Journal of Counseling and Gospel
「복음과 상담」 제22권 2호(2014): 43-79

False Self, True Self, and Self-Denial: The Contribution of Object-Relations Theory to Christian Self-Denial

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【Abstract】

The act of self-denial in the Christianity seems to be in conflict with the idea of self-fulfillment. True self-denial however leads to self-fulfillment in God. Within the framework of true and false self based on Donald W. Winnicott's theory and Christian theology, this paper addresses the reality that while self-denial by the false self results in distorted practices of denial, the practice of self-denial motivated by the true self rather achieves self-fulfillment. In self-denial by the false self, people feel empty, though it may help them to adapt to a religious environment. The defensive reaction of the false self has a tendency to reveal itself with compliant, aggressive, and evasive self-denial. However, the true self in the practice of self-denial can fulfill the roles that God empowers to the self, find spiritual satisfaction, and feel real in the restored relationships with God and others. Given that pastoral environments provide "good-enough mothering" and "responsible fatherly care" for a psychologically and spiritually safe place to reveal the true self, an individual can face his/her reality of false self-denial and engage in true self-denial. The true self then can practice mortification of sin and self-giving love through surrendering to God within community, and eventually accomplish self-fulfillment, which completes the purpose of God and glorifies God.

Key words: false self, true self, self-denial, self-fulfillment, object-relations

• 논문 투고일: 2014년 10월 14일 • 논문 수정일: 2014년 11월 9일
• 게재 확정일: 2014년 11월 14일
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Ⅰ. Introduction

In Christianity, age-old debates over denial of self and love of self still exist today within a similar context between self-denial and self-fulfillment. The act of self-denial in the Christian community seems to be in conflict with the idea of self-fulfillment in modern society. In fact, many Christians practicing self-denial often confess that they frequently feel "unreal"[1] or artificial in their religious life. This feeling hinders people from having the confidence needed to achieve self-fulfillment in spite of many religious and social successes.

What is the cause of these experiences? Can the virtue of self-denial be compatible with self-fulfillment? Synergistic integration of psychological understanding of the self and Christian wisdom in terms of pastoral care hold vast implications for finding the answer and managing the tension between self-denial and self-fulfillment. Within the framework of true and false self, this paper addresses the reality that while self-denial by the false self results in distorted practices of denial, the practice of self-denial motivated by the true self rather achieves self-fulfillment. Based on Donald W. Winnicott's object-relations theory and theological insights about the false and true self, I will explore the reality of the practice of self-denial and will briefly provide an approach consisting of the use of pastoral care for true self-denial toward self-fulfillment.

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1) The term "feeling (un)real" is borrowed from Donald W. Winnicott's works. Winnicott argues that people feel unreal when the false self pathologically takes the initiative from the true self. Unfortunately, many Christians I have met during my pastoral care often use exactly the same term "feeling unreal." See Donald W. Winnicott, "Ego Distortion in terms of True and False Self," in *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (London: Karnac Books, 1990), 148.

II. Body

1. An Important Tension: Self-denial versus Self-fulfillment

Christianity has emphasized denial of self. Self-denial is an essential Christian tradition exhorting believers to live a new life by repenting of their sins and disposing of any greed or selfish ambitions. Basil the Great teaches that "we must deny ourselves and take up the cross of Christ and thus follow him. Self-denial involves the entire forgetfulness of the past and the surrender of one's will… [and] readiness to die for Christ."[2] St. Augustine professes the necessity of self-denial in condemning the act of "self-love reaching the point of contempt for God."[3] Calvin also says that the sum of the Christian life is the denial of self.[4] Self-denial for the sake of God within the context of Christianity has been customarily viewed as

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2) Basil the Great, "The Long Rules", *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 9:246-247.

3) Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1972), 14.28. Augustine, however, distinguishes self-love, which is a fundamental root of all sin, from "right self-love", loving only indirectly oneself who lives in God by refraction through the love of God, by loving in God. Cf. Gerald Schlabach, *For the Joy Set Before Us: Augustine and Self-Denying Love* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 44-45; Oliver O' Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 96.

4) John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1973), 3.7. For Calvin, self-denial is "the suppression and annihilation of all evil desires, affections, and thoughts of the sinful nature and the corresponding sacrifice of ourselves to God." See Peter J. Leithart, "Stoic Elements in Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life, Part II. Mortification," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65, no. 2(Fall 1993): 195.

"the happiest moments" and "pleasure," for one is always in the presence of God.[5] Indeed, as Ernest Kurtz has noted, self-denial has existed at the center of traditional Christian spirituality.[6]

It is noted, however, that within the religious tradition underlying self-denial, many Christian believers seem to fail to achieve true happiness or pleasure. One youth in his twenties confesses that when he follows the principle of self-denial, he often feels he is losing himself and being dragged out for church events and volunteer work. Another deacon complains that she is suffering since she cannot vividly feel real in her religious life. Although well-adapted to society and community and sometimes even earning high intellectual, social and religious achievements, some Christians frequently have a sense that their lives are artificial and void of meaning. Their common issue is a feeling of failure in having a graphic sense of a real life and genuine spiritual pleasure from their practice of self-denial.

With regard to this condition, along with the contemporary development of psychology and social science, some scholars reject the concept of self-denial.[7] They consider it a bigoted and violent

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5) Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1941), 503-504.

6) Ernest Kurtz, a religion historian, summarized that the traditional Christian spirituality has three approaches: imitation, asceticism, and spiritual direction. The common main factor of the three approaches is self-denial. See Ernest Kurtz, "The Historical Context", in *Integrating Spirituality into Treatment: Resources for Practitioners*, ed. William R. Miller (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1999), 23-24.

7) For most psychological therapies, from Psychoanalysis, Transactional Analysis therapy and Cognitive-Behavior therapy to current Solution-Centered therapy, and Positive psychology, therapists fundamentally center their therapeutic principle on the self-function involving self-concept, self-instruction and self-control. Cf. Michele Baldwin, *Use of Self in Therapy* (New York: Haworth Press, 2000); Pamela Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom: Use of the Self in Pastoral Care*

tradition impeding self-fulfillment. Eugen Drewmann, a German theologian and psychotherapist, vigorously attacks the traditional Christian spirituality of self-sacrifice and self-abuse. He sees such Christianity as "masochistic self-denial" mainly responsible for the neurotic personality structure of many contemporary Christians.[8] The nonviolent perspectives held, for example, by Joanne C. Brown, Rebecca Parker, Rita N. Brock, J. Denny Weaver and Stephen Finlan, also point out that Christianity, particularly the atonement theory leading to the practice of bearing a cross and self-denial, leaves room to justify self-hatred, self-abuse, and even domestic abuse.[9]

Accompanying these long standing criticisms against self-denial, contemporary spirituality has called for a shift to the pursuit of self-fulfillment. The fact that psychological "how-to" books, self-help programs and seminars are becoming more and more popular gives us a glimpse into the current change in spirituality. E. Brooks Holifield, describing a history of pastoral care in America, analyzes that the ideal of self-denial in Christian spirituality is moving to self-

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and Counseling (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 2004).

8) Kurt Remele, "Self-Denial or Self-Actualization?: Therapeutic Culture and Christian Ethics," *Theology* 99, no. 793 (January 1997): 19-20.

9) They agree that traditional Christianity is "an abusive theology" implying "divine child abuse" and "glorifying suffering." God, from their perspectives, is even seen as 'sadistic and bloodthirsty.' Stephen Finlan's statement recapitulates their main idea: "[Traditional] Atonement is a millstone around the neck of Christianity, preventing further advance in psychological health and family ethics." Stephen Finlan, *Options on Atonement in Christian Thought* (Collegeville, MN.: Michael Glazier, 2007), 117; Joanne C. Brown & Rebecca Parker, *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse : A Feminist Critique*, eds. Joanne Carlson Brown & Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 26; Rita N. Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 56; J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001); Cynthia S. W. Crysdale, *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001), 115.

love; self-love to self-culture; self-culture to self-mastery and finally to self-realization.[10] Today, as Phillip Rieff earlier anticipated, Christianity becomes indeed a "self-therapeutic" culture which emphasizes individual self-fulfillment and inner growth as the highest values and the predominant orientation for consideration.[11]

However, this recent spiritual tendency of the therapeutic culture in turn raises critical voices; critics claim that the approach which overemphasizes the self has contributed in a large part to the advancement of narcissism, selfishness, and devotion to self improvement, self interest and personal success.[12] Thus, in therapeutic Christianity, the imitation of Christ through self-denial is at risk of being simply replaced by a gospel of self-fulfillment. Remele's analysis nicely exposes the tension between traditional Christian values and the therapeutic trend: "the traditional Christian virtues of altruism, self-sacrifice and concern for the common good have been given at best a subordinate status below the therapeutic values and fashionable first world preoccupations of self-actualization, self-acceptance and self-esteem."[13]

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10) E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville, TN.: Abingdon Press, 1983), 12.

11) Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Remele, "Self-Denial or Self-Actualization", 18-25.

12) With regard to this trend, Christopher Lasch has labeled American society as a culture of narcissism. Sympathizing with Lasch's evaluation on this culture, Donald Capps also criticizes the self-centered culture and provides, in response to the narcissism, a meaningful pastoral care perspective related to sin and the sense of shame. See Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1991); Donald Capps, *The Depleted Self: Sin in a Narcissistic Age* (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 1993).

13) Remele, "Self-Denial or Self-Actualization", 22.

The tension between traditional Christian values and recent therapeutic values emphasizes the important task of pastoral theology and care: the task of accounting for and wisely applying wisdom about the relationship between self-denial and self-fulfillment. Why do many Christians practicing self-denial frequently fail to experience a sense of feeling real or spiritual pleasure? Is it possible to resolve the tension between self-denial and self-fulfillment?

Based on the understanding of the writings of Donald W. Winnicott and Christian theology, I will analyze the reality of the practice of self-denial in the context of Christianity, exploring the dynamics of the false and true self, and briefly propose the use of effective pastoral care for true self-denial. This study will serve as a meaningful pastoral recommendation to help Christians avoid the distorted practice of self-denial suppressed by the false self, and encouraging them to form a vivid, healthy spirituality in their faithful self-fulfillment through true self-denial.

2. Understanding of the Self: Winnicottian False and True Self

An understanding of the self is useful in order to review the practice of self-denial. Since the self is both a subject and an object of the denial, it is impossible to argue the denial of self without first understanding the self. The understanding of Winnicott's true and false self has the benefit of not only taking off the individual's false mask, but also of providing a significant insight to analyze the practice of self-denial.

The self, for Winnicott, is a psychological developmental term for how the individual obtains the ability to distinguish "me" from "not-me." At the beginning, the self is like a "bubble" adapting to outside

pressure.[14] This self, even before birth, thus interacts with the environment and reacts to environmental impingements. Winnicott describes this experience of natural reacting and of returning from reacting to a state of not having to react as the only state in which the self can begin to be.[15] More precisely, having to adapt to the impingements of the environment, the self, through good-enough care, technique, holding, and general management, can develop into a whole self a person who is able to distinguish between "me" and "not-me."

This development of the self, however, connotes more than just distinction between me and not-me; it involves feeling a sense of being real. With regard to feeling real, Winnicott divides the self into a true and false self. Only the true self, according to Winnicott, can be creative and feel real; however, the false self produces an unreal feeling and a sense of futility.[16]

The true self is the position from which come spontaneous gestures and creative personal ideas. The true self relates to external reality as a natural developmental process.[17] Within this relationship, if the development of the true self has not been seriously interrupted, every

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14) Donald W. Winnicott, "Birth Memories, Birth Trauma, and Anxiety," in *Through Pediatrics to Psycho-Analysis: Collected Papers*, ed. M. Masud R. Khan (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1992), 182-183.

15) Winnicott, "Birth Memories", 183.

16) Winnicott, "Ego Distortion", 148.

17) Maturity of the self, for Winnicott, involves not only personal development but also socialization. Thus, he argues, "the healthy individual does not become isolated, but becomes related to the environment [and] can be said to be interdependent. His argument is a precise analysis on the nature of human beings who cannot be completely independent from relations with objects." Winnicott, "From Dependence towards Independence", in *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, 83-84.

moment of living results in a strengthening of the sense of being real and the growth of the capacity to tolerate "breaks in continuity of true self living."[18] Also, false self experiences related to the environment on the basis of compliance are minimized.[19]

For the strength of the true self, the most decisive factor that Winnicott emphasizes is a "good-enough mothering." Good-enough mothering means offering a holding environment that repeatedly fulfills the omnipotence of the infant and at least makes sense of it. If the mother's implementation allows the infant's omnipotent expressions, it strengthens the infant's weak self, and the true self begins to have its own life.[20] Therefore, when the true self efficiently enjoys good-enough mothering, individuals can feel a sense of being real through such spontaneous life, instead of a life hampered by the external environment or other people.

On the other hand, if the infant's early environment is not good-enough, the infant's sense of self becomes split, leading to the development of a protective shell for the self, which Winnicott calls the false self. In the case of not good-enough mothering, the mother repeatedly fails to fulfill the infant's omnipotence and substitutes her own gesture for the infant's; the infant in turn considers his or her mother's gesture as his or her own gesture by the compliance of the mother's reaction.[21] Within the situation of not good-enough

18) Winnicott, "Ego Distortion", 149.
19) Winnicott, "Ego Distortion", 149.
20) Winnicott, "Ego Distortion", 145.
21) Winnicott, "Ego Distortion", 145. This is the failure of mirroring where the infant can see himself or herself through the eyes of the mother. Without adequate mother's mirroring, the infant cannot see himself or herself as a valued self whose spontaneous gestures are recognized, responded to, and allowed a place. Cf. Allan N. Schore, *Affect Dysregulation & Disorders of the Self* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 145.

mothering, the infant realizes that in order to "survive," his or her spontaneous (i.e., authentic) gestures should be supplanted by the compliant (i.e., inauthentic) gestures that the environment requires. This adaptive self, therefore, accepts environmental demands regardless of the self's real needs, creates false relationships, and pretends that the compliant false self is the infant's real being. Winnicott describes this process as the false self's "defense against that which is unthinkable, the exploitation of the True self."[22)]

Though it is one of the successful strategies to defend the true self, the development of the false self suffers the cost. The highest cost of a false self personality is feeling unreal. Since the false self protects the true self and compliantly reacts to what the environment requires, as Winnicott says, the child may grow to be just like the mother, nurse, sibling, or whoever at the time dominates the situation.[23)] Particularly in the case of the false self in which a fine intellect is located, the individual may seem to be academically and socially successful, but the false self cannot reveal the individual's creativeness and spontaneous actions. Winnicott says that such persons feel "phoney" the more they are successful.[24)] This false self

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22) Winnicott, "Ego Distortion", 147. Winnicott argues that a person's false self so fully develops early in life that it is not directly affected by later social influences and experiences. According to contemporary theorists, however, the false self develops well beyond childhood, and even across the entire life course. J. F. Masterson, *The Personality Disorders Through the Lens of Attachment Theory and the Neurobiologic Development of the Self: A Clinical Integration* (Phoenix, AZ.: Tucker & Theisen, 2005). Considering the recent concept of the self, which develops for an entire life, it is more reasonable to believe the false self also develops for an entire life. See Capps, *The Decades of Life: A Guide to Human Development* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008).

23) Winnicott, "Ego Distortion", 146.

24) Winnicott, "Ego Distortion", 144; Abram, *The Language of Winnicott*, 278.

eventually leads to a feeling of unreality and a sense of futility.

As Parker and Davis point out, however, assuming that Winnicott's false self is entirely "bad" whereas the true self is entirely "good" is an overly simplistic understanding.[25] Indeed, Winnicott leaves a possibility of adaptive false self open by presenting the spectrum of the false self from "extreme" to "healthy" one. He even insists that a "healthy" (i.e., adaptive) false self is necessary to live successfully as a social self representing "the polite and mannered social attitude."[26] Arguing the positive function of the false self, he assumes that every person has, to some extent, a false self. Thus, it seems unrealistic to say that the false self is entirely "bad": it serves an adaptive function.

Apart from the adaptive functions of the false self, we need to give attention to the fact that the false self, whether pathological or adaptive, has the fundamental purpose of hiding and protecting the nature of the true self. Though Winnicott's "healthy" false self, through compliant gestures to the environment, may provide a place to survive and even function positively for success in society, it is still true that under the guise of the false self, the true self cannot freely express its nature. If the existence of the false self inevitably hides or disguises the true self, the false self cannot be genuinely considered "healthy," because it entails a feeling of unreality. In other words, just as the term literally implies, the false self exists under the limited reality of a disguised self. The false self thus cannot be placed under the word "healthy" and becomes an unessential self, which should be overcome for the development of a truly healthy self.

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25) Stephen Parker and Edward Davis, "The False Self in Christian Contexts: A Winnicottian Perspective," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 28, no.4(2009): 318.

26) Winnicott, "Ego Distortion", 143.

Meanwhile, On the other hand Winnicottian true self cannot always be considered entirely "good." In the context of the community and public, without the social rule and polite manner, which control and rule over the self, the unregulated individual regarding only his or her desires in the Winnicottian true self may ruin the public security and order. Thus, the expression of true self, as avoiding the distortion of the false self, should be wisely guided by a proper social principle and care norm, not by the environmental impingement which leads to the distortion.

Moreover, in terms of Christianity, Winnicott' s concept of true self may not be genuinely true. The true self for Winnicott, as mentioned above, is developed from an individual' s internal sense of being real, mediated by relationships with primary caregivers. From this Winnicottian perspective, discerning what is true or false depends on a person' s internal sense of aliveness. The final criterion of value is subjected to a personal sense of the self in this regard. However, from a Christian perspective that assumes human depravity, a personal sense cannot be the standard for discerning the true and the false because of its subjectivity and its possibility of distortion. For example, a father might fulfill his own desires by physically abusing his child, but he is not in that moment acting according to his "true self." In his depravity, he might feel as though he is "alive" in this moment. He might feel he is acting genuinely—that is, in accordance with his feelings. However, this understanding of the true self is not objectively, morally, and spiritually true from a Christian perspective. Winnocotian true self is limited to its subjectivity, in particular, its personal feeling. To discern the genuineness of the true, thus, we need a transcendent standard, beyond the subjective sense of Winnicott' s true self. In Christianity, the Bible has played the role. In

this sense, Winnocottian true self in its practice must be reexamined through the lens of the Scripture in order to be genuinely true.

This understanding of true and false self provides a useful framework for analyzing the reality of self-denial in Christianity. Understanding Winnocott's false self helps one assess distorted practices of self-denial; and the inadequacy of the Winnicottian true self necessitates the understanding the self from a Christian standpoint in order to practice true self-denial. The Winnocottian false-self can only be the subject of distorted self-denial; true-self denial requires the self be re-envisioned from a Christian perspective.

3. The Reality of Self-denial: Distorted and True Self-denial

The true and false self theory of Winnicott is based on the premise of relations with an object. Likewise, the self-denial in Christianity presupposes the spiritual relations with God and the worldly relations with other people. Therefore, if the manner of the self, in the relations to the object, is affected by the dynamic of true and false self, then the practice of self-denial is someway involves both the true and false self.

However, while the theory of the true and false self deals with the self's reactions to protect the true self in a relationship with objects, the virtue of Christian self-denial aims not to protect the self but to restore and develop a relationship with God and humans by denying unordinary self-love and the propensity of sin and by practicing loving God and humans through offering of giving of one's self, self-giving love. This difference of purpose requires a Christian anthropology to understand the true practice of self-denial. In this discussion, I will explore the distorted forms of self-denial through

the lens of Winnicottian false self and search the true meaning and practice of self-denial from a Christian viewpoint. in Christianity.

(1) Distorted Self-denial in the False Self

When the false self is dominant, the individual tends to adapt to society and the environment through the false self. This false self causes distorted practices in the context of self-denial. Particularly, within a hierarchical church system or authoritarian pastoral environment, denial of the false self frequently occurs as a form of suppressing the true self under the guise of Christian self-denial. In the suppressed situation, congregants are implicitly forced into perfectionism,[27] legalism,[28] and triumphalism[29] by excessive exhortation and criticism. In response to such influence, the false self, according to Parker and Davis, reacts "defensively."[30] This defensive reaction of the false self has a tendency to reveal itself with compliant, aggressive, and evasive self-denial.

Excessive compliance is a major form of self-denial by the false self. The false self may make the individual accept even an excessive demand by thinking wrongly that the rejection of church authority would be rejection of Christianity. During a pastoral conversation, for

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27) Parker and Davis, "The False Self in Christian Contexts", 319.

28) Donald A. Hargner points to "a natural human tendency toward legalism." Emphasis on doing self-denial, being subject to this natural human tendency, inevitably increases some forms of legalism. See Donald A. Hargner, "Paul and Judaism, the Jewish Matrix of Early Christianity: Issues in the Current Debate," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 3 (1993): 111.

29) Nydam explains that in spiritual triumphalism we are forced to "believe and pretend that all is well." Ronald J. Nydam, "Facing Cancer: The Spiritual Dangers of a Docetic Engagement of Acute Leukemia," *Calvin Theological Journal* 45 (2010), 339-340.

30) Parker and Davis, "The False Self in Christian Contexts", 318.

example, a youth in his twenties who was evaluated as a very desirable Christian model by his pastors, honestly confessed that he rarely said “no” when his pastors or church leaders asked him to do something related to church activities, even though he hardly had time to do them.[31] In this case, we can assume that his false self, by excessively complying with the orders of church authorities, was trying to defend his true self even though compliance could ruin his personal life.

The aggressive reaction of self-denial by the false self appears in the form of excessive asceticism or legalism. In this case, the false self presents the appearance of self-denial by repressing his or her inner emotions and desires under strict rules. The Pharisees provide a good illustration: they made definite and rigid rules even for the washing of hands and accused those who failed to obey by those rules.[32] Bound by rigid rules the real nature of the true self easily loses a way to express itself.

Another form of aggressive false denial is the destruction of the whole self. Combined with a distorted faith and mental problems, the false self

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31) Parker and Davis, “The False Self in Christian Contexts”, 318.

32) Pharisees, according to their traditions, had to wash their hands in a certain way before every meal, and between each of the courses. The water for washing had to be kept in special large stone jars. First, the hands were held with finger tips pointing upwards; water was poured over them and had to run at least down to the wrist; the minimum amount of water was one quarter of a log, which is equal to one and a half egg-shells full of water. While the hands were still wet, each hand had to be cleansed with the fist of the other. The fist of one hand was rubbed into the palm and against the surface of the other. Next, the hands had to be held with finger tips pointing downwards and water had to be poured over them in such a way that it began at the wrists and ran off at the finger tips. They believe that the man who fails to do this would be subject to the attacks of a demon called Shibta. See William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), 190-191.

may commit suicide. Winnicott says that the false self, by suicide, functions to protect the true self from insult or annihilation.[33] In May 2011, one middle-aged Korean man killed himself by nailing himself to a cross.[34] According to witnesses, after his divorce, he was socially alienated from his ex-wife and children because of his abnormal thinking and fanatic belief. Investigators analyzed that he attempted to express his faith by re-enacting the death of Jesus. Thomas E. Joiner, professor of psychology at Florida State University who has studied suicide for decades, says that people often desire suicide, especially a form of self-sacrifice, where two factors are combined: one is a thought that death has more worth than life because of present physical, psychological, and social sufferings, and another is the belief that he or she is hopelessly alienated, cut off and isolated from others.[35] Judging from a variety of circumstances, the person contemplating suicide might suffer from alienation, depression, and a sense of defeat. In response to these experiences, he finally reacted destructively to himself: committing suicide. Indeed, those who consider bearing the cross of Jesus as suicide may misunderstand suicide to be a form of self-denial and some of them choose suicide as a refuge from present sufferings.[36] In this case, the false self deceives the individual into incorrectly believing that to destroy

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33) Winnicott, "Ego Distortion",143.

34) Hyungwan Kim, "Suicide Hanging on the Cross," *Chosun Times*, accessed on May 17, 2011, available at: http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/05/17/2011051700940.html.

35) Thomas E. Joiner, *Myths about Suicide* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 12; 33; 213-215. See also Thomas E. Joiner, "Deconstructing 'Myths about Suicide'," National Public Radio, accessed on April, 28, 2010, available at: http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126365907.

36) For example, see Debated God, "Was the Cross Suicide", accessed on September 23, 2010, available at: http://www.debategod.org/members/debategod/comm/READ/00000587/Was-the-Cross-Suicide.html.

the whole self is the only way to protect the true self.

In the evasive self-denial by the false self, the self tends to run away towards a third alternative to avoid a conflict between the inner desires of the true self and environmental impingements.[37] Excessive ministries and work for church activities are one form easily found among pastors and church leaders. Their incessant involvement in a flurry of church activities externally seems to be a practice of self-denial because they spend most of their time and efforts performing church work. However, he or she sometimes uses busyness to cover the reality of the self. Since busyness snatches away time to face the reality of the true self, he or she does not have to consider his or her true self. Then, the self feels free from inner conflicts, at least during the busyness.[38] It is distorted self-denial of the false self, which cuts off the consideration of the true self, in order to hide it from oneself as well as from others in the guise of an external form of self-denial: devoting all one's efforts and time to busy church activities.

In the end, all of these distorted practices of self-denial contribute to interruptions in the true experiences of life. The false self, by these distorted self-denials, reinforces "impinging God images" as hostile, uncaring, or demanding,[39] and maintains a relationship with God that is superficial and defensive. In addition, the false self's defensive

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37) The self seems to suffer between two sets of approach–avoidance conflicts. Cf. Wayne Weiten et al., *Psychology Applied to Modern Life: Adjustment in the 21st Century* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2008), 76.

38) Parker and Davis analyze that their busyness is a compensation of an internal sense of deadness. Parker and Davis, "The False Self in Christian Contexts," 318. In the ministry scene, however, because busyness usually results in burn-out and void, it can hardly compensate for the sense of deadness. Thus, it is a more realistic explanation that the false self uses busyness as a means of evading inner conflicts, and eventually cause the sense of deadness.

39) Parker and Davis, "The False Self in Christian Contexts", 319.

reactions in self-denial hinders the ability to have frank relationships with others. As a result, in these superficial and artificial relationships, the self fails to feel real.

(2) True Meaning and the Practice of Self-denial

Beyond the distorted practice of self-denial by the false self, what is the true meaning and the practice of self-denial in Christianity? Is it really possible to achieve self-fulfillment through the practice of self-denial? In this regard, Christian theology shares an important wisdom.

The self from a Christian viewpoint first means that humans are created in the image of God[40] but are fallen and corrupted on account of sin (Gen 1-3). After the fall, humanity was not only alienated from a relationship with God, but also lost its dignity (i.e., self-esteem) that originated from God. Their ability to rule over themselves and the world in God was impaired. William T. Kirwan, a Christian counselor, characterizes this state of humanity as being on the stage of roaming between "need self" and "rejected self."[41] In other words, the self needs to experience belonging to God, self-esteem from God, and rules of God, but its needs are continually

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40) The image of God is a key term for understanding the divine-human relationship in biblical thought. Calvin defines the image of God as everything in which the nature of man surpasses that of all other species of animals, including the original righteousness, namely, true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Along with Calvin, Berkhof more specifically describes it involving the original righteousness, natural constitution of man, spirituality, immortality, and man's dominion over the lower creation. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.3-4; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 202-210.

41) William T. Kirwan, *Biblical Concepts for Christian Counseling: A Case for Integrating Psychology and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1984), 169-79.

rejected because of sin. To release dissatisfaction of the unfulfilled needs, this rejected self shows anger, perfectionism and overdriving ambition.[42] As a result, for this tainted self, it is impossible not to sin.[43] The Bible, therefore, describes this fallen self as an "old self" which needs to be denied and to be crucified (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:33).

Admittedly, the argument about sin today is not welcomed by secular society and humanistic science.[44] However, if we fail to deal with sin, we will miss an important part of the holistic understanding for human beings. The concept of sin in our existential experience helps us see the world and human experience more fully than only naturalistic idea views.[45]

In regard to the state of the self, David K. Clark, in a study of biblical language usages, suggests that since an egocentric "self A" under the pollution of sin still exists in the congregant, by continually denying the "self A," which is similar to the old self, one needs to gain "self B" which fully conforms to Christ.[46] In contrast to the

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42) Kirwan, *Christian Counseling*, 181.

43) Augustine say, In Adam's original sin, "humans lost the posse non peccare (power not to sin)". See his footnote 229 in Augustine, *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*, trans. Albert C. Outler (Christian Classics Ethereal Library), XXVIII, 105.

44) The concept of sin is insignificant for recent secular society and science. Donald Capp describes that current society excludes sin, and the self does not experience guilt. Ronald J. Nydam also says that young people today have lost the ability of empathy, because they do not feel guilt. The loss of guilt comes from losing the concept of sin. Capps, The Depleted Self, 22–24; Ronald J. Nydam, "The Relational Theology of Generation Y," *Calvin Theological Journal* 41(2006): 327–329; Johanna McGrath & Alister E. McGrath, *Self–Esteem: the Cross and Christian Confidence* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2002), 78.

45) Herbert Anderson & Bonnie J. Miller–McLemore, *Faith's Wisdom for Daily Living* (Minneapolis, MN.: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 34.

46) David K. Clark, "Interpreting Biblical Words for the Self," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 18, no. 4(1990): 314–315.

Winnicottian self that is defensive in the practice of self-denial, the self from this biblical standpoint is characterized by openness: open to dying to the self A and surrendering the self B to God. His suggestion This conceptualization clearly exhibits the true meaning of self-denial in Christianity: true self-denial is to put off the fallen self which exists in the dominion of sin and to gain the redeemed self which unites with Christ's will and purpose, by surrendering everything to God. This concept of true self-denial includes not only the denial of sinful things but also things that are not sinful in daily life. Through this true self-denial, the redeemed self in any circumstance "live[s] for God and die[s] for God" by accepting that he or she is not his or her own, but belongs to God.[47)]

By this definition, true self-denial in the context of Christianity is not incompatible with self-fulfillment. Rather, the self redeemed from the dominion of sin, by fully conforming to Christ in self-denial, can reach the life fulfilled purpose of God. According to Randall C. Zachman, a theology professor of the University of Notre Dame, since Christ is the living image of God in whom God reveals all that we lack, when we become one with Christ, the spiritual gifts we lost in Adam are restored to us in Christ.[48)] We participate in all his blessings, so our shortcomings and sins no longer separate us from the purpose and goal of our creation. Thus, the self in Christ renews the relationship with God, and rightly and voluntarily rules over itself and the world according to God's will. As a result, the redeemed self can feel real in a living relationship with God and the

47) Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.7.1.

48) Randall C. Zachman, "'Deny Yourself and Take up Your Cross': John Calvin on the Christian Life," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 4(October 2009): 467.

world. The redeemed self can achieve God's plans and goals, which Adam failed to achieve, and which are our calling and self-fulfillment.

The concrete forms of the practice of the true self-denial appear in the cross of Jesus. The cross of Jesus, understood as the culmination of Christian self-denial, implies the way to solve the problem of sin and achieve love for humanity through self-giving.[49] If the life of Jesus is treated as the example which demands Christians to follow (1 Cor. 11:1), our practice of self-denial should also embrace mortification of sin and self-giving love.

As Calvin says, sin comes from an external impulse towards vain thoughts, which lead to evil affections and wills, and finally to sinful behaviors.[50] The mortification of sin is to sever the links. More specifically, the mortification of sin involves the elimination of the external impulse that drives sin: to change thoughts, to stifle evil affections and wills, and finally to stop sinful behavior.[51] Paul's confession, "I strike a blow to my body and make it my

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49) Traditionally, there are various theories about the cross of Christ, such as *Satisfaction theory*, *Ransom theory*, and *Moral influence theory*. Today, however, they can be understood in light of multidimensionality: they together contribute to the richness of the whole meaning of the death of Christ. From the multidimensional approach, the common meaning of the cross comprehends the foundation of mortification of sin and self-giving love towards human beings. See Willem J. van Asselt, "Christ's Atonement: A Multi-Dimensional Approach," *Calvin Theological Journal* 38, no. 1 (2003): 52-67. More recently, however, there are some theologians who hold that the cross of Christ is not redemptive nor liberate. To encompass fully the complexity and multiplicity of the meaning of the cross, a comprehensive and in-depth study is needed. See Anderson & Miller-McLemore, *Faith's Wisdom*, 66-67.

50) John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book, 1998), 290.

51) Peter J. Leithart, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life", 195.

slave" is a typical example of the mortification of sin (1 Cor. 9:27).[52]

However, in the practice of mortification, if the concept of sin is wrongly and abusively applied to a congregant, the practice may easily devastate his or her life. Anderson and Miller-McLemore insightfully points out, "the clever and the powerful have used sin and fear of punishment and damnation to control people in both private and public life."[53] To avoid the devastation, right principles and care for mortification of sin are needed. The practice of mortification guided by the right principles and proper care will liberate the congregant's spiritual pleasure and aliveness which was formerly suppressed by guilt and shame about sin.

Another form of true self-denial, the self-giving love, begins with searching for healthy self-love in God. Self-love in God is discriminated from blind or selfish self-love. While blind or selfish self-love is only self-centered and a merciless desire of sinful nature, healthy self-love in God means to value and love oneself based on the image of God in the self. In regard to self-love, Calvin argues that it is the goal of self-denial to remove the love of self from our heart,[54] but the self-love that Calvin urges us to deny is the blind and sinful self-love in fallen human beings. "For, such is the blindness with which we all rush into self-love that each one of us seems to himself to have just cause to be proud of himself and to despise all

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52) Paul says in Greek, "ἀλλὰ ὑπωιάζω μου τὸ σῶμα καὶ δαουλαγωγῶ." Here, Paul's usage of the word is striking. The Greek ὑπωιάζω means to "treat roughly, torment, [and] maltreat." Felix W. Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 208.

53) Anderson and Miller-McLemore, *Faith's* Wisdom, 31.

54) Zachman, "Deny Yourself", 472.

others in comparison."[55] Rather, Calvin encourages healthy self-love in God. "[L]ook upon the image of God in all men [including the self], to which we owe all honor and love."[56] If we surrender our sinful will and ownership to God, then we can focus on the image of God in us instead of our own. Then, due to the glory and beauty of God's image, we can love ourselves regardless of what our situation is. This healthy self-love is a vital part of self-denial in that it should lead us to relinquish evaluation of the self based on its value in and of itself and to establish God's value as the standard for everything, including the evaluation of the self.

Beyond self-love in God, true self-denial is what Jesus shows us, the pursuit and practice of self-giving love. Self-giving love is remembering all the gifts that we have received from God and using them not for personal gain but for others and communities. The practice of self-giving love is actually based on the healthy self-love. In this regard, McGrath and McGrath's explanation about humility is helpful for understanding this concept. They say, "The essence of humility does not lie in self-deprecation or devaluation, but in our positive evaluation of others…Humility is not about lowering our valuation of ourselves, but about raising our valuation of others."[57] Similarly, self-giving love is not annihilating self-love in God, but raising up the extent of love from a lack of love towards others in order to love others as we love ourselves: giving ourselves to be servants of others in Christ.

The range of self-giving love embraces even the love of enemies. As we, through the healthy self-love in God, can find the image of

55) Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.7.4.
56) Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.7.6.
57) McGrath & McGrath, *Self-Esteem*, 128.

God in ourselves and then love ourselves, we can also see the image of God in our enemies, and then love them. As a result, in the practice of self-giving love our broken relationships will be restored.

This self-giving love that calls us to be servants even to our enemies paradoxically becomes a privilege. About this paradoxical truth, McGrath and McGrath rightly evaluate that Christ, by giving himself, confirmed the royal role of servanthood within the Christian community:

> By becoming a slave for us, Christ confers His dignity on this role. We who are slaves for Christ can know that Christ has brought a new dignity and meaning to the concept. A slave is no longer a despised and reviled person. By becoming a slave Himself, Christ brings a new sense of nobility and honor to his role. To be a slave for Christ is both a privilege and honor.[58]

Through self-giving love by becoming a slave, the individual can take on the noble and honorable role that Christ conferred. Accepting this role, the individual can find meaning in life and feel alive before God, while enjoying the privilege and glory from Christ. In this role, the individual who surrenders everything to God, as Jesus "finished" the task conferred by his role,[59] will eventually completes the will and purpose that God conferred upon him or her.

Furthermore, the community where each member recovers the practice of such self-giving love to one another, as Daniel Bell

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58) McGrath & McGrath, *Self-Esteem*, 131.

59) In John 19:30, the Greek word Τετέλεσται means, within its perfect tense, to successfully finish and complete the mission. Johannes P. Louw & Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible societies, 1996), 1:657.

suggests, entails seeing self-giving or sacrifice "as a central practice in a cycle of gift-exchange, in which giving does not result in loss but rather nurtures communion, mutuality, and interdependence."[60] In this community, each member together will gradually attain self-fulfillment within the accomplishment of the communal goal and purpose.

In a word, whereas the practice of self-denial distorted by the false self cannot liberate the congregant's true self and constantly cause a phony feeling, the practice of true self-denial, by the mortification of sin and by the self-giving love in community, can fulfill the roles that God empowers to the self, which is self-fulfillment. The self even in the practice of self-denial finally can find the spiritual satisfaction and feel real in the restored relationship with God and others.

4. Pastoral Care for Self-denial: Towards Self-fulfillment

As discussed above, the main reason for a distorted practice of self-denial is self-denial by the false self. If religious authorities force a congregant to deny himself or herself without solving the defensive system of the false self, the false self may continually lead to hypocritical lifestyle of self-denial and interrupt the building of honest confessional fellowship with others. The congregant, in the end, fails to experience the sense of feeling real and of spiritual pleasure but rather suffers from a contradiction between self-denial and self-fulfillment. Therefore, the goal of pastoral care for the practice of self-denial is to find the true self and to accomplish self-

60) Daniel M. Bell, Jr., "Sacrifice," *New and Enlarged Handbook of Christian Theology*, eds. Donald W. Musser & Joseph L. Price(Nashville, TN.: Abingdon, 2003), 448.

fulfillment through true self-denial.

First, a pastor or pastoral caregiver should be a "good enough mother" in order to treat the defensive reactions of self-denial by the false self. The good enough mother, in terms of pastoral care, offers a good "holding." Through empathy, holding allows congregants to have spontaneous gestures and provides an emotionally safe space for the self's thoughts and behaviors. The core of holding is empathy, which does not judge and correct a congregant based on the pastor's thoughts and faith, but "know[s] of and relate[s] to a person in his or her fullness in depth and in development context" as "an ethic of love, of agape."[61] In this in-depth understanding and love, a congregant may be able to frankly face, freely express and fearlessly share his or her emotions, experiences, thoughts and faith. Without this motherly holding care based on empathy, enforcing the practice of self-denial is spiritual abuse under the guise of religious virtue and spiritual direction.

With regard to holding based on empathy, however, a caregiver should note that some persons often resist empathy. Chris R. Schlauch emphasizes that a caregiver should be aware of "resistance to empathy," which is "resisting being seen, understood and known, and the intimacy characteristic of these experiences."[62] This resistance is understood as a test for the extent of safety before the revelation of the true self's nature. Thus, when a congregant shows a resistance to empathy, the caregiver should not judge or suppress it as an inappropriate response, but "sustain" it like a mother who sustains

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61) Chris R. Schlauch, "Empathy as the Essence of Pastoral Psychotherapy," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 44, no. 1(March 1990), 13, 16.

62) Chris R. Schlauch, "The Psychology of the Self and Cross Cultural Clinical Care," *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* 17, no. 2(Fall 2007), 99.

a child's aggressive and defensive behavior. If the test is successfully completed, the person can trust the caregiver and find a way to expose the true self.

Second, in dealing with the true self, a pastor or pastoral caregiver, like a responsible parent, should guide each congregant with authority and love, so that congregants can set a clear spiritual standard for the true self-denial. In particular, the caregiver, from the perspective of fatherly care,[63] needs to teach and encourage congregants regarding the mortification of sin. By teaching spiritual principles about mortification,[64] the pastoral caregiver can lead congregants to recognize sin and confess it within the declaration of God's forgiveness.

When dealing with a congregant's sin, however, a caregiver may make the mistake of asking a congregant directly for a confession of sin. Although the problem of guilt in the self may be cleansed by the forgiveness of God through Christ's merit, exposing sinful desires and behaviors to another is still shameful. In this situation, the direct request for confession may stun the self, causing it to hide sin and revert back to a form of self-denial by the false self.

The confession of sin, in reality, is possible when the individual voluntarily opens the true self within a feeling of being accepted "as is" regardless of the exposure of sin.[65] Therefore, the caregiver

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63) The fatherly care does not necessarily mean a biological father's responsibility. This term implies "Father God" who gives us his law and unfailing love.

64) John Owen, based on the principle of being engrafted into Christ as a believer and diligent obedience, proposed five directions for the mortification of sin. See John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol 6: *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991).

65) James E. Dittes, *Pastoral Counseling: the Basics*(Louisville, KY.: Westmenster/John Know Press, 1999), 81-85.

should not provide a forced environment, but one of acceptance. If the caregiver has the image of a loving parent who accepts and comforts his children and encourages them in their growth, then the individual may not regard confessing his or her frailties and sins as shameful but as a natural process of the maturity in faith.

Accepting the congregant as is, however, does not imply that sin is natural; if so, that is a compromise with sin. When congregants intellectually accept being sinful, they may be free from obsessing about being righteous; when they emotionally and willingly comply with it, the congregant's will to resist sin is diminished, so he or she may feel peace even in sin.[66] This feeling of peace, however, is deceitful, which makes the self exist in the dominion of sin, and thus the self may fail to achieve spiritual pleasure, satisfaction, and self-fulfillment.

Thus, pastoral care should involve a direction towards each person's holistic life, including the intellectual, emotional, behavioral and spiritual life. A pastoral caregiver, like a spiritual parent who also follows Christ's likeness, should not just accept each sinner's weaknesses and faults, but should set a clear spiritual standard for the believer based on the word of God about self-denial, by being a good example of one who avoids sin and obeys God's will and purpose.

Third, pastoral care for the true self-denial needs to help a congregant with the practice of surrendering to God. Surrendering to God does not come through charities, donations, or voluntary works; this can be accomplished when one shifts his or her self-centered life to become God-centered.[67] As Sinclair B. Ferguson argues, in God-

66) Owen argues that peace without the abhorrence of sin is false peace. Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol 6: *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, 71.

67) Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.7.1.

centered life united with Christ, a congregant can experience not only the love and comfort of the son of God "who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20) in all situations, including suffering and struggles, but he or she can also be filled with "an inexpressible and glorious joy" from the fruit of the Spirit (1 Pet 1:8; Gal 5:22).[68] The congregant who experiences this union of love and joy with God, like Paul, begins to consider all else as rubbish (Phil 3:8-12). The congregant then gradually desires to surrender to God.

For the practice of the congregant's surrender, a pastoral caregiver can help in terms of "as though." If a pastoral caregiver, according to James E. Dittes, regards the congregant "as though" the person is in a mature and faithful relation to God (i.e., a person who already surrendered everything to God), the congregant is defined "not by discrepancy from the ideal, but by the promise of it."[69] The congregant, through the reflection of the caregiver, can see oneself as God intended one to be. Then, he or she may decide to gradually and incessantly surrender to God in order to be the person who is defined "as though." When the congregant surrenders to God, God's will and purpose, instead of his or hers, is placed within the person so that through obedience, he or she has the potential for self-fulfillment.

Finally, a pastor or pastoral caregiver, through communal support, can assist each congregant in the practice of true self-denial in order to arrive at self-fulfillment in God. Given that the Christian community is one body in Christ, self-fulfillment of the self should be accomplished in community. Since all pastoral situations involve a set of interconnections between people in groups, healing happens

68) Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 180.

69) Dittes, *Pastoral Counseling the Basics*, 82.

not only from the restoration of self but also from harmony with others in God.[70] In particular, the principle of self-giving love has to happen in relationships. If community members mutually practice self-giving love toward one another, each person's weaknesses are compensated with another's servanthood, and vice versa. Then, through this communal love, all members can be united as one body and can achieve God's will and goals together. Through communal love and achievement in God, each congregant can feel that his or her life is more meaningful and alive. Therefore, the pastoral role in community is to promote a system that is reciprocal and self-giving rather than hierarchical and authoritative.[71]

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, within the framework of the false and the true self, it cannot be said that Christian virtue of self-denial is incompatible with self-fulfillment. Indeed, true self-denial leads to self-fulfillment in God. In self-denial by the false self, congregants continually feel empty, though it may help for them to adapt to the religious environment. However, given that pastoral environments provide "good enough mothering" along with "responsible fatherly care" for a psychologically and spiritually safe place to reveal the true self, the individual can face his or her reality of false self-denial and practice true self-denial. Then, accompanied by mortification of sin, the true

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70) Cooper-White, *Shared Wisdom*, 191.

71) For changing a psychosocial system, Larry Kent Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds: A Psychosystems Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville, TN.: Abingdon Press, 1992) is a useful resource.

self can practice self-giving love through surrendering to God and eventually accomplish self-fulfillment, which completes the purpose of God and glorifies God within community.

It is not an easy task to accept that our religious efforts of self-denial are easily contaminated by the false self. It is more difficult to admit the reality of sin, mortify it, and to surrender to God. At this point, candidly facing up to the reality of the distortions of false self-denial and providing a proper care and guidance for the practice of true self-denial will be helpful not only for redeeming congregants from a false and artificial religious life but also for finishing God's calling. This practice of true self-denial is a lifelong spiritual journey, that of knowing God and self deeply, a goal of spiritual formation for all congregants and pastoral caregivers.

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【국문초록】

거짓자기, 참자기, 자기부인: 대상관계 이론을 통한 기독교 자기부인 고찰

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기독교 공동체에서 자기부인의 실천은 자아실현과 상충되는 것처럼 보인다. 그러나 실제로 참된 자기부인은 자아실현의 방편이 된다. 이 논문은 대상관계 이론가 도날드 위니캇의 참자기, 거짓자기 이론에 대한 신학적 고찰을 바탕으로 거짓자기의 자기부인은 왜곡된 결과를 야기하지만 참자기의 자기부인은 기독교 관점에서 오히려 자아실현에 이르게 함을 주장한다. 자기부인의 실천은 위니캇 개념의 거짓자기에 의해 지배될 때, 순응적, 공격적, 회피적 형태의 왜곡을 보인다. 거짓 자기부인은 종교 환경에 적응하는데 도움을 줄 수는 있지만, 결국 공허함, 혹은 위선적 종교생활을 야기한다. 반면, 성경적 관점의 참 자기가 자기부인의 실천을 지배할 때, 자기부인은 죄 죽임과 자기희생적 사랑으로 나타난다. 참 자기부인은 죄의 지배 아래 있는 옛 자아의 죽음뿐만 아니라 하나님의 뜻 아래 새 자아의 자발적 내려놓음을 포함한다. 결국 참 자기부인을 통해 자아는 하나님께서 주신 사명을 하나님과 이웃과의 회복된 관계 가운데 실현하고, 만족과 살아있음의 정서를 경험한다. “충분히 좋은 모성적 돌봄”과 “책임 있는 부성적 돌봄”의 제공, “내려놓음”의 권고와 공동체적 지원은 내담자에게 거짓 자기부인의 실제를 직면하게 하고 참 자기부인의 실천을 촉구함으로 기독교 관점의 자아실현을 돕는다.

중심단어 : 거짓자기, 참자기, 자기부인, 자아실현, 대상관계