, or do not want to build and sit around these kinds of tables. A church with people who do not want, or cannot see each other as equals, can sit at a round table and still exclude each other. A church where the initiative to be equals is present but not supported, is not a place where people will be equals. Of course sitting at a round table makes it easier for people to look at each other, talk with each other and come closer to each other, which shows that the relationship between practical ecclesiology and systematic theology, is of the utmost importance for the promotion of inclusivity in the church, because both theological thinking and practical measures are needed. The fact that Russel sees a form of radical inclusivity in the Table is because it is a sign of the unity of God in the church that can be seen there, or in her own words *"we believe the church and not in the church because we believe that no matter what its present failing it is still a community of Christ that offers the possibility of new life and continuing nurture of the faith through the word and sacraments"*.⁴² We can conclude that the round table for Russel therefore is both a sign of the unity, as paradoxically also not a sign but a reality, because the church does not only represent unity, it *is* unity in itself, even if parts of the body do not act as such.

The relationship between theology, ecclesiology and practices is close and they will and ought to influence each other. Clare Watkins and several colleagues claim in their study on ecclesiology for example that *"if we want to develop an authentic ecclesiology, we have to recognize practices as themselves to be bearers of theology"*,⁴³ because *"the things Christians do together to express their faith, are examples of faith seeking understanding and to listen to these practices is to listen to works of theology"*.^{44,45} It is even necessary in my opinion to do so, after all how can we learn about pain in Gods world, if we do not listen to the cries of others? In light of this claim it is worth mentioning how congregational studies is related to ecclesiology and theology.

⁴² Russel, L. (1993). *Church in the round*, p.44.

⁴³ Watkins, C. (2012). Practical ecclesiology: what counts as theology in studying the church?, in Ward, P. (Ed.). *Perspectives on ecclesiology and ethnography*, Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, p.169.

⁴⁴ Watkins, C. (2012). Practical ecclesiology: what counts as theology in studying the church, p.170.

⁴⁵ An interesting parallel can be found in congregational studies, where Haight and Nieman claim that *"the study of congregations should focus on practices"*, in Haight, R.S.J., & Nieman, J. (2009). On the dynamic relation between ecclesiology and congregational studies, *Theological Studies*, vol.70, p.592.

Roger Haight and James Nieman state that “*congregational studies ultimately specifies the object studied by ecclesiology*”.⁴⁶ Where ecclesiology studies the nature of the church (how broad that may be), one could say that congregational studies focusses on the individual congregation, but there is a close interaction between the two. Where ecclesiology as a form of normative theology explains the nature and norms of the church, “*congregational studies thus serves as a kind of reality principle for formal ecclesiology, a test for whether the theological claims are credible*”.⁴⁷ One could say that the congregation is therefore a kind of *theological litmus test*.

Rein Brouwer focuses in his definition also towards a theological understanding of the individual congregation, defining congregational studies as “... *a practical theological discipline, with its focus on the discernment of the praxis of God in the local faith community*”.⁴⁸ Of course it is possible that individual congregations are the object of research from a more sociological perspective, for example in ethnography, which causes Haight and Nieman to admit that “*congregational studies is an umbrella term, so that what more-or-less coheres as the field references by that term cannot be considered just one thing*”.⁴⁹ From a theological perspective however, the influence and role of God in both the church and the individual congregation, can of course not be neglected.

In light of inclusivity in the church, I would argue that the voices of those who are oppressed in the church, for example sexual minorities, women and Dalits, are especially important to listen to, because they are even more so than Christians in general people who *yearn for liberation*. This results in a theological paradox, because in a community that has an inherent eschatological longing for the return of their Savior, there are people who long and pray for the liberation from the yoke that their own community places on them. In a certain way it is even a double paradox, for if we would follow John 15:19,⁵⁰ one could argue that Christians are inherently queer,⁵¹ but queer Christians are queerer. Minorities and others who are discriminated, serve as the canary in the coalmine: if they cannot seem to live in the church, the congregational atmosphere is toxic.

⁴⁶ Haight, R.S.J., & Nieman, J. (2009). On the dynamic relation between ecclesiology and congregational studies, p.583.

⁴⁷ Haight, R.S.J., & Nieman, J. (2009). On the dynamic relation between ecclesiology and congregational studies, p.587.

⁴⁸ Brouwer, R. (2005). De praxis van God in the plaatselijke geloofsgemeenschap. Theologie in congregational studies, *Praktische Theologie*, vol.32(3), p.485.

⁴⁹ Haight, R.S.J., & Nieman, J. (2009). On the dynamic relation between ecclesiology and congregational studies, p.590.

⁵⁰ “*If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world. But I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*” in the translation of the English Standard Version from <https://www.esv.org/John+15/>, accessed June 26, 2019.

⁵¹ In the sense of ‘strange’ or ‘peculiar’.

Listening to the voices and theology of queer Christians is essential for understanding inclusive ecclesiology, because in them the boundaries of the majority become visible. The focus on the oppressed in society and in the Christian community is certainly not a new invention, we could even call it an important element of Christian theology, strongly substantiated by a large number of Bible passages, where Jesus Christ subverts the expected societal hierarchy.⁵² To listen to those who are oppressed, even more so to those who are oppressed by their own people, should therefore be nothing more than the core business of every Christian.

For an inclusive church and inclusive ecclesiology, both practical and systematic ecclesiology are necessary, something that is comparable with the term *concrete ecclesiology*, where the empirical church is the main object for theological reflection.⁵³ Both are necessary because sometimes rules and traditions are out of touch with reality. However we also cannot focus on the church as a constitution of believers alone, because in some instances, people can lose sight of what it means to be Christian. A well-developed ecclesiology and honest and devoted believers, need to keep each other in balance and create a congregation where there is room for everyone.

There is however a certain interaction between these three elements and they can all influence each other. A Bible passage about the church or community can be interpreted by a group of believers, who in turn will use their interpretation of this Bible passage as a theological guideline in how to shape their community. These will then create a certain set of rules and norms for the community that after a while can become a standard on its own, which justifies sayings like: *“that’s just how we do things here”*. This hermeneutic-theological circle keeps repeating itself but can change, for example because of certain incidents or where new people enter the community. The undermentioned example illustrates such a process:

⁵² Examples can be found in many Bible passages, such as Matthew 5:3-12; Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:31 and Mark 12:41-44, where the expected outcome is subverted.

⁵³ Hegstad, H. (2016). Reflections on understanding ecclesiology, in Fahlgren, S., & Idestrom, J. (Eds.). *Ecclesiology in the Trenches: Theory and Method Under Construction*, Cambridge: James Clarke Company, p.78.

1. A group of people form an new congregation.
2. Due to their interpretation of Romans 1: 26-27, they decide to not recognize same-sex relationships.
3. For some years the standard in this community therefore becomes that of a heterosexual marriage.
4. One of the congregants comes out of the closet and wants a blessing over his/her relationship, which is denied because of the norms and rules at that moment, which results in the departure of the couple from the community.
5. After a few years the new pastor mentions homosexuality in one of the sermons, which results in conversations about the incident from a few years ago.
6. The original people who founded the church have all withdrawn from activities because of their old age and a new generation stands up in the community to take their place.
7. A conversation in the community arises about whether to allow the blessing of same-sex relationships. For an answer people move towards the Bible, to examine what the Bible has to say about this topic.
8. The people who are now active in the church, interpret the Bible passages concerning same-sex relationships in another way than the generation before them.
9. After the discussions cease the community agrees to introduce blessings over same-sex relationships.

The different stages are of course fluid and people can move back and forth within the different stages. Some communities will spend more time reading and studying the Bible, some will spend more time on the fact that the discussion arises again and others will try to get advice from the older generations, but in all cases, a certain form of change is inevitable. This cycle is applicable to a variety of other subject and in a certain sense, reflects a general way of how communities deal with change.

According to Hegstad a sociological perspective that is applicable to the church, as it is for society, is based upon the role of human activity.⁵⁴ The context in which we are born and live, is shaped by the ones who came before us. From a theological standpoint the church is of course something that is not only made by humans, but also part of God's works and under God's influence. This creates a question that has led to many conflicts: what is traceable to God and what to humans? Or even more concrete: what does God wants us to do? In light of inclusivity this is indeed a core question, because the exclusion of certain people is justified by the fact that people say that it is God's will or "*that's what the Bible says*". Another important aspect of this socio-theological understanding of the church, is the fact that a church is a community, but that this does not mean that this community is unanimous. A group is in essence always a collection of individuals who can have many different thoughts on the same case. The fact that they are drawn to each other forces them to get to know other points of view, which they can either agree or disagree with. To be a community however, a certain degree of unity is necessary, which gives rise to a community identity. This does not imply however that the community identity is

⁵⁴ Hegstad, H. (2013). *The real church*, p.61.

the same as the sum of the whole. Individuals can disagree or clash with the community. In light of this fact, Wolfgang Huber has created five *basic internal church rights*:

- “1. Everyone has the right of access to the faith and to know Jesus Christ. When the church withholds the gospel within a closed inner circle, or is content to provide religious services only for its members, it violates this right. The church must be missional in its structure to safeguard this right.
2. Everyone has the rights of conscience and freedom of opinion. This means that the church cannot promote its own teachings or beliefs by force. It is only possible to fight for the truth by spiritual means. This does not exclude the necessity for the church, in certain instances, to draw limits for what is said, and done in the church. Such cases should be treated fairly and with broad and open dialogue in the church where theologian and pastors have no monopoly of opinion.
3. Everyone has the right to personal integrity. This means that the church must respect basic legal rights and formalize rights for its employees. Important decisions should not be reached through closed and informal forums, but through open processes governed by legal regulations.
4. Everyone has the right to equality. This means that every Christian has the right to share the gospel in accordance with their gifts. This excludes a hierarchical structure of the church with sharp distinctions between clergy and lay. When someone represents the church, this is to be on behalf of the whole church. The rights to equality is also incompatible with all forms of discrimination based on gender, race, nationality or social position.
5. Everyone has the right to participate in church decisions. The church cannot be governed by clergy alone, but requires participation from all church members. This is realized through a democratic structure in which the members elect their representatives to synodical bodies”.⁵⁵

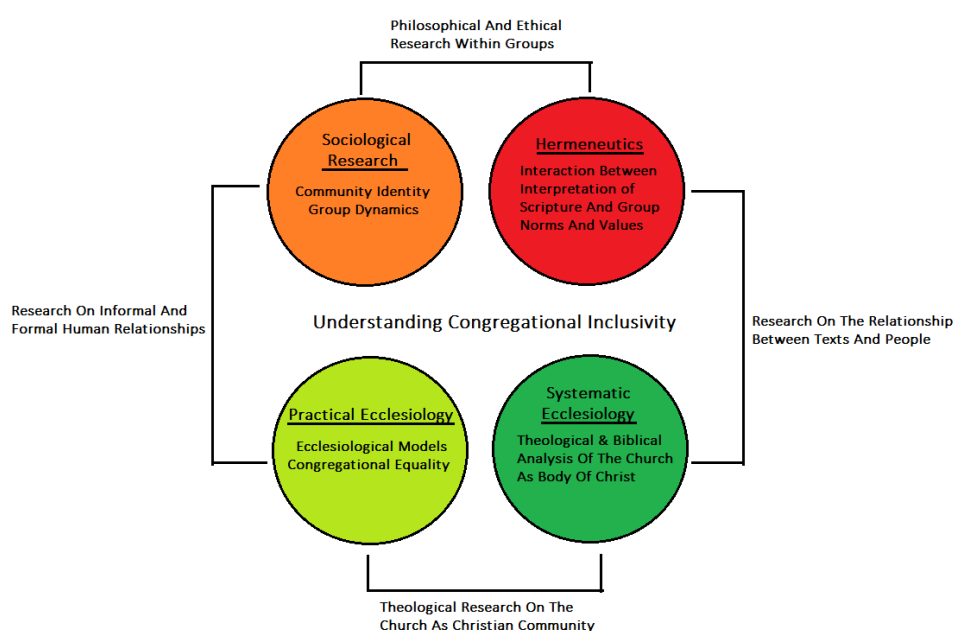
These rights stand in a broader theological discussion about freedom as a theological concept, a key element in Huber’s work.⁵⁶ Huber interprets *communicative freedom* in light of the Reformation’s focus on individual freedom, which places freedom in a new light and causes it to be more than something that just creates self-realization, but rather relates to a form of freedom “that can only be realized (sic) relationally”.⁵⁷ These basic internal church rights therefore need to be interpreted not just as rights for individuals, but also as something for the congregation as a whole. In chapter four an attempt will be made to further focus on these church rights. With the need of both systematic and practical

⁵⁵ Hegstad, H. (2013). *The real church*, p.124.

⁵⁶ See for example: Huber, W. (1996). *Christliche Freiheit in der freiheitlichen Gesellschaft*, *Evangelische Theologie* 56(2), pp.99-116.

⁵⁷ Willem, F. (2009). *Communicative freedom? Wolfgang Huber's critical engagement of modernity*, Doctoral dissertation: University of Stellenbosch, pp.76-77, retrieved from <https://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/1350>.

ecclesiology in our mind and with an understanding about how the Bible, theology and ecclesiology are influenced by the living church, we can summarize what is discussed till now and see what we have learned about inclusivity in light of theology and ecclesiology. The results of this chapter will be the conceptual framework on which the further exploration of congregational inclusivity will be built. We can conclude now that inclusivity has to do with a focus on one side, with practical ecclesiology in the form of a democratic and egalitarian view on how to be a congregation and how to organize something like that, and on the other side, with a systematic theological focus on how to live, communicate and cooperate with other people in a congregation in a justified and Biblical way. Despite the fact that a form of majority can be discovered in a church, for example in the fact that the majority will be heterosexual men or women, at a second glance the people in such a community often tend to be more diverse if one were to compare them on the basis of other elements, such as background or financial situation. Therefore the meaning of majority and minority can weaken in certain instances. An important distinction was also made between hospitality and inclusion, which was important for the understanding of the relationship between minorities and the majority in a church. We concluded that how we define ecclesiology and the church can have an influence on how we see inclusivity. We also discussed the relationship between theology, ecclesiology and people in the church, how they influence each other and how inclusivity can increase in the interaction of these three. A socio-theological analysis of the church is therefore necessary to see that inclusivity is dependent on the people in a congregation. The relationship between community and individuality influences how and if people are included. Community identity is a decisive factor on inclusivity and has boundaries when it comes to including people. All these elements have been set in a model to understand their relationship with each other:



Now that a conceptual framework has been set up, we can look further into the elements that constitute inclusivity in a congregation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

§3.1. Introduction

In this chapter the methodology of this study will be described. In paragraph 3.2. an overview is given of how the fieldwork in this study was prepared and a reflection will be given about the methodology. In paragraph 3.3. the different research methods are described that have been used in this study. Paragraph 3.3. gives a normative reflection about my own position and background as a researcher.

§3.2. Fieldwork preparation and Methodological Reflection

In this paragraph the preparation for the planned fieldwork and the initial chosen research methods are described. The methodological choices that were used in this study were all well-prepared in advance, but due to some misfortune and setbacks (partly during fieldwork), the gathering of data went differently than planned. Even though these plans could not be brought into practice, the whole process of preparation and the research methods will be described, followed by a methodological reflection. In paragraph 3.3. the research methods that in the end were used to gather information for this study will be discussed.

Due to the exploratory character of this study, the methods required to gather information had to contain a degree of flexibility, so that I could gather a variety of relevant data. The motive to do research on this topic leads back to my own interest in inclusivity in the church, because in the Netherlands sexual minorities still have a disadvantaged position in the church. Because I am both Christian and gay this also affects me as a person. Therefore this study has a strong normative character, in the sense that it is my answer to a situation of injustice and inequality. This will be discussed further in the last paragraph of this chapter. The fact that this study was done in a very different context compared to my own, was more or less coincidental and called for a high degree of preparation. Not only was I unfamiliar with Christianity in India, but also the cultural and social differences between the Netherlands and India (and the large regional and local differences within India), cannot be underestimated. Because of this form of fieldwork I wanted to prepare myself as much as possible.

Interviewing

From the start of my study I knew that I needed to do interviews in a language that was not my own. Therefore some preparatory matters were taken care of such as the purchase of a good quality voice recorder. Because I had interviewed people before for a different study, I knew that my interview skills were adequate, but I also knew that these had all been with Dutch people with a Dutch way of communicating. The Dutch way of communicating is often experienced by foreigners as direct or

impolite, while I read on several websites, that 'the' Indian way of communicating is more indirect.⁵⁸ Socially desirable answers were therefore expected, especially because of the sensitive subject. Although I did not know if I could trust these websites, I chose to follow the advices because a polite way of communicating would probably not be experienced as a problem. I concluded that if an informal way of communicating was more appropriate, I would probably notice that during the interview. Another important aspect of interviewing is body language. While reading about the way in which the people in India communicate generally speaking, I came across multiple websites that claimed, that touching or pulling the ear slightly was a sign of sincerity.⁵⁹ Because it did not seem to be something inappropriate to me even if it were not true, I tried to do this at least a few times in each interview, always as natural as possible. I also tried to keep my gesture as open as possible, with my hands on uncrossed legs and smiling at certain moments, to try to remain approachable. I even forced myself to use the famous Indian head shake or head bobble in conversations,⁶⁰ to avoid miscommunication due to unconscious movements.⁶¹ Whenever I did an interview, I also took notice of the body language of the interviewee. In almost all cases this was neutral and people seemed comfortable talking to me.

A well-prepared list with question was also necessary, likewise the creation of a safe space for the interviews. Safe space being, the (social) context (online and offline) where people feel safe enough to share personal or intimate information about themselves with others.

The Social Inclusive Tool

In my preparation for the research I stumbled upon an interview tool made in India. It was a list with questions made by the ESHA-program of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) called the *Social inclusive Tool* (SIC). Because this research tool was developed for use in the same context in I wanted to use it,⁶² I chose the tool as part of my methodology. After some e-mails to the people

⁵⁸ I found descriptions of Indian communication styles on <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/indian-culture/indian-culture-communication>; <https://www.worldbusinessculture.com/country-profiles/india/culture/business-communication-styles/>; <https://businessculture.org/indian-business-culture/business-communication/> and <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides/india-guide#C4>, all accessed August 28, 2019.

⁵⁹ See <https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/indian-culture/indian-culture-communication>; <https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/individuals/destination-guides/movers-guide-to-india/business-etiquette.html> and http://factsanddetails.com/india/People_and_Life/sub7_3c/entry-4168.html, all accessed August 8, 2019.

⁶⁰ A movement people make in India with their head to indicate certain things during a conversation with someone, comparable with nodding in Western communication. See http://www.worldhum.com/features/how-to/tilt_your_head_like_an_india_20060128/, accessed August 28, 2019.

⁶¹ Also because certain movements from 'Western' cultures have a different meaning in India, such as waving your hand to greet someone (which in Indian culture can mean something like 'go away').

⁶² I concluded that this would lead to fewer cultural tensions were I to create my own questions, because the questions in the list were coming from people of that specific cultural context and thus an example of questions that were living in this context.

responsible for the development of the tool, I learnt more about its use.⁶³ In short it is a list of discussion points about suspected HIV/AIDS-patients, focused on different social categories such as women or sexual minorities and how they are included in a certain community or context. These discussion points can be answered with a number. Examples of these discussion points are:

- Our pastor would never speak about HIV, in his sermons during Church service.
- In our Church women are simply not as effective pastorate committee members as compared to men.
- Our Church would not welcome people suspected of being lesbians, gays, homosexuals and transgender as church members.

If all the discussion points are filled out one can add up all the numbers and a score is given, which indicates how inclusive the corresponding context is. The higher the total number is, the greater inclusivity is in that context and vice versa. However the tool does not define what inclusivity is, but based on the questions one could say that the term social acceptance covers the meaning of the word.

Focus group and Interview Questions

After discussion with my supervisors the choice was made to use the SIC as an introductory research tool. Following the advice from my acquaintance in India, I chose two churches in Mumbai and two in Chennai where I would use the SIC to create a general picture of the social acceptance there towards the people in the SIC. My Indian acquaintance would use his network in those cities to find churches that were suitable for the research. For this part of the study I created a list of discussion points, based on those in the SIC, which served as a guideline for the focus groups I would organize.

Because this focus group was the method with which I wanted to deepen my understanding about this sensitive subject, it was important that the questions were safe enough to answer and took the specific cultural context into account. Therefore the questions were checked and corrected by my Indian acquaintance, who was well acquainted with the specific context and culture because of his own background and work. The final list of questions was divided into three thematic parts with two questions in each. After discussions with my Indian acquaintance and my supervisors, we agreed that it would be best to give three examples as an answer to the first question, which were ascending from

⁶³ This tool is not included to the appendix of this study, because in the end it was not used as part of the methodology.

negative, to moderately positive to positive. The questions were open questions,⁶⁴ illustrated by several closed example answers. These examples were meant to give an impression of what kind of answers people could give, but also to create a kind of safe space where the uncertainty of a wrong answer was taken away. Because the answers were just examples of answers, at the end of each question it was underlined that they were examples of answers. The goal of giving some examples was therefore not to guide participants to the right kind of answer, but rather to show them how to answer within the scope of the question.⁶⁵

The three themes would not be given to the participants, but the questions would be read out aloud by myself, so I could oversee the discussion and ask for clarification where this was necessary. Underneath are the three themes with their corresponding questions and example answers.

Theme 1: The Church as a Social Hub

- 1) What are your thoughts on the church in your social and emotional life? For example:
- would you consider them people whom you do not know that well;
 - would you say that they play a role in your social network;
 - or could you really trust and speak with them if you would encounter a problem in your personal life?
- 2) If you look at the people in your church, how would you describe it as a community? For example:
- would you say that your church community consists of many different and smaller groups;
 - would you say that there are a few big social groups in your community;
 - or would you say that your church community is more or less a uniform group?

Theme 2: The Boundaries of Church Hospitality

- 3) What would be your definition of an 'inclusive church community'? For example:
- Would you rather keep out certain people from your community;
 - Would you say that there are a few boundaries in the hospitality of your church;
 - Or would you say that everyone needs to be welcomed in your church community regardless of their orientation or background?
- 4) A How does your church express hospitality?
 B Are there any restrictions in your church regarding who can participate and who cannot?
 If there are, how do you ensure such restrictions? If not, how do you ensure that everyone feels welcome?

⁶⁴ "... which are designed to give participants freedom to initiate topics within research settings...", see Given, L.M. (Ed.). (2008). *The Sage Encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, p.83.

⁶⁵ Which in my opinion is a subtle but important and justifiable difference, which also prevents the need of follow-up questions as much as possible.

Theme 3: Sexuality, Sexual Minorities and the Church

5) A How comfortable is your church to talk about sexuality?

B Do you have any restrictions regarding discussing this topic in your church?

6) A If a member in your church shares in with you, for example in prayer, his or her sexual orientation, how would you respond?

B How would you respond when the person that shares his or her sexuality is gay? How would others in your church respond?

Another measure to safeguard and create a context where the subject could be discussed, was to ask my Indian acquaintance to introduce me to people within the corresponding churches. He also offered me help by contacting churches and individuals in Mumbai and Chennai that could prove to be useful for my study.

Although initial plans did not seem to work out, the approach adopted could prove to be useful after all, in reflection on the process in the light of the sensitivity around this seemingly taboo subject. The exact reason why this approach did not seem to work is difficult to figure out. A lack of proficiency in English would be unlikely, because the churches I contacted were situated in one of the biggest cities in India, where according to my Indian acquaintance, English is spoken by the majority of people, even when it is a second language. Another reason could be that people were hesitant to speak with me because I was a foreigner and they did not trust me enough to speak about such a sensitive subject. Later my Indian acquaintance confirmed to me that a call for help via email in light of this topic was expected to be unsuccessful,⁶⁶ but I anticipated this by not mentioning my focus on the LGBTQI-community or Dalits in the first contact and only mentioning inclusivity as a general research topic.⁶⁷ It is possible that these themes were showing through anyway which may have been a reason for people to ignore my messages, because it is a taboo topic,⁶⁸ but I did not have another option for my first contact than contacting people by mail. My initial hope for making contact with churches were the emails that my Indian acquaintance sent to them, but that did not seem to work. For the individual interview this was different though. Although I had planned some interviews, due to the impossibility of doing focus groups, I had to improvise to get enough information to understand the context of my research topic.

Although I started with preparations for my fieldwork almost four months in advance of my departure to India, by sending e-mails to churches and keeping in contact with my Indian acquaintance, the results

⁶⁶ Because of the sensitivity of the research topic.

⁶⁷ Of course I had to reach out to people, churches and organizations in some way, so whenever I did, I tried to do this as polite and neutral as possible.

⁶⁸ Fontes, L.A. (2008). *Interviewing clients across cultures – A practitioners guide*, New York: The Guilford Press, pp.175-178.

proved to be rather disappointing. About two months before my departure I still had not found any churches that were responding to my emails or the requests of my Indian acquaintance, which caused for a great deal of improvisation. My Indian acquaintance, who knew some churches in Mumbai and Chennai, offered to help me find churches who were willing to cooperate with my study and he reached out to a few churches. Two months before my departure however I sensed that time was running out and concluded that the subject maybe was too sensitive for churches to reply without knowing or seeing me first. I chose to continue my search during my stay in India, because I concluded that more personal contact and meeting in person might prove to be more successful than a request for help from afar. In addition to the focus groups there were also some individual interviews with people who did answer my emails, likewise a few people that my Indian acquaintance brought me into contact with, that were done in both Mumbai and Chennai. These will be discussed in paragraph 3.3.

Immediately when I arrived in India, I started sending emails about my study and my willingness to gladly meet in person to tell more about it. Unfortunately these also provided no places for me to organize my focus groups. Because I had some contacts who responded rather quickly to my messages, I tried to use them as a way to get to know more people. This proved to be successful, but only for individual interviews and meetings. Apart from contacting churches by email I also searched for groups and pages on social media that had to do with the topic. I joined for example two groups on Facebook that focused on LGBTQI-persons in India, one with almost 8500 members and with over 13.000 members, where I posted some messages about my study and intentions. Apart from some background information about the Indian context of LGBTQI-persons I did not manage to find anything useful, but after a while a few persons responded to my message by sending me a private message on Facebook, which resulted in an interview. A spontaneous visit to a local church was also unsuccessful and at the end of my journey in India, even after contacting dozens of churches, I did not manage to find a place where I could organize my focus groups. A disadvantage for my study and of course also rather disappointing.

In hindsight I think there was little that I could and would do differently. The challenges of research on such a sensitive subject in an unknown context are great and would probably be easier with more research time and more acquaintances in the local context. In my opinion I handled things with great care and integrity and tried to be as creative as possible in the moment in an attempt to redirect my study and focus, but there are of course always risks and outcomes like this. For future studies and researchers, I would suggest spending even more time in the local context than I did and focusing on getting to know people who can introduce you in relevant networks. Nevertheless I continued my study and improvised with the implementation of my research methods, which will be discussed in paragraph 3.3.

§3.3. Research Methods

In this paragraph the research methods that have been used in this study will be discussed. The research methods that I used to gain information were:

- Formal and semi-structured interviews that were recorded. These were all interviews that were planned because of someone's expertise or background.
- Informal and semi-structured interviews that were sometimes recorded, where I used the question from the formal interviews. These informal interviews were sometimes planned but less relevant than anticipated and still recorded. Others were interviews that tended to be more or less (unplanned and informal) conversations in the context of these informal interviews, which would still give me information about the topics, but which were not recorded.⁶⁹
- Informal and unstructured conversations that were not recorded. These were mostly unplanned activities people invited me to, which gave me some insight in the subject.⁷⁰
- Creating a Grindr-profile.⁷¹
- Search for Facebook-groups that were meant for LGBTQI-persons in India.
- Participating in both informal and more or less formal activities with LGBTQI-people, such as a shared dinner and participation in a psychological support group, led by the organization Orinam.

In my study I used a combination of these different methods. Because I sensed after a while how big the taboo was surrounding this topic, I was forced to adjust my method of finding people. People would probably not be willing to cooperate if I spoke to them, or wrote to them a message, where the social environment was not considered to be a safe space. Because collecting data and meeting people seemed to be harder than I expected, I needed to change the way I searched for participants.

⁶⁹ An example is a conversation I had with two delegates from a university for women in Mumbai, that showed up during the interview I had with reverend Srmbical about the Navodaya Movement. They shared with me some information about the relationship between universities and the acceptance of Hijras.

⁷⁰ An example is a conversation I had with a group of people who attended the Orinam lecture on March 3, 2019 (see paragraph 3.2), about living as queer persons in India and their process of coming out to their family and friends.

⁷¹ This is a popular dating app for queer people, used mostly by gay men for friendship, romantic dates or hook-ups.

I therefore tried to enter the gay scene in Mumbai and Chennai, by creating a profile on the app Grindr,⁷² and by searching for Facebook-groups meant for LGBTQI-people. One could ask the question if this is an appropriate research tool to find participants. In my opinion, it certainly is, because it gives the researcher access to a community that is closed and difficult to reach via normal ways of communication, but still offers the possible participant a form of privacy protection.⁷³

Apart from the element of usefulness another question could be if this is also an ethical correct way of finding participants, because one could interpret it as a kind of sociological voyeurism where research is done on people without informed consent or without them knowing this at all, such as in the study of Laud Humphreys.⁷⁴ In the case of my research I



tried to prevent this as much as possible, by not reaching out to people myself or using the app to look at profiles, but letting people who were interested in my research send a message to me. In this way there was no voyeurism because people could see me publicly and reach out to me if they wanted to. If one were to compare it to a more analogous example, one could say that I hung up a poster in a public place with my contact details and explanation about my research, which people could use to reach out to me.

Although the app did not prove to be successful,⁷⁵ the Facebook-groups did, which will be explained later. However, the fact that I was forced to look for these alternative ways of finding people, may also

⁷² The picture on the right is the information on my Grindr-profile when I was in India. I choose to use informal language and share on my profile that I am gay too, because I expected that to lower the threshold to contact me, as the church is known in the LGBTQI-community as having tendencies of homophobia. If I had only mentioned that I am part of the Christian community and not of the LGBTQI-community, I suspected people would be hesitant to tell me about their experiences because they maybe wouldn't trust me.

⁷³ Because "Grindr, on the other hand, makes them "virtually visible" while keeping them closeted and confidential, because they have enough control over how much information they share with other users including face, any other identification or links to any other social media accounts", see Koc, Y. (2016). Grindr as a participant recruitment tool for research with men who have sex with men, *International Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 20, p.27.

⁷⁴ "Humphreys's research interest was in impersonal sex, and, in order to shed light on this area, he took on the role of 'watchqueen' - that is, someone who watches out for possible intruders while men meet and engage in homosexual sex in public toilets. As a result of his involvement in these social scenes, Humphreys was able to collect the details of active participants' car license numbers". See Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*, 4th ed., New York: Oxford University Press, p.131.

⁷⁵ I got some recommendations for websites that could be useful according some people, but no interviews came from this method. The people who reached out to me however were interested in my research and

say something about the social infrastructure of these communities. In one of my conversations with Ankit Bhuptani he mentioned that the phenomenon of gay bars, such as in Amsterdam or other capitals in Europe, is not really present in India.⁷⁶ He stated that there were at most a few clubs that organized parties specifically for the LGBTQI-community.⁷⁷ The fact that there are merely a few public places where LGBTQI's can meet, could be a reason that online contact seems to be popular and that there are social media groups with many members, but because this exceeds the scope of this study, I could not research this further.

§3.4. Fieldwork and Interviews

Prior to my departure I was in contact with several Indian people who were active in the field of social acceptance of the LGBTQI-community, both in the church and in Indian society in general. Because my second supervisor, prof. dr. Zorgdrager, was an acquaintance of Thomas Ninan, a priest from the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church who was working at the National Council of Churches in India, I contacted him for advice about where to go in a country as large as India. He suggested that Mumbai and Chennai were good places to go to if one was interested in the relationship between the LGBTQI-community and the Indian church, partly because the topic of sexual diversity could be discussed more openly there compared to other parts of the country. Father Ninan brought me in contact with several people in Mumbai, from where I broadened my network by contacting people who were known for their social work in- and outside the church, or connecting with people who were referred to by previous acquaintances. Many people whom I spoke with were more or less open about their work, but in the conversations I had with them, many of them also told me that this openness was scarce, especially in the Indian church.

Almost all interviews I held were semi-structured, a form of interviewing that I concluded to be a useful form for this study, due to the combination of focus and freedom.⁷⁸ Most interview questions were made before the interview, but some interviews were less relevant than predicted or only useful in a limited way. The interview with Daniel Mendonca for example was done in the car driving between two

communication with them was enjoyable (there were even some people who flattered me by asking me to marry them).

⁷⁶ If one searches online with the search term 'gay bar Mumbai' for example, websites like Travelgay.com indeed mention hardly any results. See for example <https://www.travelgay.com/mumbai-gay-bars-clubs/>, accessed August 8, 2019.

⁷⁷ Such as club Kitty Su in Mumbai (and Delhi). For more information about the inclusive approach of this club, see <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/music/kitty-su-in-delhi-a-symbol-of-inclusivity/article24769682.ece>, accessed August 8, 2019.

⁷⁸ Because, as Anne Galletta also states "It is sufficiently structured to address specific topics related to be the phenomenon of study, while leaving space for participants to offer new meanings to the study focus". Especially the element of leaving space open for new information was necessary as the study in itself had an exploring character. See Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: from research design to analysis and publication*, New York: New York University Press, p.24.

activities and therefore hard to record (although it gave me a few insights). This was the same with some other interview. All were recorded, but in a few cases it was hard for me to understand, because of a combination of background noise and language and accent barriers. This was also the reason that I recorded every conversation I could, because in this way I could focus all my attention on my interviewee, instead of making notes on the spot. Because I read that socially acceptable answers could be expected with a topic as sensitive as this one, whenever an answer in an interview seemed to be too careful or vague, I tried to politely ask some follow-up questions to clarify the previous answers. All interviews were done with the informed consent of the interviewees, first by asking them if they had any objections if the content of the interviews and their names and background were being used and secondly, by asking them to sign a document of informed consent. Unfortunately I only got signed documents back from a few people, often not the interviews which I in the end used in my study. Although I therefore do not formally have an informed confirmation of consent from everyone, but informally my interviewees did give them to me. Therefore only two documents of confirmation of consent will be added to the appendix of this study, which are interviews that were used in this study.

Below is a summary of the people with whom I had an interview, the respective interview questions if possible and the activities I joined, both in Mumbai and in Chennai that were relevant to my study.

Mumbai

February 14th 2019: Interview with auxiliary bishop John Rodrigues

Because I was interested in a broad and interdenominational view of how the Indian church tackles the issue of the LGBTQI-community, I took the plunge and sent a letter to the archdiocese of Mumbai, addressed to cardinal Oswald Gracias. The reason I wrote to him was because his statements about the LGBTQI-community are quite liberal,⁷⁹ and sometimes even bold,⁸⁰ compared to many other Roman Catholic leaders. Although the cardinal himself was not available, the archdiocese welcomed me warmly and I had an interview with auxiliary bishop John Rodrigues. The interview took place at the office of the bishop in Mount Mary Church.

The questions I asked bishop Rodrigues were:

⁷⁹ <https://www.ucanews.com/news/indian-cardinal-backs-gay-catholics-lgbt-helpline/83862>, accessed June 5, 2019.

⁸⁰ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/we-should-be-more-welcoming-of-the-lgbt-community/article7937829.ece>, accessed June 5, 2019.

- 1) What would be your definition of an inclusive church?
- 2) What would the religious leader of a church need to do, if he wants to keep his community inclusive?
- 3) Would you say that there are people in your church that have a favorable position compared with others?
- 4) Can everyone in your church participate in everything? Or are there restrictions in what certain people can do?
- 5) Would you say that your church consists of a more or less uniform group of people?
- 6) How comfortable is your church in talking about sexuality?
- 7) Are there church policies that deal with sexual minorities? If so, what's their stance on sexual minorities? Positive or negative?

February 15th 2019: Interview with reverend Abin Srmbical of the Navodaya Movement

Referend to by father Thomas Ninan, I had an interesting interview with reverend Abin Srmbical of the Navodaya Movement. This movement, affiliated with the (Mumbai Diocese of the) Mar Thoma Church, enables the empowerment of marginalized and vulnerable communities to enhance their life situation and well-being. The Navodaya Movement tries to empower the Hijras,⁸¹ so they can lead an independent life, for example through financial training or education. The interview took place at the headquarters of the Navodaya Movement in Kalyan, a suburb of Mumbai. The interview questions were:

- 1) *What is the reason according to you, why many people seem to think that transgenders are such an issue?*
- 2) *What are your thoughts on gender inclusive theology and gender inclusive churches?*
- 3) *If I understood it right, the Navodaya Movement tries to empower transgenders in their well-being on different levels, as to make them less vulnerable. How do you do this, especially on spiritual level?*
- 4) *What do you think needs to happen in churches, on the level of religious leaders and on the level of the people in the community, to make transgenders feel more welcome?*

February 16th 2019: Morning lecture at the Roman Catholic seminary in Mumbai.

After my interview with reverend Srmbical he invited me to be present at a morning lecture he gave the next day, to young priests in training at the Roman Catholic seminary in Mumbai. The lecture was about pastoral sensitivity towards people with gender dysphoria (transgendered people) and was held in St. Pius X College, the Archdiocesan seminary in Mumbai.

⁸¹ The Hijras are transgendered persons, often living in communities with their own culture, norms and even language. They are systematically discriminated and disadvantaged by Indian society, which forces them to often beg or work as prostitutes.

February 20th 2019: Interview with Hindu queer activist Ankit Bhuptani

Ankit Bhuptani is a queer Hindu activist from Mumbai. He is one of the co-organizers of the Mumbai Pride and is studying the relationship between sacred Hindu texts and homosexuality. My meeting with Ankit was more a conversation about religion and homosexuality in the Indian context, than a formal interview, hence the questions are more informal than the other interviews.⁸² The interview took place in a restaurant in Powai, a suburb of Mumbai. The questions were:

- 1) *Could you please tell me how you experience living as a gay man, in the biggest city in India?*
- 2) *What kind of activities are you participating in for the LGBTQI-community?*
- 3) *What are your thoughts about the relationship between Hinduism and the LGBTQI-community?*
- 4) *With the partly abolishment of section 377 in the Indian law last year, sexual activities between adults of the same sex are now legal. Do you think that this has changed much in daily life already for the LGBTQI-community?*
- 5) *How did you experience the Mumbai Pride this year? Was it different than the years before?*

February 22th 2019: Lectures with Daniel Mendonca

Daniel Mendonca is a Christian intersex activist.⁸³ I joined a mini-lecture in the morning that was given by Daniel and a few friends, at the Maharshi Dayanand College, where they talked about their experiences as minorities. Afterwards I went with Daniel to a liberal arts college where he was participating in a lecture about the effects of the abolition of section 377. Parts of this section in the Indian law criminalized sexual intercourse between people with the same gender, which caused it to be a source of discrimination towards sexual minorities.

February 24th 2019: Interview with Mehak and Ripali

Mehak and Ripali are a lesbian couple whom I met on an Indian Facebook page for the LGBTQI-community. I interviewed them about their experiences as a lesbian couple in Mumbai, especially given the fact that the majority of attention to sexual minorities, is still directed on gay men. The interview took place on the terrace of a quiet café in Bandra, one of the neighborhoods in Mumbai. The interview questions were:

⁸² The conversation was also written out by me, with consent from Ankit, in the form of an article on the website of the Dutch LGBTQI-paper 'de Gaykrant', where I am a columnist. For this article see <https://www.degaykrant.nl/2019/02/25/homoseksualiteit-was-er-altijd-al-in-india-homofobie-niet/>, accessed July 23, 2019.

⁸³ Intersexuality is a biological deviation where at birth, no clear masculine or feminine sex characteristics can be determined. The letter 'I' in LGBTQI stands for intersex, but due to the small numbers of intersex people, many are still uninformed about them.

- 1) *Could you tell me something about yourself first. Who are you, what do you do in daily life and what do you find important to let people know about yourself?*
- 2) *How is life as a lesbian woman and lesbian couple in Mumbai? Are you involved in the LGBTQI-scene here for example or did you walk along with the Mumbai Pride?*
- 3) *How do you see the relationship between your sexuality and your religious community? Do people know about your sexuality?*
- 4) *What role does your faith play in your daily life? Do you enjoy support from your faith?*
- 5) *What would need to change in your religious community for you, to feel welcomed as a queer person?*
- 6) *What do you think that religious leaders need to do, to make their communities more inclusive?*

Chennai

March 3rd 2019: Orinam lecture with Deepak Kashyap

Orinam is a Chennai based all-volunteer unregistered collective of LGBTQIA+ people and allies, which functions as a support, cultural and activist space.⁸⁴ I joined an afternoon lecture given by the Canadian psychotherapist Deepak Kashyap on emotional well-being, which was co-organized by Orinam. The lecture was given because many LGBTQI-people in India are forcefully in the closet, which causes them to ignore or suppress their emotions. The activity took place in a classroom in Royapettah, a neighborhood in Chennai.

March 4th 2019: Interview with feminist theologian Aruna Gnanadason

Dr. Aruna Gnanadason is an Indian (eco)feminist theologian. I interviewed her because of her knowledge of the Indian church and theology, but also because she is well acquainted with the position of minorities in the Indian church such as the Dalits and sexual minorities. The interview took place at her home in Anna Nagar, one of the neighborhoods of Chennai.

March 5th 2019: Interview with Rōmal Lāisram

Rōmal Lāisram is a gay theologian from Chennai. He is active in the social acceptance movement of Christian LGBTQI-people and one of the few openly known gay Christian men in India. I interviewed him about the position of the LGBTQI-community in the Indian church. The interview took place in a restaurant in a shopping mall in Chennai. The interview questions were:

⁸⁴ Description of <http://orinam.net/about/orinam-net/>, accessed June 5, 2019.

- 1) *What would be your definition of an inclusive church?*
- 2) *What would the religious leader of a church need to do, if he or she wants to keep his community inclusive?*
- 3) *What would be the role of church leaders according to you, in promoting inclusivity and diversity in the church?*
- 4) *Would you say that a top down approach in promoting inclusivity in churches, is more effective than a bottom up approach?*
- 5) *What would need to change in the theology of the church according to you, so as to make it more inclusive to the LGBTQI-community?*

March 14th 2019: Interview with Jessica Richards from the Church of South India in Chennai

Jessica Richards is a feminist theologian and coordinator on advocacy, campaign, policy and training in the Church of South India, Chennai Diocese. I interviewed her about how the Church of South India is participating in the social acceptance of the LBGTQI-people in their church. The interview took place at the headquarters of CSI Chennai. The interview questions were:

- 1) *Could you tell me something about your work at the Church of South India?*
- 2) *What would be your definition of an inclusive church?*
- 3) *What would the religious leader of a church need to do, if he or she wants to keep his community inclusive?*
- 4) *What would be the role of church leaders according to you, in promoting inclusivity and diversity in the church?*
- 5) *How comfortable is the Indian church to talk about sexuality, or more specific the CSI?*
- 6) *I read your masterthesis about resisting bodies and Christology. I am curious about your thoughts of the dominant theology in India towards LGBQI-people.*

March 16th 2019: Interview with reverend Asir Ebenezer of the Church of South India

Reverend Asir Ebenezer is a minister of the Church of South India and general secretary of the National Council of Churches since January 2019. I interviewed him about the Social Inclusive Tool and the position and future of LGBTQI-people in the Church of South India and the Indian church in general. The interview took place in a Starbucks in Chennai.

March 17th 2019: Orinam Support Group

The previously mentioned organization Orinam has a monthly support group for (both secular and religious) LGBTQI-people. The support group is set up to talk about your feelings surrounding your sexuality in a safe haven to support each other. I was present at the support group and partly participating. The place for this support group is provided by the Chennai diocese of the Church of South India.

Because normativity and integrity are an important element in academic research, I will also reflect in the next paragraph upon my own background and position and discuss what influence this has in my

study. I will also discuss how I safeguarded the privacy and safety of my interviewees and those who were involved in my study.

§3.5. Normativity and Research Integrity

This study can be characterized as a study with strong normative elements. This has partly to do with my personal background as a researcher. Because I am both Christian and homosexual, the search for a church which is a safe environment for people of all sexualities is important for me. In that context I would even dare to call myself an activist for queer people and queer christian. In all the years that I have been studying theology, the relationship between religion, the church, sexuality and sexual minorities has been the topic that I am most interested in. Apart from this topic as an academic interest, I also participated in numerous activities that had to do with this topic. Therefore this study comes from a deep personal conviction, which could (and probably will) influence the design, character and execution of it, as well the conclusions that are drawn. However, no researcher is a *tabula rasa* and completely independent research is only something to dream of, but for the sake of academic integrity, to try to reduce the possible influence of my own bias and to stay in a spirit of academic integrity, it is necessary that I put these cards on the table. My own background however can also be an advantage for researching the experiences of sexual minorities. Because I am also part of the LGBTQI-community I share certain experiences surrounding (the coming out of one's) sexuality, which is the reason that once sexual minorities discuss their sexuality, I can relate to my own experiences and therefore understand their experiences better than for example a heterosexual researcher who is unfamiliar with these experiences on a personal level. Normativity as such, can be an element that guides observation and interpretation of practices and because this study has to do with the practices around inclusivity, it plays a role in our understanding and observation of inclusivity. Normativity as a set of personal convictions, is however just one side of the coin.

From a theoretical perspective normativity is also an interesting theme to reflect upon. Bonny Miller-McLemore for example claims that practical theology's objective is both to understand and to influence religious wisdom in congregations and public life more generally.⁸⁵ The normative aspect of practical theology therefore also has a *formative* goal for the practices in congregations, which can be summarized in the third task of the practical theologian according to Richard Osmer, namely "*what ought to be going on*"?⁸⁶ In a certain sense, this formativity also has to do with an *ethical assessment* of practices. Here, the personal convictions of a researcher arise, because if the practical theologian has

⁸⁵ Miller-McLemore, B.J. (2012). Five misunderstandings about practical theology, *International Journal of Practical Theology*, vol.16(1), p.7.

⁸⁶ Osmer, R.R. (2008). *Practical theology: an introduction*, Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, p.4.

the responsibility of influencing the practices of certain groups or people, this can only be done by using his or her personal convictions as an ethical principle that guides the change of religious wisdom of congregations and public life generally. Without these personal convictions, the practical theologian has no compass that tells him or her how to influence a certain phenomenon. Practical theological research therefore is closely related to the exercise of own's own personal convictions. However the extent to which personal conviction play a role in someone's research of course differs, if someone is closely related to the subject of research due to his or her own experiences, the relationship is different than for others.

One could say that this subjectivity is a hindrance to critical thinking or academic integrity, but as I mentioned before, no researcher is a *tabula rasa*. To be aware of these guiding principles in my opinion only helps to understand the object of research. Focusing again on my own background and identity as a researcher, this study can therefore be seen as my academic contribution, based on my own convictions, that will hopefully influence how congregations deal with queer people,⁸⁷ people who deserve to be treated fair and equal.

Because the object of my study was perceived as sensitive in Indian culture, I also knew that if I had to reach out to people I needed to do so carefully. I needed to be discrete and responsible in my curiosity, because the people could be discriminated against because of the sensitivity surrounding the subject. Sexual minorities are still discriminated against in India and personal (and physical) trauma is something that many are forced to deal with, so the fulfilment of my curiosity, wish for answers and information was dependent on whether or not my interviewees felt safe enough to cooperate with my study. Apart from that, because I am a gay man myself, in a certain way the dangers that the participants of my study were facing, were also a danger for me, although foreigners are relatively safe.⁸⁸ For every aspect of this study I tried to follow the codes of conduct for research integrity as close as possible.⁸⁹ For my meetings with interviewees and others, I always asked them where they wanted to meet, or asked them if they agreed with the location I chose, which were always neutral places such as a café or restaurant, where we could talk quietly. All the interviewees I met in my research where willing to meet with me because they wanted to. There were no cases where interviewees were involved in my research without informed consent, my messages were always publicly visible and people could send me a message if they wanted to.

⁸⁷ Defined in a broad sense here, including but not limited to sexual minorities.

⁸⁸ Although foreigners still can be attacked due to homophobia in India. See for example <https://nltimes.nl/2019/08/09/dutch-man-rainbow-colored-debit-card-beaten-india>, accessed August 28, 2019.

⁸⁹ KNAW; NFWO; NWO; TO2-federatie; Vereniging Hogescholen; VSNU (2018), '*Nederlandse gedragscode wetenschappelijke integriteit*', DANS. <https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-2cj-nvwu>, accessed August 6, 2019.

Chapter 4: The Boundaries of Congregational Inclusivity

§4.1. Introduction

This chapter is an introduction into the influence that inclusivity has on congregations, which will be further discussed in the next chapter where a theological and practical focus will deepen our understanding of congregational inclusivity. In the first paragraph the results of the fieldwork and interviews will be discussed, which will be enriched by some supporting findings from the literature surrounding the subject. Paragraph 4.2. will focus on the policy on inclusivity of the Church of South India, a denomination where a part of the fieldwork has been done. Paragraph 4.3. will discuss how congregational inclusivity affects minorities by using the metaphor of the *insufficient minimum*. Lastly in paragraph 4.4. we will turn back to the *basic internal church rights* that were discussed in chapter two. These will be discussed together with the findings of the fieldwork and interviews, to look for the tension between inclusivity on a theoretical level and how this can differ from the lived reality of people in congregations.

§4.2. Results of Fieldwork and Interviews

Due to the interviews I had, the activities I joined, the information people gave me and the literature they pointed me towards in these interviews and activities, there are a few things that could prove to be useful in light of this study.

Generally speaking, one could conclude that homosexuality is still a sensitive subject in Indian society, considered a taboo and unnatural. Not only is creating a family and having children is considered to be the norm, but also only one year ago a law still existed that prohibited sexual contact between people of the same gender. Even though a part of this law has been lifted, people of the same gender are still not permitted to officially marry each other, although there are known exceptions,⁹⁰ and several petitions have been submitted to allow same sex marriage.⁹¹

In a study on the self-disclosure of sexual orientation or coming out process of 48 lesbian women, 56 gay men and 44 bisexual participants from Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai, researchers found out that only 44% of lesbian woman, 68% of gay men and 14% of the bisexual respondents came out of

⁹⁰ I found one case of a local recognized same sex marriages, for background information see <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/gurgaon/In-a-first-Gurgaon-court-recognizes-lesbian-marriage/articleshow/9401421.cms> accessed July 22, 2019.

⁹¹ See <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/drafting-change-what-the-new-progressive-intervention-in-uniform-civil-code-debate-entails/> and <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/fEiZSRM7ng7Ja4ssTyfl8J/Historic-verdict-holds-hope-for-samesex-marriages-adoption.html>, accessed July 22, 2019.

the closet and embraced their sexual orientation.⁹² The percentages are in stark contrast compared to the Dutch context. For example a big Dutch research, conducted by Movision, concluded that almost every gay man and lesbian woman between the age of 18 and 64, have someone who knows about their sexuality and that in more than 90% of the cases, their direct family know about it.⁹³ Another subject that was mentioned by a lot of people I interviewed, especially younger people, was the focus in Indian society to marry and have children. Although youth suffer great social pressure to marry, this seem to be changing. In their research on marriage trends in India, Ridhi Kashyap, Albert Esteve and Joan García-Romá concluded that the expected proportion of women never married by age 45–49 years rises from 0.07% in 2010 to a remarkable 8.7% in 2050. The corresponding increase for men by age 45–49 years is from 1.4% in 2010 to 5.1% to 2050.⁹⁴

This is one of the reasons that many people do not come out to, for example their parents, because they expect their children to give them grandchildren. Even if the expectation of having children is bearable the tension of not having a heteronormative relationship or a relationship at all, is hard to maintain. In some cases this is ‘solved’ by the parents with an arranged marriage. Although this phenomenon is difficult to quantify, numbers seem to have gone down in the last 50 years. To be more specific, the numbers of arranged marriages by the parents decreased from 49,6% in 1970 to 31.0% in 2000, but the marriages where both the child and the parents are having a voice in the decision have increased from 47.4% in 1970s to 62.6% in the 2000s.⁹⁵ Although the influence of parents in the marriage of their children is decreasing, in many cases they still have a decisive opinion.

If an arranged marriage does not work there is also the option of a *marriage of convenience (MOC)*. This kind of marriage, in contrast to a love marriage, is done between gay men and lesbian women, to live under the safer cover of heteronormativity.⁹⁶ People who are searching for such a marriage can do this online, for example on specific websites,⁹⁷ or social media pages, where they can post their characteristics and needs. Beneath is an example of such an advertisement, taken from a Facebook-group for marriages of convenience. For safety reasons, personal information that could lead to identification is deleted.

⁹² Biswas, M. (2018). Socio-economically convenient coming-out decision of India’s lesbian, gay, bisexual community, *International Journal of Research Culture Society*, vol.2(2), p.326.

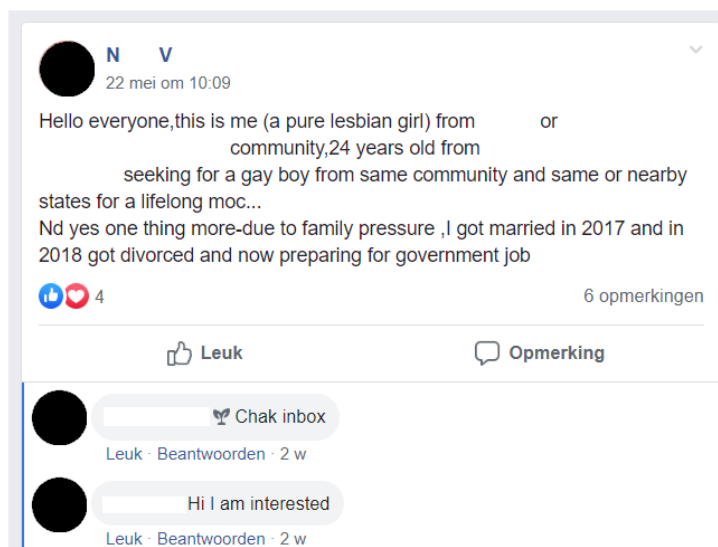
⁹³ Keuzenkamp, S. (Ed.). (2012). *Niet te ver uit de kast – Ervaringen van homo- en biseksuelen in Nederland*, Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, p.19.

⁹⁴ Kashyap, R., Esteve, A., & García-Román, J. (2015). Potential (mis).match?: marriage markets amidst socio-demographic change in India, 2005-2050, *Demography*, vol.51(1), p.194.

⁹⁵ Allendorf, K., & Pandian, R. K. (2016). The Decline of Arranged Marriage? Marital Change and Continuity in India. *Population and Development Review*, vol.42(3), p.454.

⁹⁶ Another name for this kind of marriage is a *lavender marriage*, a term coming from Hollywood in the 1930s. See Summers, C.J. (2005). *The Queer Encyclopedia of Film & Television*, San Francisco: Cleis Press, p.132.

⁹⁷ For an example of such a website, see <https://lgbtmoc.com/>, accessed June 6, 2019.



Scrolling through the page I concluded that even though people are planning to marry officially, they do not always want to live together and often only marry out of family pressure and self-protection. Few people will readily come out to their parents if they have a same sex partner. In an interview I had with a lesbian couple in Mumbai, one of them told me that when her parents came to know of their relationship, they locked her up in their house for several weeks, after which she managed to escape and flee to the other side of the county, a story that does not seem to be an exception.⁹⁸

Another interesting theme in many conversations I had was the position of transgendered people, in India known as the *Hijras*.⁹⁹ The Hijra-community is still discriminated in Indian society,¹⁰⁰ although they are well known in Indian society and history and have a certain amount of prescribed cultural space and freedom, for example the giving of blessing during important life events.¹⁰¹ This creates a paradox for them: on the one hand they are accepted because of their symbolic and ritual work, but on the other hand they are rejected in many other fields in society. Sridevi, a transwoman who invited me into her house and with whom I spoke for several hours, told me for example that she had to search for several months before she could find a housing agent who allowed her to rent a small apartment.

⁹⁸ See for example <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/lesbian-couple-uttar-pradesh-village-seeks-police-protection-marry-1552734-2019-06-20> and <https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/sexuality/agenda/article/2018/09/26/court-india-rules-lesbian-couple-can-live-together>, accessed July 22, 2019.

⁹⁹ Who are India's official third gender.

¹⁰⁰ Sibsankar, M. (2015). Let Us to Live: Social Exclusion of Hijra Community, *Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, vol.5(4), pp.108-117.

¹⁰¹ Patel, R.A. (2010). India's Hijras: the case for transgender rights, *The George Washington International Law Review*, vol.42(4), p.837: "For a small fee, they also perform *badhai*-local families sometimes welcome them into their homes to bless auspicious births or weddings".

In the field of education the Hijras are also discriminated a lot, which forces them to do work that requires no degree.¹⁰² In many cases this comes down to either begging or paid sex. Sridevi however was accepted a few years ago as Mumbai University's first transgender student,¹⁰³ and also in other parts of the county educational institutes seem to acknowledge transgender students more than before.¹⁰⁴

In the field of religion and the LGBTQI-community there is still need for improvement. If society tolerates them in public life, it is often only when they do not stand out and conform to the (hetero)normative view of society. Miroslav Volf describes this as a form of *exclusion by assimilation* which, he states, according to the language of Claude Lévi-Strauss rests on a deal: *"we will refrain from vomiting you out (anthropoemic strategy) if you let us swallow you up (anthropophagic strategy)"*.¹⁰⁵ In other words: *"you can be gay, just as long we do not see that you are and act normal"*.

Churches can have an even stronger opinion on the form and requirements of relationships, especially in the Indian context where Christians are a minority. In numbers the Roman Catholic Church is still the biggest church in India,¹⁰⁶ a church which is known for its conservative and heteronormative views on relationships and marriage. In my interview with auxiliary bishop Rodrigues he told me that the LGBTQI-community as a subject in the church, was more present the last years, but that the Roman Catholic Church has clear teachings about sexuality.¹⁰⁷ He underlined that everybody is welcome in their church, but *"if he is actively practising (a homosexual identity) that is something that we cannot accept"*,¹⁰⁸ which as a practical consequence, could mean exclusion of participating in communion.

However he emphasized that the Roman Catholic church still has to make steps in this subject and that *"it is important to talk with these people and not about them"*.¹⁰⁹ It seems that careful steps are taken

¹⁰² Hence the great focus of Navodaya Movement on the educational improvement of transgenders, because education gives them a chance to improve their life by applying for 'regular' jobs.

¹⁰³ <https://mumbaimirror.indiatimes.com/mumbai/other/meet-sridevi-mumbai-universitys-first-transgender-student/articleshow/57386528.cms>, accessed July 22, 2019.

¹⁰⁴ See <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/du-to-reach-out-to-transgender-students/articleshow/68989497.cms>; <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/transgender-students-can-now-study-in-loyola-college-in-chennai-1544885-2019-06-08> and <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-38470192>, accessed July 22, 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Volf, M. (1996). *Exclusion & embrace: a theological exploration of identity, otherness, and reconciliation*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, p.75.

¹⁰⁶ Exact numbers are hard to find, but it is estimated that there are approximately 17 million Indians who are part of the Roman Catholic Church. For sources see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4243727.stm> (17.3 million); <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/sc3.html> (17 million) and <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/india-rising-catholic-power-too> (17.6 million), all accessed August 28, 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Although he stated that *"In this a shift in theology is sometimes needed in terms of its pastoral application, but the theology of our church itself is fairly clear"*. Answer on the fifth question in the interview. This interview is included in the appendix in this thesis

¹⁰⁸ Answer on the first question of the interview.

¹⁰⁹ Answer on the fifth question of the interview.

towards a pastoral responsible way of communicating but as the bishop himself said, there is still a way to go. After the Roman Catholic Church there are several churches in India with a few million members, such as the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church,¹¹⁰ which is a (*sui iuris*) major archiepiscopal church,¹¹¹ the Church of South India,¹¹² and the Lutheran Church.¹¹³ None of these churches allow same sex marriage, but their attitude towards the LGBTQI-community differs,¹¹⁴ and some even take a lead in promoting social acceptance of the LGBTQI-community in the Indian church, such as the National Council of Churches in India,¹¹⁵ or the Evangelical Church of India.¹¹⁶ Another leader is the earlier mentioned (Mumbai Diocese of the) Mar Thoma Church who started the Navodaya Movement,¹¹⁷ a program focused on ministry to transgenders.¹¹⁸ The Church of South India is another church that is quite liberal in her approach and language, although the church is divided on the subject due to a variety of denominational backgrounds and therefore does not (yet) have one shared opinion on this subject.¹¹⁹ Theologians, theological colleges and seminaries, such as the United Theological College in Bangalore, also seem to focus more on the issue and implement (homo)sexuality as a topic in their curriculum.¹²⁰ Interesting is that multiple people I spoke with, mentioned that the rejection of homosexuality by

¹¹⁰ With approximately 4.25 million members according to <http://www.cnewa.org/source-images/Roberson-eastcath-statistics/eastcatholic-stat17.pdf>, accessed July 22, 2019.

¹¹¹ In short this is a church that is self-governing and in "close communion" with the Roman Catholic Church. For information about this church, its structure and its relationship with Rome see <http://www.syromalabarchurch.in/syro-malabar-church.php>, accessed July 22th 2019.

¹¹² Numbers about membership differ from 3.5 million according to <https://web.archive.org/web/20080611024524/http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/regions/asia/india/church-of-south-india.html>, 3.8 million according to <http://www.csimichigan.org/ChurchofSouthIndia.html> and 4.2 million according to <https://csidubai.com/church-of-south-india/>, first two accessed July 22th 2019, third accessed July 30, 2019.

¹¹³ With approximately 3.5 million members. Source: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/LWI-Statistics-2013-EN.pdf>, accessed July 22, 2019.

¹¹⁴ The National Council of Churches for example, who represents millions of Christians in India, published a letter in which they argued for the abolishment of section 377, see <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/01/17/indian-churches-call-for-the-decriminalisation-of-homosexuality/>; but at the same time, other religious leaders strongly condemn homosexuality, see <https://international.la-croix.com/news/indian-catholic-bishops-unhappy-with-legalization-of-homosexuality/8362>, both accessed July 23, 2019.

¹¹⁵ For an example of their work, see this interview with gender rights activist Daniel Mendonca, who is working with the NCCI to make churches in India more inclusive to the LGBTQI-community, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TW1i2gpYSW0>, accessed July 23, 2019.

¹¹⁶ Who ordained India's first transgender pastor in 2011, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Meet-Indias-first-transgender-pastor/articleshow/11772802.cms>, accessed July 23, 2019.

¹¹⁷ In full the 'Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church'.

¹¹⁸ <http://marthoma.in/news/ministry-to-the-transgenders-navodaya-movement-video/>, accessed July 22, 2019.

¹¹⁹ The Church of South India is originally a union between the South India United Church (which was a combined body of Presbyterians and Congregationalists), the Anglican dioceses in South India and the South Indian districts of the Methodists church. For more information about the history of the Church of South India, see <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/church-of-south-india>, accessed July 22, 2019.

¹²⁰ See <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/deep-focus/Yes-theyre-gay-And-pious-too/articleshow/53025793.cms> and <https://thewire.in/rights/a-theological-challenge-to-christian-homophobia>, both accessed July 23, 2019.

(religious) Indians, was a consequence of the colonization of India by the British. Robert Aldrich gives for example a description of the British empire during the colonization of India, that seems to point towards that which I heard in several interviews, namely that *“homosexuality (especially when the Oscar Wilde affair burst in Britain) came up against the sexual norm, ‘a basic postulate of the colonial attitude in Britain’, which mandated heterosexuality, marriage, monogamy, child-rearing and family life as essential values of civilised (sic) society”*.¹²¹

Several people I spoke with during my visit in Mumbai and Chennai mentioned these kind of values that hindered their coming out to family and friends and earlier research showed that this pressure is indeed still present in the India of today.¹²² The other side of this phenomenon, the alleged fluidity in India’s culture and history towards gender and sexuality, is something that was also mentioned in my interview with Ankit Bhuptani and research shows, that this is indeed present in classical Hindu scriptures and culture. Rohit Dasgupta mentions for example the intimate friendship between Krishna and Arjuna that seem to transcend traditional friendship, the God Ayyappa who is born out of two men (the God Krishna and Shiva in male form) and the famous Kamasutra who prescribed ‘queer’ sexual practices such as *auparishtaka*.¹²³ Other examples are temple carvings where sexual activities between people of the same gender appear,¹²⁴ and there are several examples of gender fluid Gods (or their incarnations) and people, like Ardhanarisvara,¹²⁵ Harihara¹²⁶ and Gadadhara Pandita.¹²⁷ In my interview with Ankit Bhuptani he mentioned that in cases of rejection of LGBTQI-persons by (religious) Indian’s, these kind of stories are often forgotten and the arguments that are used to reject homosexuality, seem to be taken from values that were introduced to India(ns) in the time of colonization.

Summarized one can conclude that the social acceptance of the LGBTQI-community in India’s churches is there, but it is still small and still growing. The influence of secular law on the acceptance of LGBTQI’s also cannot be underestimated here. Since a part of section 377 has been abolished, churches and religious institutes cannot discriminate against LGBTQI’s, but unfortunately in reality that is not always the case and as long as same sex marriages are not yet allowed by Indian law, that too, remains an argument for churches and religious leaders to deny that right in churches to LGBTQI’s. The social acceptance of LGBTQI-people is also influenced by the focus in India society to marry and have children,

¹²¹ Aldrich, R. (2003). *Colonialism and homosexuality*, London: Routledge, p.6.

¹²² See footnote 43.

¹²³ Dasgupta, R. (2011). Queer sexuality: a cultural narrative of India’s historical archive, *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol.3(4), pp.652-653.

¹²⁴ Keene, M. (2002). *Religion in Life and Society*, Dublin: Folens, p.58.

¹²⁵ Goldberg, E. (2002). *The Lord who is half woman: Ardhanārīśvara in Indian and feminist perspective*, New York: SUNY Press, p.30.

¹²⁶ David L. (2001). *A Dictionary of Asian Mythology*, New York: Oxford University Press, p.67.

¹²⁷ Kapoor, O.B.L. (1976). *The Philosophy and Religion of Sri Caitanya*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, p.23.

which causes social and psychological pressure on LGBTQI's. To cope with this pressure some people seek a marriage of convenience as an answer, because the cover of a heteronormative relationship seems to give a certain amount of safety. It is expected that these marriages of convenience are not only present in secular society, but also to a certain amount in churches, where the Christian theological vision,¹²⁸ and Indian cultural norms come together. The relationship between current views on homosexuality and the cultural and religious history of India, show that in the study of sexuality in the context of Indian churches, colonialism plays an influential role that cannot be denied. After all, section 377 was a British law installed in India, that was abolished only after 157 years.¹²⁹ There are many studies that examine the history of homosexuality in India, but an interesting question would be, whether pre-colonial churches in India had an opinion on same-sex relationships that was more or less comparable with the general norm in Indian society, or that opinions differed. We can assume with reasonable certainty that the Bible passages that are being used by contemporary churches in India to condemn homosexuality, were also present in pre-colonial times. In my literature review I could not find anything that could shed some light on this case, even in large studies about the history of sexuality in India.¹³⁰ It would be interesting to know if these imposed values already existed in pre-colonial Indian churches, to further understand the impact of colonization on the Indian churches.

Now that the methodology has been outlined, the results of the fieldwork and the relevant religious and Christian elements have been described, we can discuss these with the theological analysis and exploration of inclusivity from chapter two. With the results of this an overview will be made in chapter five that presents how (a lack of) inclusivity influences the church as an organization, community and place of worship.

§4.2. That they all may be one: Inclusivity and the Church of South India

Although opinions differ among congregations and leaders, the Church of South India (from now on referred to as CSI) tries to actively promote an environment where there is room for diversity. An interesting start in studying how CSI tries to promote inclusivity is to start with their history, something that in itself is a process of inclusion and diversity.

¹²⁸ According to the Roman Catholic catechism for example, sexual activity needs to be open to procreation. Not all churches will have this as clear in their teachings as the Roman Catholic Church, but it is expected that it plays an important role in their theology or norms and values. See for example article 2331 in the Roman Catholic catechism. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a6.htm, accessed July 24, 2019.

¹²⁹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/section-377-india-gay-sex-crime-lgbt-supreme-court-dipak-misra-a8525116.html>, accessed July 24, 2019.

¹³⁰ Such as Vanita, R., & S. Kidwai, (Eds.). (2000). *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

The Church of South India is the result of a union of Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian, and Reformed churches, the process of which already had begun in 1919.¹³¹ The South India United Church, which was the combined body of Presbyterians and Congregationalists together with the Anglican dioceses in South India and the South Indian districts of the Methodist Church, reached a decision in 1947 and the Church of South India was inaugurated.^{132,133} The fact that a multitude of churches, each with their own history and identity, found a way to unite themselves, is in my opinion proof of a spirit that seeks to understand and find others across religious, cultural and social borders, an echo of which can be heard in the mission of the church, which reads:¹³⁴

THE INAUGURATION OF THE CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA, ST. GEORGE'S CATHEDRAL, MADRAS, 27th SEPTEMBER, 1947



THE SOLEMN DECLARATION OF UNION

“The Church of South India affirms that the Church is the Servant of God to carry on the mission rooted in Jesus Christ based on the Scriptures. The Church through her mission expresses solidarity with the broken communities for a new hope to face the challenges of life. The Cross continues to be the sign of hope for the witnessing Church, which strives towards Unity, Peace and Reconciliation as a vibrant Channel of God”.

These broken communities are in particular the people who are underprivileged, such as women, Dalits, the poor, Hijras and sexual minorities, for whom specific programs are made that are meant to empower them,¹³⁵ with SEVA as one of CSI’s biggest programs. The Social Empowerment: Vision in Action (SEVA) program, contains many individual projects that focus on diaconal concerns such as a micro insurance schemes for the poor, Dalit women empowerment, prevention of HIV and AIDS, disability intervention for solidarity and holistic accompaniment (DISHA) and many more.¹³⁶

¹³¹ <https://csidubai.com/church-of-south-india/>, accessed July 30, 2019.

¹³² <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/church-of-south-india>, accessed July 30, 2019.

¹³³ Picture of the inauguration taken from <https://www.csisynod.com/aboutus.php>, accessed July 30, 2019.

¹³⁴ <https://www.csisynod.com/mission.php>, accessed July 30, 2019.

¹³⁵ An example of how the church deals with this subject, is the conference that was held in 2017 on the “borderless church”. See https://www.csisynod.com/deptnews_view.php?id=5495&cat=C, accessed July 24, 2019.

¹³⁶ For an impression of the SEVA-program and projects that are part of it, see <http://csiseva.csi1947.com/>, accessed July 30, 2019.

Another important aspect of inclusivity in CSI is their logo, and their explanation of it:¹³⁷

*“That they all may be one; as thou, father, art in me, and I in thee that they also may be one in us.....” (John 17:21) is an inclusive affirmation showing explicitly that Christ is the Head and the Church, His body. It also symbolizes the prayer of the Church that not only Churches need to be united but all people of this country which can be interpreted as a meaningful prayer for national integration. ... The four ends of the cross made of equal size symbolizes the equality and also the contextual peaceful co-existence and communal harmony”.*¹³⁸



The equality and inclusion of everyone in the community is a central element in the logo and therefore, also part of the identity of the church. In light of inclusivity this is an element that cannot be underestimated, because a striving for unity and equality is the essential start from which this goal eventually will be reached. After all a church with people who do not want, or cannot see each other as equals, can sit at a round table and still exclude each other.¹³⁹ Of course actions need to prove these words in reality, which CSI fortunately does where she can.

Other approaches are to include a checking box for transgender in all their forms whenever one is asked about their gender, to develop Bible courses on homosexuality and the Bible and to offer space for a social support group led by the LGBTQI-organization Orinam. However, due to the diversity in CSI among the churches, opinions on sensitive subjects such as sexual diversity differ. An unanimously shared standpoint on this subject would certainly help to promote social acceptance towards for example sexual minorities, but is difficult to reach. In my interview with Jessica Richards, she told me that religious leaders in CSI and members of the synod, are often more liberal towards subjects as same sex relationships, compared to members of local congregations. Therefore the role and influence of these leaders are essential in promoting a safe environment for minorities. However, acceptance is something that cannot be reached by force, so a top-down approach will not work according to CSI. What is possible however, is to educate people and break stereotypes about people who are not accepted in congregations, communities and society, something that was also mentioned by bishop John Rodrigues in my interview with him. The approach that CSI takes in these matters is characterized by dialogue between all parties in church, where the people who are subject in the discussion, are also involved in

¹³⁷ Logo taken from the website of the Church of South India, <https://www.csisynod.com/csi-synod-logo.php>, accessed July 30, 2019.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ See paragraph 2.3.

the discussion and therefore heard. In this way the situation is avoided where 'they' are talking about 'them', or that people who experience a 'problem' will discuss among each other how to handle the 'other'. This kind of situations however where people are *subjectified* and changed into a given fact, a problem or a mere set of words that need to be discussed, unfortunately are still present in a lot of communities. Instead a better and more empathic and Christian approach is to listen to someone who can share his or her life experiences and pain, as part of a process of mutual understanding.

It becomes clear that the way CSI deals with inclusivity, can be characterized as inclusivity in a practical way, where real people are helped in a real way. The reason of this approach could be explained by a direct need, especially in a country as India with more than one billion inhabitants, where poverty can be a lifelong sentence. Theological analysis and interpretation of dealing with social injustice and inclusivity could however also help understanding why we do what we do and maybe also what we ought to do in the face of injustice.

In the next paragraph we will investigate inclusivism in congregations more deeply and consider the fact that although inclusivity and hospitality will always be present among people and congregations to a certain extent, a minimum of inclusivity is often insufficient.

§4.3. The Metaphor of The Insufficient Minimum

In this paragraph the metaphor of the insufficient minimum will be discussed, to fully grasp the severe impact of (a lack of) inclusivity on people. For this to happen it is necessary to think about the somewhat paradoxical question: *can a minimum be insufficient?* It seems like an unusual question, because a minimum of something would be sufficient, although it is not much, for most people. A minimum amount of food is needed to survive for example and although we may be hungry it is just enough for us, but in the case of inclusivity that is certainly not true. In the case of inclusivity a minimum of inclusivity will probably not ensure the inclusion of people, who already are not accepted. A minimum of inclusivity or hospitality, can only lead to a community where people trust and approach each other if they are deemed (sort of) equals, but if we speak about sexual minorities, women, Dalits or Hijras, that is often not the case. It is important to state here that this minimum is therefore often the minimum of the majority. In almost all contexts it is namely the majority that sets the standard for the group as a whole, even when certain people are not included as part of the majority, which makes them inevitably a minority. Because the standard has been made by the majority, it at least has to be made based on certain elements people in the majority possess, otherwise it cannot be applied to those who made it. In a certain sense the standard is both the product of the majority and the majority itself. Imagine for example that heterosexuality and having children is the norm in a congregation, from this standard it follows that the majority of people at least have to meet these requirements. Because they as majority are the standard, people who do not meet the characteristics of the majority do not meet the standard.

A question one could ask here is if this is a bad thing in itself. Does not meeting the standard of the majority make someone inferior or does it endanger someone? Not necessarily, because people in the majority could also shrug their shoulders and say "*why would it matter that you are not the same as most of us, just be yourself*". Unfortunately, being yourself can imply that your relationship does not meet the requirements to get a blessing in church, or that people who have few things in common with you would rather not speak to you, or in some extreme cases, it can even cost you your life.

Due to the fact that people are confronted by others who are not accepted (by them or other people) as equals, they are forced to cross a social and psychological border if they want to accept them as equals anyway, but to do that, a minimum is certainly insufficient. If we seek for an approach that is sufficient and strong enough to tear down walls of our own making, it surely must be something that forces people to step outside their comfort zone. The fact that it feels unnatural that more is needed than what is seen and felt as normal, is in this case however not a confirmation that it is wrong to do so, but rather proof of the existence of the insufficient minimum. One could ask what the minimum is for those outside of the majority, but why would it be anything else than the minimum of the majority? This whole argument is of course built on the premise that people are in essence equals and have the same rights, although for example appearances can influence greatly how someone is treated. The Hijras in India for example can differ from the traditional view on how a woman or man should look like, which is an element that for some people, is a justified reason to discriminate against them. If however one does not believe or acknowledge that people are equals, the argument of course does not convince, but this creates a slippery slope, where the consequences of it can lead to undesirable outcomes, some of which are well known to humankind. We can conclude therefore that if we want to achieve the social acceptance of certain people (who are normally not accepted), that which is sufficient enough, can only be that which is beyond our comfort zones and that which we are used to, because a minimum is only sufficient to those whom we already accept.

In a sense the metaphor of the insufficient minimum is a way to establish awareness of the application of a golden rule that one can find in many religious contexts, paraphrased as: treat others how you want to be treated by them. The metaphor shows how we interact with others in our community, how the unconscious actions of the majority in one way or another, makes up the (social) standard of how people in a community interact with each other. It is a set of behavioral patterns that, unless someone chooses to break them, will sustain itself. To break those patterns, is to swim against the stream: it feels unnatural, takes a lot of energy and above all a lot of courage.

In the next paragraph our findings in chapter two about inclusivity in academic literature, will be discussed with the tensions that are present in reality surrounding in- and exclusivism.

§4.4. Basic Rights or Blind Spots: Theology and Reality

In this paragraph we will try to look for the contrast with our findings of chapter two, by introducing some examples from the field studies that have, in a certain way, to do with exclusion or inclusion. We will do this by using the *basic internal church right*.¹⁴⁰ The goal of this paragraph is not to describe whether or not certain situations in church are acceptable or not, or that a church needs to change its policy because it does not meet the requirements of this list, but rather to stretch these basic internal church rights as far as possible. To show that there can be a discrepancy, a difference, or an explanation or interpretation dependent on certain persons. That there can be *theological blind spots*, or in other words, that there can be questionable exceptions that we justify because those exceptions challenge the status quo, or do not meet the characteristics or requirements of the majority. The basic internal church rights were:

“1. Everyone has the right of access to the faith and to know Jesus Christ. When the church withholds the gospel within a closed inner circle, or is content to provide religious services only for its members, it violates this right. The church must be missional in its structure to safeguard this right.

2. Everyone has the rights of conscience and freedom of opinion. This means that the church cannot promote its own teachings or beliefs by force. It is only possible to fight for the truth by spiritual means. This does not exclude the necessity for the church, in certain instances, to draw limits for what is said, and done in the church. Such cases should be treated fairly and with broad and open dialogue in the church where theologian and pastors have no monopoly of opinion.

3. Everyone has the right to personal integrity. This means that the church must respect basic legal rights and formalize rights for its employees. Important decisions should not be reached through closed and informal forums, but through open processes governed by legal regulations.

4. Everyone has the right to equality. This means that every Christian has the right to share the gospel in accordance with their gifts. This excludes a hierarchical structure of the church with sharp distinctions between clergy and lay. When someone represents the church, this is to be on behalf of the whole church. The rights to equality is also incompatible with all forms of discrimination based on gender, race, nationality or social position.

5. Everyone has the right to participate in church decisions. The church cannot be governed by clergy alone, but requires participation from all church members. This is realized through a democratic structure in which the members elect their representatives to synodical bodies”.

One could conclude that these principles are ideologically understandable and theologically tenable, but that in reality they are not always maintained or that there are certain thresholds before they are

¹⁴⁰ See p.16.

met. For example, everyone has the right of access to the faith and to know Jesus Christ, but baptism is necessary in many churches, before people are allowed to partake in communion. As bishop John Rodrigues mentioned in the interview I had with him, the practice of homosexuality is a reason for people to be excluded from partaking in communion, so this basic internal church right has in the Roman Catholic Church certain requirements. Of course practicing homosexuals are not withheld from hearing the gospel, but in the religious service surrounding the proclamation of the gospel, there are certain elements in which they cannot participate. Everyone has the rights of conscience and freedom of opinion, but heresies are still acknowledged in many churches. If it comes to making important decisions, church communities do often come together to discuss these issues and listen to as many people as possible. However, problems arise when there are certain people who are not considered to be truly or fully part of the community, or when the people who bear many responsibilities no longer consult the community. An example that is present in many churches is the fact that many church councils will consist of (highly) educated heterosexual men, or that theologians and pastors, as the list mentions, have a decisive vote in certain situations, partly because of their theological expertise, but in other cases because they have a certain hierarchical position. However a counter-example can also be presented, namely the policy of CSI to invite Hijras or sexual minorities to discussion where they are the subject of the discussion.

The third basic internal church law is a difficult one, because in many countries, including India which is a secular country according to state law,^{141,142} there is a separation of church and state, which creates a space where some laws could be viewed as legal because of the freedom of religion. What is considered 'basic legal rights' is not always easy to define, something that is illustrated by the position of Dalits, lower caste people or people from a certain religious background.¹⁴³ For example, if a Dalit Christian wants to partake in communion, but is forced to do this only after all higher caste people have done this, to whom can he or she turn? Although everyone has the right to equality and everyone should have the chance to participate in church decisions, this is not always the case. After all Dalits are treated different than non-Dalits. Justin Pallickal Jose and Vinod Chakkitakudiyil Varghese claim for example that

¹⁴¹ According to the forty second amendment. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20150328040620/http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/amend/amend42.htm>, accessed August 1, 2019.

¹⁴² Although opinions are divided on this point, for example because of certain pro-Hindu tendencies. See for example <https://www.bloombergquint.com/opinion/how-indias-laws-made-it-a-hindu-secular-state> and <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/why-india-is-not-a-secular-state/articleshow/50072294.cms?from=mdr>, both accessed August 1, 2019.

¹⁴³ For examples see <http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201301/caste-26818>, accessed August 1, 2019.

*“The most pronounced forms of discrimination within the Churches are construction of two chapels, one for non-Dalit Christians and other for Dalit Christians. In some Churches, liturgical services are conducted separately for Dalits and non-Dalit followers, while separate seating arrangement within the same chapel is provided in other Churches. Dalits are usually seated at the two aisles or wings of the Church. Even if there are benches or chairs, Dalits are allowed to sit only on floors”.*¹⁴⁴

Another example is the distribution of ecclesial power. Decisions should be made through open processes governed by legal regulations, but how open and legal is it, when there are only six Dalit bishops among the nearly 155 Catholic bishops in India?^{145,146} If people from certain backgrounds are systematically underrepresented (or in some cases systematically excluded) in processes that affect themselves (and others), we cannot speak of an open and fairly regulated system. If we talk about numbers however, it is important to note that research on castes, especially lower castes and the Dalits, can be difficult (one of the reasons is that they are stigmatized),¹⁴⁷ but although exact number are hard to come by, there is no denying that *casteism*,¹⁴⁸ plays an influential role in the Indian church(es).

It can be concluded that although the initial fieldwork did not result in the outcomes I maybe hoped for, it nevertheless forced me to step outside my comfort zone and created an opportunity to discover insights about inclusivity (in the Indian context). The results of the fieldwork showed that exclusion is often still based on traditional and hierarchical structures, even when one would expect that Biblical stories about rejecting expected outcomes in hierarchal cases would counterbalance this. This is partly to blame due to the deeply rooted effects of casteism in Indian culture that reach beyond only Hinduistic religious contexts and partly due to blind spots in theology and congregational praxis. On a more religious and spiritual level it also shows that being Christian does not automatically mean that people always *act* Christian, human flaws exist, but turning a blind eye on injustice is never justified.

¹⁴⁴ Pallickal, J.J., & Varghese, V.C. (2013). Dalit life in catholic church of south India: dimensions of discrimination, *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, vol.6(1), p.99.

¹⁴⁵ For this number see Prakash, L. (2007). Dalit Christians: betrayed by state and church, *Economic and Political weekly*, vol.42(16), p.1411.

¹⁴⁶ The website <http://www.Dalitchristians.com/Html/arulappa.htm>, accessed August 1, 2019, mentions slightly other numbers (and facts), namely that “Out of 156 Catholic bishops in India, 150 bishops belong to the upper caste community. Only 6 bishops belong to Dalit community. Out of 12,500 Catholic priests, only 600 are from Dalit community. 75% members of the Indian Christian community are from Dalit community. 25% of the Upper caste Christians (clergy, religious and laity) have complete control over the Dalit or untouchable Christians”.

¹⁴⁷ National Geographic claims for example, that 2000 was the last year for India’s National Crime Records Bureau for which figures were available of crimes committed against Dalits. See <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/06/indias-untouchables-face-violence-discrimination/>, accessed August 1, 2019.

¹⁴⁸ One of the hereditary social classes in Hinduism that restrict the occupation of their members and their association with the members of other castes, see <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/caste>, accessed September 11, 2019.

Chapter 5: The Influence of Inclusivity on the Church

§5.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will describe how a lack of inclusivity affects the church. This will be done by means of a tripartite analysis based on several main characteristics of the church, namely:

- the church as administrative organization that is managed by a group of people;
- the church as community, where people meet and interact with each other;
- the church as place of worship, where people come together to confess, express and practice their faith, for example by during the Sunday service and other liturgical moments.

Of course one could describe the church in a multitude of ways, each with its own sub-categories. These three categories are chosen however because they summarize the church in a way that is understandable and recognizable for the majority of people and acknowledge both the earthly and the religious side of the church. In the discussion about the relationship between these three sides of the church we will see that they are closely related. In the next three paragraphs we will discuss how (a lack of) inclusivity influences these three sides of the church and how they relate to each other.

§5.2. (Un)Just Systems: The church as an Organization

Although this side of the church is not always known to people who are not members of a church, the church as an organization is important in the study of inclusivity,¹⁴⁹ because as I mentioned before,¹⁵⁰ the image of the church as an organization evokes different thoughts than that of a group of people characterized by a more or less uniform belief(system).

Just like other organizations (although different in nature and goal) the church is a place where meetings are held, financial choices are made, where people work either as paid employees or as a volunteers and where people are needed who keep an overview. In almost all cases this will be done by people who are members of this church. Because the people in a church council, as representatives of the whole community, often take decisions that affect the whole community, it is of great importance that the decisions that are made, are the best possible reflection of the will of the community. In a sense this is comparable with a chosen parliament in a democratic country. However, tensions can arise when the decisions that are being made do not reflect the will of the people who chose the representatives, or when only a part of the people feel represented, or in a worse case when the representative actively

¹⁴⁹ I define church here in the sense of a parish: a single and independent church with its own local members, although it can be part of a larger denomination that is higher in ecclesiastical hierarchy.

¹⁵⁰ See p.19.

makes decisions that disadvantage certain people whom they should represent. Of course we know that someone who always represents everyone does not exist. There will always be people who do not feel represented or who are disappointed in the way a country or organization is managed.

When we switch back to the church, we can say that a church council can never satisfy the needs of everyone in that community. If that is not attainable the next best thing in my opinion is that it can be a goal to do so, combined with a division and policy of the church (council) that is as fair as possible. Inclusivity is of importance here because the constitution of the church council - for example how many men and women there are, if they have an education degree of a certain level and their financial and social background - determines how they see and interpret the world and hence, how they cope with situations they encounter. As mentioned in the literature review, to study inclusivity in churches it to look for dominant patterns that suppress inclusivity, hence the constitution of a church council is of great importance because it is a place of ecclesial and congregational power. If those decisions are made in a place with an unhealthy environment concerning inclusivity, patterns continue to exist and suppress. Where we first focused on the normative question of who *should* influence the church,¹⁵¹ we now focus on the descriptive task. To ask ourselves who should have a decisive vote and voice in church is important, but the next example shows that it is also important to look at the people who *have* a decisive vote and voice in church and why a clear overview of people and their preferences and influence is necessary.

Imagine that in a church council, the treasurer is a highly educated man with a well-paid job and no children. Because of these elements he will be less likely to know how a single mother with two children and who is financially challenged deals with her expenses and therefore he will make different financial choices. Imagine now that two requests are submitted to him. One is from the single mother who wants to organize the yearly day trip for children of the church whose parents have little money to spend. The other request comes from the pastor of the church who claims that the crucifix that is hanging in the church hall needs to be repaired. The pastor however is, due to his position, also in the church council and happens to be just as educated as the treasurer of the church. Apart from which request the treasurer would choose to accept, one can see that certain relationships and interests play a role here. Maybe the treasurer wants to maintain the relationship he has with the pastor for the sake of future cooperation. Maybe he ask himself why the yearly trip for those few children would actually be more important, than the interior of the church? We of course hope that in a Christian community personal relationships and favoritism do not spoil an honest bond between people, but we also know

¹⁵¹ See p.20.

that in reality, Christians too are humans and therefore are capable of making mistakes, both conscious and subconscious.

A good answer to the example above is therefore not easily given, but it illustrates why diversity in a church council is necessary, not only for an equal treatment of people in that congregations, but also for a good understanding about why diversity matters (in a congregation). With this example we can also imagine how deeply certain minorities in churches can be influenced by a lack of inclusivity. Imagine for example that there are no women in a church council, or only people with children, or only heterosexual people, or maybe – in the case of India – no Dalits and only Brahmans? One can resist and protest, but if the system is against you and is upheld by a(n) uninformed majority, appeals and protests will have little to no effect.

Not only does a lack of inclusivity in a community have an effect on how people interact with each other, a lack of inclusivity can create a vicious circle, where some people will always be marginalized or not understood. Or worse: it creates a downward spiral where in time, people are no longer seen at all and are pushed out of the community. Inclusivity and diversity therefore are important elements of the church as an organization.

In the next paragraph we will discuss the church as a community and how it relates to the church as an organization.

§5.3. Looking with a Christ-gaze: The Church as a Community

A more anthropocentric point of view gives the church another meaning. Before we analyze the church from this perspective, let me stress that the church as a community does not automatically mean that we have to see the church only as a religious community. The reason why people are gathered in a specific building on specific times in the week can of course be explained by reference to religious arguments and maybe it sounds superficial to forget that those people are Christians, but in my opinion it is not that peculiar, because we often tend to forget that Christians are still human, even though they may be different in nature.¹⁵² Here practical ecclesiology arises because a practical ecclesiology acknowledges the importance of a living church as the body of Christ, something that counterbalances the more institutional understanding of the church.¹⁵³ As mentioned before theology cannot simply be

¹⁵² See for example Bible passages about how Christians are in this world but not from this world, like John 17:14-17: "I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.", or Philippians 3:20-21: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself", both passages are taken in the English Standard Version, accessed from <https://www.esv.org/>, September 5, 2019.

¹⁵³ Hegstad, H. (2013). *The real church*, p.25.

seen as a doctrinal topic,¹⁵⁴ because if we want to develop an authentic ecclesiology, we have to recognize practices themselves to be bearers of theology.¹⁵⁵ To grow and foster an inclusive church is to look at the church as a community of Christ and to focus on the sometimes imperfect and broken places and persons that exist in that community. The church as an organization has some common grounds with this, but has more to do with the community *on paper*, how it is regulated officially and administratively.

To talk about the church as a community is to talk about the people that constitute that community but also about how they interact and communicate with each other, because the existence of a community implicates that people seek and interact with each other. A community where this does not happen cannot be called a community, but is, in my opinion, rather a group of individuals that just happen to be together at the same place. For every community that exists in society, be it a chess club, a music choir, a swimming team, scouts or any other place where people meet in a social context, the people that come together have to feel at least, together with a personal interest relating to a certain subject, a sense of interest to meet each other. If someone for example wants to join a chess club, he or she at least has to like chess personally, but also need to have a reason to do this together with others who share the same interest and conviction. Someone who does not like chess, or only wants to do this on his or her own, will not have a reason to join a chess club. If someone however has the need to join a community, that person also has to follow certain rules to be able to remain a member of the chess club. These rules can be formal, for example paying your chess contribution, but also informal for example treating others with respect and a spirit of unity. So far, the same is applicable in a general sense to Christians who are part of a congregation, but the content of these 'rules' differs a little bit.

Inclusivity is an underlying element here, because to live as Christians in unity in a community, is not always an easy task. People can differ and tensions can rise in even the most consentient church. To be able to live together and create a space where everyone is allowed to be who he or she is, sometimes touches the limits of what we can accept and can result in excluding certain people, behaviors or habits. Especially in a group where a lot of people have a more or less similar view on certain behaviors or opinions, people who unwillingly or willingly contradict those views, tend to be reprimanded or excluded. To live together is therefore a lifelong exercise of balancing our own views with the rights of the freedom and integrity of others. A community where the only leading principle is how we as an individual perceive and interpret the world will eventually cease to exist or in time be so hollowed out, that there can no longer be talk of a community. Especially in a community where a

¹⁵⁴ Hegstad, H. (2013). *The real church*, p.3.

¹⁵⁵ Watkins, C. (2012). Practical ecclesiology: what counts as theology in studying the church?, in Ward, P. (Ed.). *Perspectives on ecclesiology and ethnography*, Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, p.169.

specific group of people have a decisive vote or a voice that is heard or listened to by many people, the risk of developing a certain view of reality that imposes itself on all other persons in that community is present. In my opinion, not only is patriarchy present in a lot of churches and theologies, but also a kind of *male gaze* is present.¹⁵⁶

Although the term traditionally has to do with sexualizing women in the cinematic world and imposing this view on the people who watch the corresponding movie, in a more general sense it also has to do with framing certain publicly accessible phenomena, often by men, to satisfy their wishes and needs and is in my opinion a direct consequence of patriarchy and a tool to maintain it. In theology, a Christian phenomenon that is publicly accessible and used by everyone,¹⁵⁷ one does not have to search long to realize that theology can and does empower Christian men and male theologians.¹⁵⁸ For example by interpreting certain Biblical passages to favor the position of men or to disadvantage the position of women,¹⁵⁹ or by maintaining the image of God as male, sometimes consciously in the form of the Lord's prayer, or sometimes unconsciously, such is the case in the catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, where it is said about God that *"He is neither man nor woman: he is God. He also transcends human fatherhood and motherhood, although he is their origin and standard no one is father as God is Father"*.¹⁶⁰ In my opinion God is God and although we need language to describe 'Him', no language can summarize what God is. However, the way we choose to describe God, either with (only) male centered images or in another way, certainly impacts *how* we think about God. Although we know that an image only symbolizes that which it refers to and does not coincide completely with it, in time we can grow unconscious of this and the symbol moves from being a symbol to a standard image of that which it actually refers to, for example with referring to God as man. The effect of this is summarized in the famous quote of feminist theologian Mary Daly: *"If God is male then male is God"*.¹⁶¹ We can ask ourselves therefore if it is accidental that male centered metaphors are used most in a church where men hold the most important ecclesial positions. Althaus-Reid even states that *"Women's ministry is such a deep issue that it goes beyond an eventual acceptance of women into priestly roles: it works as a*

¹⁵⁶ "The phrase "male gaze" refers to the frequent framing of objects of visual art so that the viewer is situated in a "masculine" position of appreciation. By interpreting objects of art as diverse as paintings of the nude and Hollywood films, these theorists have concluded that women depicted in art are standardly placed as objects of attraction (much as Burke had lined up women as the original aesthetic object); and that the more active role of looking assumes a counterpart masculine position", see Korsmeyer, C. *Feminist Aesthetics*, in Zalta, E.N. (Ed.). (2017). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed from <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=feminism-aesthetics>, September 9, 2019.

¹⁵⁷ Both academics, clergy and lay people use theology one way or another, so I do not refer here to the academic discipline of theology only, but also to theology as a way of Christian thinking.

¹⁵⁸ Often these men are also straight, white and cisgender.

¹⁵⁹ Such as interpreting 1 Timothy 2:11, about the silence of women, as an argument of Paul to exclude women of ministry.

¹⁶⁰ http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p1s2c1p2.htm, accessed September 9, 2019.

¹⁶¹ Daly, M. (1985). *Beyond God the Father*, Boston: Beacon Press, p.19.

challenge to structures of power, inside and outside the church".¹⁶² It is important to note here that patriarchy and its influence do not necessarily mean that there is some kind of ecclesial conspiracy, but it is rather, just as in secular society, a system that is unconsciously maintained by the majority of people.¹⁶³

Let us return to the goal of this paragraph, the promotion of inclusivity in Christian communities. The tensions and excluding patterns that arise in communities are in my opinion only solvable if we as Christians stop looking at others with self-centered intentions that only favor ourselves or those who have the same view as us. In his analysis of Paul's theology, Miroslav Volf states that "*Paul presumes a centered self, more precisely a wrongly centered self that needs to be de-centered by being nailed to the cross: "I have been crucified with Christ"*".¹⁶⁴ In my opinion this is the core problem when we talk about exclusion, which is in my opinion a form of *incurvatus in se* as Martin Luther calls it:¹⁶⁵ to be centered inwards, focused only on living with oneself, unaware or even worse, willfully ignorant of one's relationship with the world and dependence on other people. Centered inwards because of the threat that the other could be a threat for oneself, for the status quo and thus for the (religious or social) purity of the group. It drives us apart from each other because, as Jürgen Moltmann states "*we accept others, even our neighbors, only on our own turf and view them only with our own preconceptions. And thus we do not at all seek the other but only ourselves in the other*".¹⁶⁶ Looking at others and letting their otherness be the justification for their exclusion, is therefore the consequence of a selfish form of love, that arises from the fear of everything that does not meet one's own standard. Something that should not exist, especially within the heart of Christians, because, as Volf states "*this "de-centered center" of self-giving love – most firmly centered and most radically open – is the doorkeeper deciding about the fate of otherness at the doorstep of the self*".¹⁶⁷ Without this de-centered center, the heart is bound to reject others and give rise to the "*impenetrable barriers that prevent a creative encounter with the other*".¹⁶⁸

Instead of gazing at others with a self-centered view, I therefore suggest that we look with a *Christ-gaze*. To see in those who differ from us not an enemy, but rather the Samaritan woman, the leper or the desperate centurion, who despite their otherness and position, approached Jesus Christ. By using a Christ-gaze we can promote an inclusive environment for all people because with this gaze differences

¹⁶² Althaus-Reid, M. (2004) *From feminist theology to indecent theology*, London: SCM Press, p.27.

¹⁶³ However, those who have a decisive vote in such a system, will probably not limit their power without a struggle, for the sake of a just system, just as in many other systems with oppressive elements.

¹⁶⁴ Volf, M. (1996). *Exclusion & embrace*, p.69.

¹⁶⁵ Johnston, M. (2009). *Saving God – Religion after idolatry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.88.

¹⁶⁶ Moltmann, J. (1978). *The open church – Invitation to a messianic life-style*, London: SCM Press, p.29.

¹⁶⁷ Volf, M. (1996). *Exclusion & embrace*, p.71.

¹⁶⁸ Volf, M. (1996). *Exclusion & embrace*, p.67.

or otherness are no longer an excuse to exclude people. We can therefore speak of a *spirituality of inclusivity* if we look with a Christ-gaze. A Christ-gaze will help us to include those who we see, by not following our initial feelings and thoughts of strangeness as a threat to the church, but as an invitation of God to spread the Word. With a Christ-gaze we will *need* to see the other as an authentic other with an intrinsic value, both for the church, as for us as a way to understand that the other is only strange in our own eyes, but not in the eyes of God.

If Jesus Christ looked at the desperate centurion and accepted him, even though he was part of the oppressors, then those who call themselves followers of Christ, cannot do anything other than to look with the same eyes to others as their Savior did. In the next paragraph we shall examine the relationship between (a lack of) inclusivity and the church as a place of worship.

§5.4. Spiritual Inclusion: The Church as Place of Worship

When people think about the church, one of the first things they think about will be the church as a place of worship. It is a place where people as individuals but also as a community pay tribute to God. It is therefore important to underline that there is a difference between the church as a building and place of worship, because the building is not the community itself but rather the place where the community gathers. In my definition Christians rather are the church as body of Christ, than that they go to church. The fact that we call the place where people are gathered on Sunday morning a church, is in my opinion only because of the fact that the church is present there on that moment. In everyday language the building is of course indicated as and named a church, but we probably would not call it a church if Christians were not using it as a place of worship. Therefore the church as a community and the church as a place of worship are closely related to each other but also differ.

Let us focus us on the church as a place of worship. What does inclusivity have to do with this side of the church? Is a church service not a public activity where anybody can participate in? In a certain sense it is, but during worship there can be elements that are not entirely inclusive, be it on purpose or not. Cases where tensions can arise in worship are for example:

- In the prayers of thanksgiving it is addressed that we need to be thankful for good health, while there are people in the community who have an (incurable) sickness;
- In a church with many young members some older members cannot hear everything because there is no audio induction loop;
- The examples in a sermon or in prayers are only applicable to certain people or to people from a certain background, such as men, people with children or relatively rich people;
- During a service God is only mentioned as male and illustrated with examples that apply to fathers.

One could say that most of these examples lead back to a narrow focus during services on a specific part of the community or to experiences that only certain (privileged) people have. Imagine that there is a family in a community who are financially challenged and who have barely enough money to survive. For them it can be difficult to hear about the instruction to adhere to the giving of tithes. Imagine for example that the minister only clarifies a Biblical passage with examples that concern men or fathers, women or mothers could then find it difficult to relate to certain experiences. Of course one could try to imagine oneself in a certain situation or position, but a lot of men would probably find it difficult to imagine the experience of giving birth and how this can have an impact of your life. On the one hand this example shows that our language is limited in describing reality, but inclusive language is nevertheless an important condition to inclusive liturgy. Language can even lead to *symbolic exclusion* according to Volf, especially in the form of dysphemism, words that dehumanize the other, because once they are dehumanized “*not only does exclusion become justified but necessary because not to exclude appears morally culpable*”.¹⁶⁹ The Dalits are a fitting example of this phenomenon, because by calling them Dalits,¹⁷⁰ the justification for their discrimination is set. The same can of course be said about the derogatory names of other minorities which also carry certain prejudices and dehumanizing elements.

Because the church as a place of worship is a place that welcomes everybody in the community (the invitation often extends to people outside of it), it also has to reach out spiritually to everybody it welcomes, otherwise a division of participators and spectators is created. The term *spiritual inclusivity* is the term that I would like to use here: if a Christian community thankfully professes their faith towards God in a service, it should be conscious of how they do this. It would be a spiritual shortcoming if a community, represented for example by a minister or other person, thanked God for their good health

¹⁶⁹ Volf, M. (1996). *Exclusion & embrace*, p.76.

¹⁷⁰ A unilateral translation is difficult, but the meaning of the word has connotations with ‘broken’ and ‘divided’, but is also used to describe communities that have been subjected to untouchability (which has to do with (ritual) purity laws in Hinduism), see Kanmony, J.C. (2010). *Dalits and Tribes of India*, Delhi: Mittal Publications, p.198.

while certain persons in their community are fighting for their lives. Of course this is an intense example but other, more hidden examples can also be found. Can a south-Indian church for example pray against discrimination in the world, but force Dalit members to take Communion only after Brahman people in the church went first? Can an American church pray for healthy and happy relationships for everyone in their church, but fail to give the homosexual couple in their church a blessing over their marriage? Can Roman Catholic churches pray against the wage gap in the financial world, but reject women in their church becoming ministers? Can European Christians pray for the wellbeing of Christians in the other side of the world, but deem Western theology superior?

Apart from the fact that people could defend these examples by using certain Biblical or traditional arguments, one can see here that tensions of spiritual hypocrisy can arise between what we pray for and what we practice. Of course one can defend the rejecting of blessing same-sex relationships, but can you then pray for the wellbeing of all relationships in your community? If you would agree with that, one could say that this is in fact a form of hidden discrimination, because you do not want to pray for all relationships: you only want to pray for those whom you deem good enough, a Christ-gaze is not present here: it is your own moral standard that has ascended to become spiritual law.

Moreover the church as place of worship is especially important because it is often the only place, where a congregation worships as a community. Of course each member of the congregation has his or her individual preferences and traditions when it comes to day to day liturgical life, such as praying before diner, but to keep the liturgical life of a community alive and understand the reason why it is necessary for Christians to remain brothers and sisters in Christ, it is necessary that the whole congregation worships together whenever this is possible.

One of my favorite examples that illustrates this is that of the Christian community as burning coals. When coals are burning individually and are placed together they keep each other warm and burning, but once an individual coal is taken away and placed on its own, it quickly loses its heat and becomes ash. Whenever certain people in a congregation are cut from their community, for example because of exclusive liturgical language or a toxic social environment, they too will have to keep themselves burning, something that eventually will lead to them leaving the congregation, or losing their faith entirely. Both in the liturgical and theological context the narrowing down of the community to a specific group of people results in excluding certain people. This does not always happen consciously, but it does happen. Although there is some literature surrounding inclusive church services or worship that takes

into account the experiences of minorities,¹⁷¹ it is still an area that could benefit greatly from further research.

It is therefore necessary that the church as place of worship is a place where the community as a whole feels welcomed. You can come together as a community, but not celebrate as a community, or as Goddard describes it bluntly but true “*The people are there in body but the spirit seems to be absent*”.¹⁷² Spiritual inclusion is therefore a requirement for professing your faith as a community. A great deal of responsibility here is with those who lead a church service, often the minister of the congregation, but this does not mean that individual responsibility does not exist. To be a community of and in Christ is to look out for each other, especially when you come together to worship.

§5.5. A new vision on congregational inclusivity

In this last paragraph of the last chapter of this study, the definition of (congregational) inclusivity that was put forward as a working definition in this study, can be revised with the conclusion that have been drawn up till now.

It can be concluded now that the definition lacked an important element, namely the relationship between congregational inclusivity and the influence that the people in that congregation and their corresponding theological beliefs and spiritual praxis have on that congregational state-of-being. The original definition spoke of a *social environment*, something that in my opinion is not completely wrong, but rather lacking in depth, because it does not recognize that the building stones for this environment are largely supplied by the socio-theological identity of the people living in it. In a way this environment is the product of the people living in it, but it also has an existence of its own that in turn influences people. Congregational inclusivity is therefore the product of a reciprocal influence between the socio-theological context in a congregation as well as the socio-theological identity and praxis of the people living in this context. Both influence each other and in a way, one could say that congregational inclusivity is influenced by, on the one hand, the socio-theological decisions and beliefs of present-day people and on the other hand by the present-day product of the past action and decision of people in

¹⁷¹ See for example Cherry, K., & Sherwood, Z.O. (Eds.). (1995). *Equal Rites: Lesbian and Gay Worship, Ceremonies, and Celebrations*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.; Shakespeare, S. (2009). *Prayers for an Inclusive Church*, New York: Church Publishing.; Ramshaw, G. (1996). *Liturgical language: keeping it metaphoric, making it inclusive – American Essays in Liturgy*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press.; Elhorst, W., & Van der Woude, S.J. (Eds.). (2018). *Zie de regenboog en prijs zijn maker – Een handreiking voor roze vieringen*, Utrecht: Kok.

¹⁷² Goddard, G. (2008). *Space for grace*, p.94.

that congregational context. I therefore suggest a revised definition of congregational inclusivity, with the revised elements in bold, which is:¹⁷³

“the socio-theological environment within a congregational context, which - as the product of a reciprocal influence between the present and past socio-theological identity and spiritual praxis of congregants and that congregation - gives all people belonging to that congregation, the same ecclesial rights and practical chances, to – if they desire so out of their own initiative – be actively involved in formal and informal activities of that congregation; and to be connected to both the social and liturgical life of the community belonging to that congregation”.

With this new definition, which I hope will inspire future researchers to further investigate this exciting theme, we now turn to the conclusion of this study.

¹⁷³ One could in theory add to the definition that the future congregation and congregants will also be influenced by the present, but this already follows from the fact that the past influenced the present. This is just the result from the temporal perspective in which the situation is approached.

Conclusion

Now that different aspects of inclusivity have been discussed and we have focused on both the practical and theoretical consequences of it, we can return to the research question of this study *“What role does inclusivity play in congregations and how is this experienced by sexual minorities”?*

It can be concluded that inclusivity touches central theological and sociological topics in the church and that the effects of (a lack of) inclusivity deeply influence people in congregations, both people who are discriminated against due to a lack of inclusivity, as well as the community as a whole. Those who will be disadvantaged by a lack of inclusivity are often sexual minorities and people with alternative gender orientations, but also women and people who come from a lower financial-social background in society are influenced by it. This is often in the form of liturgical or social (partial) exclusion or unequal opportunities and limited involvement in the processes of decision-making. However, the community as a whole can also be influenced by the exclusion of a part of the community, for example because of the experiences that minorities have, that potentially could enrich the community as a whole if the space for reciprocity would be present. It is also concluded that the core of these exclusive tendencies is both practical and theoretical. Therefore to promote congregational inclusivity both a practical and theoretical focus is necessary. Practical elements that promote inclusivity are safeguarding the involvement of the whole community in the process of decision making, something that the Church of South India actively tries to pursue, but also making sure that the organs that have decisive power in congregations are diverse enough to represent the largest possible part of the community. If this does not happen, a vicious circle can be created that excludes certain people or groups in the community.

The theoretical elements that promote inclusivity have to do with a greater awareness of possible theological blind spots that contain exclusive elements or tendencies. To reach this it is necessary to look for dominant powers in theology and ask oneself who could benefit from that specific theology and whom are disadvantaged by it? Feminist theology and queer theology have earned their stripes here and have relevant questions and language for other fields of theology regarding inclusivity, but can also create new problems and challenges if only the elimination of exclusivism is being pursued, instead of creating an inclusive environment for communities as a whole.

A solution for eliminating exclusion or for promoting inclusivity in congregational life is not easily found. This is partly due to the fact that exclusive tendencies can be culturally and religiously hardwired into congregational life, partly because of theological blind spots and partly because of human tendencies to reject unfamiliarities in their direct surrounding, something that is reinforced when this process takes places in groups like congregations.

In my opinion theology can help people to overturn these challenges and prejudices, but only on the condition that those people are capable of placing their trust in someone other than themselves. For an authentic spirituality of inclusivity it is necessary that Christians cleanse themselves by eliminating the tendencies to rule over others, for example by forcing their normative view as a guiding principle on others. This statement sounds like a paradox, because it is a normative view in itself, but is meant as a way to push people towards a realization of interdependence towards each other and dependence on God.

Theology can push people towards this realization by showing that in the Bible strangeness is never a threat to the status quo, but that we rather encounter a God there who shatters the status quo with strangeness to create new lives. It is the status quo that is strange to God, because it threatens the life of those who always comes last. It is therefore that the church is strange in the world, because the heart that keeps the church a living body is the inclusion of those who are rejected by the world. To keep a living heart as a Christian can therefore only be done if one is facing outside, looking out to the world, where strange people suffer, not on the inside or being concerned with maintaining the purity of the church. When a status quo is growing in the church it is no longer Christian love for the O/other that reigns, but rather a perverse form of self-love.

My journey to India and my conversations with all the different and unique people there taught me therefore that is the O/other that keeps us living. So often our own desires and thoughts, sometimes honest and devout but sometimes also perverse and fearful, are the reasons for choosing for ourselves and therefore excluding others. If we want to promote inclusivity we have to renounce ourselves and pray to God. To be in communion with others is to give yourself over to others, to be truly free of chains yourself, is to break the chains of others! If we want to be a community who is one in Christ, the awareness of interdependence has to run deep.

For future research I suggest that explorations on inclusivity in the fields of ecclesiology and congregational studies could enhance the understanding of practical solutions and concrete forms even more. Research in the field of systematic theology on inclusivity could benefit our understanding of corresponding (unconscious) exclusive tendencies and dominant patterns. Therefore the relationship between theology and concrete exclusive practices in congregations needs to be a key element in future research. More research on a spirituality of inclusion or how to stimulate spiritual awareness and spiritual praxis in congregations would be highly advisable, because this is a key to day-to-day inclusion, which in theory could be a way to implement a permanent inclusive attitude.

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Appendix

Document of Informed Consent 1:

I hereby declare that:

- ❖ I have been interviewed by Stijn van der Woude (from now on: researcher), as part of his research and masterthesis at the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam.
- ❖ I participated in the interview because I wanted to participate.
- ❖ Everything that I told the researcher and that was recorded in the interview is the truth.
- ❖ The interview was done in a professional and academic integer way.
- ❖ The researcher did not pay or benefit me in any way as to stimulate or convince me to take part in the interview and research, or to give specific answers.
- ❖ The recorded interview may be used in full form and without any limitation of the content, except for parts that have been selected and chosen before publication of the research.
- ❖ I understand that all data that can be characterized as personal, or that can be used to reveal the identity of the interviewee, will be anonymized to a reasonable extent.
- ❖ I agree that the way and extent of the anonymization of my recorded interview will be decided by the researcher, as long as my personal identity and data is protected.
- ❖ I understand that once the research is finished, I can not make any changes in the data I supplied to the researcher in the interview, or withdraw the permission I gave to use this data.
- ❖ I give permission to the researcher to store this document in a safe place.
- ❖ This document is signed by myself with my own signature.

• Name: Mehak Sharif , Rupali Sable

Date: 28 May 2019

Place: Mumbai

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Mehak', written over a horizontal line.

Document of Informed Consent 2:

Document of Informed Consent

I hereby declare that:

- ❖ I have been interviewed by Stijn van der Woude (from now on: researcher), as part of his research and masterthesis at the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam.
- ❖ I participated in the interview because I wanted to participate.
- ❖ Everything that I told the researcher and that was recorded in the interview is the truth.
- ❖ The interview was done in a professional and academic integer way.
- ❖ The researcher did not pay or benefit me in any way as to stimulate or convince me to take part in the interview and research, or to give specific answers.
- ❖ The recorded interview may be used in full form and without any limitation of the content, except for parts that have been selected and chosen before publication of the research.
- ❖ I understand that all data that can be characterized as personal, or that can be used to reveal the identity of the interviewee, will be anonymized to a reasonable extent.
- ❖ I agree that the way and extent of the anonymization of my recorded interview will be decided by the researcher, as long as my personal identity and data is protected.
- ❖ I understand that once the research is finished, I can not make any changes in the data I supplied to the researcher in the interview, or withdraw the permission I gave to use this data.
- ❖ I give permission to the researcher to store this document in a safe place.
- ❖ This document is signed by myself with my own signature.

Name: JESSICA RICHARD Date: 17/5/19 Place: CHINA] Signature: Jessica Richard

DATAMANAGEMENTPLAN

1. Algemeen

NAAM STUDENT: Stijn Jephtha van der Woude

NAMEN SCRIPTIEBEGELEIDER(S):

Dr. Rein Brouwer

Prof. dr. Heleen Zorgdrager

DATUM: 06-01-2020

VERSIE: Goedgekeurde eindversie

2. Algemene gegevens over het onderzoek / scriptie-onderwerp

(WERK)TITEL ONDERZOEK / SCRIPTIE: The Other and others as heart of the church – A theological study on inclusivity, exemplified by the policy of the Church of South India

KORTE OMSCHRIJVING VAN ONDERZOEK EN ONDERZOEKSMETHODE(N) :

This study discusses the theological meaning of inclusivity, specifically focused on how inclusivity influences the life of people in Christian congregations and the church as an organization, community and place of worship. Sexual minorities are taken in this study as a *pars pro toto* to make a clear illustration of how a lack of inclusivity problematizes the life of people in congregations in different aspects. This study is done in an international context, due to the fact that fieldwork has been done in India, with a focus on the policy regarding inclusivity of the Church of South India.

The research question in this study is “*What role does inclusivity play in congregations and how is this experienced by sexual minorities*”. This question is answered by the use of a literature review, the creation of a conceptual framework, fieldwork in the form of interviews and contextual exploration, an analysis of the boundaries of (congregational) inclusivity by contrasting the literature review and the findings of the fieldwork and lastly a theological elaboration on how inclusivity affects three central sides of the church.

TYPEN ONDERZOEKSDATA:

Transcripties van interviews (geluidsopnamen), verslagen van afspraken en bezoeken, vragenlijsten en literatuur.

PERIODE WAARIN DATA VERZAMELD WORDEN:

November 2018 tot en met mei 2019

3. Technische aspecten

HARD- EN SOFTWARE:

Externe harde schijf, Microsoft Word en Adobe Reader (PDF).

BESTANDSFORMATEN:

.Doc; .pdf. en .mp3.

OMVANG VAN DE DATA (SCHATTING IN MB/GB/TB):

3 gigabte.

OPSLAG DATA TIJDENS ONDERZOEK:

Verschillende cloud-systemen (Dropbox en Google Drive), email en een externe harde schijf.

OPSLAG DATA NA AFLOOP ONDERZOEK:

In ZIP-format op eigen laptop of externe harde schijf.

4. Verantwoordelijkheden

BEHEER DATA GEDURENDE HET ONDERZOEK:

Alle data tijdens het onderzoek is door de onderzoeker zelf bewaard. Voor fysieke verantwoording zie vorige paragraaf, voor academisch ethische verantwoording zie de desbetreffende paragraaf in het onderzoek (paragraaf 3.5: Normativity and Research Integrity). De thesisbegeleiders kregen sporadisch per mail delen van het onderzoek toegestuurd.

BEHEER DATA NA AFLOOP ONDERZOEK:

Dit wordt door de onderzoeker zelf bewaard in een ZIP-formaat op een externe harde schijf.

5. Juridische en ethische aspecten

EIGENAAR DATA:

De onderzoeker zelf. De mensen die zijn geïnterviewd in het kader van het onderzoek hebben door middel van een document van informed consent of door middel van mondelingen of anderzijds schriftelijke toezegging, afstand gedaan van eigenaarschap van de door hun verstrekte informatie.

PRIVACYGEVOELIGE DATA: JA / NEE

Sommige informatie is privacygevoelig, maar door alle betrokken partijen met toestemming afgegeven. Bovendien is zoveel mogelijk informatie die kan leiden tot herkenning van individuen vermeden in het onderzoek zelf. Enkele keren zijn wel de namen genoemd, maar altijd met toestemming van betrokken partij.

INDIEN JA: HOE WORDEN ZAKEN ALS VEILIGE OPSLAG EN TOESTEMMING VAN BETROKKEN PERSONEN EN/OF ORGANISATIES GEREGELD?

Zie paragraaf 4 en 5A.

6. Overige zaken

-

=====

(In te vullen door thesisbegeleider:)

Goedgekeurd

Niet goedgekeurd, omdat: _____

Naam, handtekening: _____

Datum: _____

=====

TOELICHTING

Ad 1. Algemeen

Noteer de datum waarop het datamanagementplan is ingevuld en noteer de versie bijv. 1.0.

In de loop van het onderzoek kunnen mogelijk zaken als de onderzoeksmethode wijzigen of bij nader inzien toch privacygevoelige issues gaan spelen. Wijzig dan naast de betreffende paragraaf ook de datum en het versienummer.

Vul alle velden in, of vermeld expliciet: niet van toepassing/n.v.t.

Ad 2. Algemene gegevens over het onderzoek / scriptie-onderwerp

Geef een korte omschrijving van het onderzoek en beschrijf welke onderzoeksmethoden gebruikt gaan worden.

Omschrijf het type onderzoeksdata, zoals schriftelijke bronnen (archieven, literatuur), transcripties, interviews (bijv. beeld- en geluidsopnamen), verslagen, vragenlijsten, enquêteresultaten, afbeeldingen.

Vermeld ook als het bijvoorbeeld ruwe data of afgeleide data betreft.

Ad 3. Technische aspecten

Wordt specifieke hardware gebruikt naast pc/laptop? Wordt specifieke software gebruikt bijv. voor data-analyse? Bestandsformaten kunnen bijvoorbeeld zijn: DOCX, TXT, XLSX, PDF, WAV, JPG.

De omvang van bestanden kan weergegeven worden in megabyte, gigabyte of terabyte. Geef in ieder geval een globale schatting indien bij aanvang van het onderzoek nog niet precies de omvang te bepalen is.

Sla data tijdens het onderzoek op de juiste (veilige) locatie op. Bijvoorbeeld privacygevoelige data op de Home-directory van de Vrije Universiteit. De H-schijf van de VU is overigens altijd de meest veilige opslaglocatie. Sla privacygevoelige data nooit in de cloud op. Gebruik clouddiensten uitsluitend voor het opslaan van standaard data, zoals een wetenschappelijk artikel in PDF. USB-sticks en de eigen laptop zijn eveneens ongeschikt voor opslag van (privacygevoelige) data. Deze kunnen immers verloren of gestolen worden of beschadigd raken.

Denk ook aan een goede, veilige en regelmatige back-up van de versies van je masterscriptie.

Na afloop van het onderzoek kunnen data gepubliceerd worden als onderdeel van de masterscriptie, bijvoorbeeld in een bijlage. Dat geldt met name voor kleine dataverzamelingen, die geen privacygevoelige gegevens bevatten. Via de bibliotheek PThU kunnen (geanonimiseerde) data als losse bestanden bij de scriptie worden gearchiveerd. Via de bibliotheek PThU kunnen bestanden met privacygevoelige data worden gearchiveerd in een speciaal daarvoor beschikbare data-opslag faciliteit van de VU (ArchStor/DarkStor).

Ad 4. Verantwoordelijkheden

In het kader van wetenschappelijke integriteit is het belangrijk om te beschrijven op welke wijze data veilig opgeslagen zijn en beheerd worden. Daarmee wordt o.a. de controleerbaarheid van de data gewaarborgd. Zie ook de Nederlandse Gedragscode Wetenschappelijke Integriteit 2018 (te vinden op www.pthu.nl/Onderzoek-PThU/Academic_Integrity/).

Geef aan wie de data tijdens het onderzoek beheert. Dat zal veelal de student zelf zijn. Heeft echter de scriptiebegeleider ook toegang? Na afloop kan de student het beheer overdragen aan de PThU (bibliotheek).

Laat ook geïnterviewden weten, hoe (privacygevoelige) data worden beheerd en door wie.

Ad 5. Juridische en ethische aspecten

Omschrijf wie (mede-)eigenaar is van de data.

Indien er sprake is van privacygevoelige gegevens is het noodzakelijk zeer zorgvuldig om te gaan met de verzamelde onderzoeksdata. Denk daarbij aan persoonsgegevens (naam, adres, leeftijd, geslacht), maar ook aan het BSN of religieuze overtuiging.

Sla deze dus altijd veilig op (zie ad 3). Voorkom datalekken! Laat geïnterviewden weten hoe met de data wordt omgegaan. Vraag hen via een zogeheten *Informed consent-formulier* vooraf om toestemming te geven voor het onderzoek en het gebruik en de opslag van de onderzoeksdata. Geef aan dat je de verzamelende data uitsluitend gebruikt voor jouw onderzoek.

Anonimiseer zo veel mogelijk de data.

Ad. 6 Overige zaken

Vermeld hier onderwerpen die niet ondergebracht konden worden bij eerdere onderdelen.

Overleg te allen tijde met je begeleiders indien zaken niet helder zijn, je twijfelt over de juiste wijze van data verzamelen of over het opslaan van data. Of vraag advies aan de bibliotheek PThU.

PThU, Amsterdam/Groningen

(bestandsversie: 20190703)