Article

Transforming Loneliness: An Orthodox Christian Answer to an Increasing Loneliness in Disabled Populations

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Abstract: Social isolation and inactivity have a profound effect on one's quality of life. In recent times, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the social life of many. When it comes to disabled populations, emotional well-being is greatly affected by an increasing trend of social isolation. Research shows that people with disabilities perceive loneliness as unbelonging in childhood and disaffiliation to normative institutions in adulthood. Certainly, the efforts of building community bring richness and quality to life, but there are other solutions to addressing loneliness and solitude. Therefore, finding the true meaning of life is what can bring a positive vision of one's world. In the Eastern Orthodox Christian ascetical theology, loneliness was transformed into a positive voluntary solitude and has been a central point of daily life, manifested from the ancient Christian sites to modern-day monastic and eremitic life. The present paper proposes a two-folded solution for reframing loneliness into empowerment. It starts with an insight into Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* and continues with finding a positive value of loneliness. The study examines different perspectives on loneliness and solitude which can improve the spiritual and emotional well-being of people with disabilities.

Keywords: loneliness; disability; ascetical theology; Desert Fathers; Eastern Orthodox Church; COVID-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit disabled communities particularly hard as they already faced obstacles in daily life which made them more lonely than non-disabled people and most vulnerable during this challenging time[1]. Disabled people are more likely to suffer from formal segregation and institutionalization. According to the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) report on disability, well-being and loneliness[2], in the UK (2019) the proportion of disabled people who report feeling lonely is almost four times that of non-disabled people[3]. The same results were found by the report of the Helen Clark Foundation in New Zealand, where 11.3 percent of disabled people reported feeling lonely most or all of the time—four times more likely than non-disabled people. The health effects of social isolation and loneliness could become severe, as a study from the University College London shows: "Social isolation is associated with higher mortality in older men and women ... This effect is independent of the emotional experience of loneliness. Reducing both social isolation and loneliness are important for quality of life and well-being, but efforts to reduce isolation would be likely to have greater benefits in terms of mortality" (Steptoe et al. 2013, p. 5799).

Contemporary research of loneliness and disability have predominantly explored the link between these two aspects based on surveys and follow-up analyses. A study conducted in the UK which quantitatively explores the relationship between disability and emotional loneliness shows that disabled people report much higher feelings of emotional loneliness than the rest of the population (Macdonald et al. 2018). This means that 52% of the disabled population included in the study experienced feelings of emotional loneliness. Emotional loneliness is expressed as the absence of intimate attachments, and it is often characterized by feelings of isolation or anxiety. It differs from social loneliness, which

is generally characterized by feelings of boredom and marginality, depending on the engagement level in a social network (Fierloos et al. 2021, p. 2). Research shows that there exists an emotional and affective space which is not necessarily the same with the physical space, therefore people with disabilities perceive loneliness as "unbelonging in childhood, disjointed youth and disaffiliation to normative institutions in adulthood" (Tarvainen 2021, p. 6). Here, the authors show that loneliness could be connected with distant childhood family relationships, bullying and social isolation in school or a disjointed youth. Affiliation to adulthood institutions seems to be precarious, not permanent and often dominated by uncertainty. Therefore, there is a complex phenomenon to be explored, which is affected by multiple factors, as different life trajectories cause different responses to loneliness. Another study from Canada, based on a questionnaire, linked patients with physical disabilities with higher scores of emotional distress and alienation (Rokach et al. 2006, pp. 691–92). Johnstone et al. (2007, pp. 1155–56) evaluated the impact of different religious practices in coping with disabilities. Here, the spiritual model of religious coping shows that faith is an important element in dealing with disabilities. Thus, spirituality and different forms of prayer and meditation have similar effects with stress management techniques. A recent study conducted by the Centers for Disability Research at the Universities of Sydney and Lancaster states clearly that disabled populations experience loneliness at higher rates than people without disability and this is a significant driver of poor well-being. Thus, one of the conclusions of the authors of that study is particularly important for the present article: "The relative independence between different indicators of social connectedness suggests that interventions to reduce loneliness will need to do more than simply increase rates of social contact or social support" (Emerson et al. 2021, p. 6). The authors refer to addressing social and economic disadvantages for disabled populations, and, in general, they propose an improved and more inclusive social ethics. But I would like to use this conclusion in order to say that building community and social interaction is just a step towards solving the issue of loneliness. Although the value of communitarian and social life is of primary importance (and this includes all the modern technological advancements which help building virtual communities), I see here an opportunity in transforming loneliness into a form of spiritual solitude. This is a next level approach in finding the positive value of loneliness from the Eastern Orthodox ascetical theology and a point where theology and medical sciences meet.

Rokach et al. (2012, p. 739) show how religious life, in general, provides tools and support for coping with loneliness, be it through prayer, attendance of religious services or friendships within the religious community. The authors conclude: "It appears possible that the more likely it is that one's religious beliefs play a role in structuring and shaping one's daily life, the more likely it is that one will view and utilize religion as a helpful means of coping with loneliness". In a more specific context, in Christianity, studies show that a personal relationship with God is an important factor in dealing with loneliness and therefore loneliness becomes a more complex phenomenon than simply a horizontal medical or social condition. The vertical relationship plays an important role too—the relationship between a human being and God. Le Roux (1998, p. 178) concludes: "The weaker a student's faith in Jesus Christ as his/her Saviour is, the more lonely he/she is, and vice versa. It also indicates that the weaker the cognitive knowledge of a person's faith in Jesus Christ, as well as his/her Christian conduct is, the more likely that person is to be lonely". Thus, it appears that there is a correlation between feeling lonely and the lack of fully exploring a personal relationship with God. A well maintained personal relationship with God could become a tool in helping to cope with loneliness.

In Eastern Orthodox Christian theology, research on loneliness in disabled populations is at an incipient stage. Most of the studies explore different aspects of solitude, which includes silence and stillness. Chryssavgis (2012, pp. 376–77) is one of the few authors who wrote on solitude based on the writings of Barsanuphius the Great and John the Prophet. It is not difficult to notice that such a patristic theology finds the positive value of solitude, which together with silence contributes towards reaching the state of stillness, which is

desirable for any process of illumination and deification. While loneliness is perceived as an involuntary rejection or abandonment by other people, solitude is voluntary—it is a state of being alone without being lonely or feeling lonely. Still, in Eastern Orthodoxy, loneliness has a very broad manifestation and includes not only the visible interaction between people, but it draws its origins in the fallen nature of both humans and demons or fallen spirits (Thaddeus of Vitovnica 2009, p. 125). The great Fall of the Biblical narrative has produced a psychosomatic change, an ontological alienation from God (Hatzidakis 2013, p. 271) and thus the ontological unity of humanity has been affected. And therefore, because of this alienation, a certain distance between people came into place, together with its side effects such as loneliness, lack of happiness or fulfillment and an active and unending quest for new and varied encounters.

In this study, my intention is to show that the ascetical tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Christianity has solutions for dealing with loneliness experienced by people with disabilities. The early monastic communities were schools where disciples learned the value of solitude in helping their daily advancement towards purification and deification. This is actually the transfiguration of a negative concept, loneliness, into a positive one, solitude. Here, solitude is not positive in itself, but only as a means towards stillness and deep contemplation. It becomes positive only by reaching the positive goal. Accordingly, I see loneliness as involuntary and stressful, while solitude or spiritual solitude could be voluntary (in a context of renunciation) or involuntary, but advantageously and peacefully accepted by a person. The question that drives my thesis is: what stops us from advantageously benefiting spiritually from an involuntary state of loneliness? Solitude could become a helpful means of self-reflection and provide healing. Certainly, this is applicable in the case of disabled adults unaffected by severe cognitive disabilities and people who are able to perform religious disciplines and adopt conscious decisions.

When it comes to health benefits of this practice, I will only provide a theoretical extract from the lives of the early ascetics and the contemporary authors. I am not aware of existing studies framed in an Eastern Orthodox Christian context dealing with loneliness and how its transcendence could bring health benefits in the lives of disabled people. However, I am thinking here of a related study which tried to quantify the health benefits of religious assistance in case of sadness or depression, which are generally linked with loneliness (Durá-Vilá 2017). Sadness manifestations could range from deep sadness to pathological sadness or depression, and these are common symptoms among people who face loneliness. Using interviews, participant observation and ethnography to gather data, the author found that spirituality had an important role in overcoming sadness.

2. An Insight into *Man's Search for Meaning*

Viktor Frankl, in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, describes his harsh experiences as a prisoner in concentration camps during World War II. While observing the behavior of other prisoners, Frankl proposed a psychotherapeutic method for transforming the human mind and one's perspective on life, which consisted of identifying a positive purpose in life and following that ultimate goal through imagination. He noticed that those who could find meaning in their suffering were the ones who also seemed better able to find the strength to survive. Logotherapy, a therapeutic method developed by Viktor Frankl which emphasizes the meaning dimension or spiritual dimension of human beings, helps people to discover meaning in their lives by changing their attitude toward unavoidable suffering. The author noted that it was possible to turn suffering into achievement. Here is how Frankl described his thesis: "If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete . . . It is one of the basic tenets of logotherapy that man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life. That is why man is even ready to suffer, on the condition, to be sure, that his suffering has a meaning. But let me make it perfectly clear that in no way is

suffering necessary to find meaning. I only insist that meaning is possible even in spite of suffering—provided, certainly, that the suffering is unavoidable" (Frankl 2020, pp. 90, 151).

It is clear that the author does not encourage an attitude of gaining pleasure from suffering or destruction, nor he sees suffering as necessary for a kind of personal salvation, but changing one's attitude towards unavoidable pain and suffering brings relief and improves people's lives. Frankl observed there were a few people who possessed a humor that offered some necessary self-detachment. They lived their suffering honorably and remained unaffected by the dangerous reality: "The attempt to develop a sense of humor and to see things in a humorous light is some kind of a trick learned while mastering the art of living. Yet it is possible to practice the art of living even in a concentration camp, although suffering is omnipresent ... Humor was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation. It is well known that humor, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds" (Frankl 2020, pp. 58–59).

There is also a two-folded solution of experiencing fulfilment in life. For an active life, it stays in the value of creativity and work, while for a passive life, which could be the case for many disabled people, it is obtained through contemplating beauty in all its forms: "An active life serves the purpose of giving man the opportunity to realize values in creative work, while a passive life of enjoyment affords him the opportunity to obtain fulfillment in experiencing beauty, art, or nature. But there is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior; namely, in man's attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces" (Frankl 2020, p. 90). The positive value found in a passive life resides in experiencing a different reality and fosters a new understanding of the self and the world (Bound Alberti 2019, p. 207). Therefore, contemplation, as an expression of a religious practice, could become a solution for reducing loneliness by being aware of the external medium and by finding the rationality of creation, which implies a particular form of divine agency. In Christianity, contemplation becomes a personal encounter with the Creator. This social system includes the relationships between these persons and also tools for communicating and sharing between them. Thus, loneliness could be reduced, and one could find meaning in life by becoming a partaker of the divine nature and by establishing a personal relationship with God.

I would like to use Frankl's experiences and strategies in order to consolidate my thesis that involuntary loneliness could indeed be advantageously transformed into a form of voluntary solitude. It is religion that could help people change their attitude towards this condition, which, if untreated, could lead to depression, social isolation, impaired executive function, accelerated cognitive decline and ultimately death (Steptoe et al. 2013, p. 5797). Any form of hope which is suggested by a religious system could become of massive importance for the spiritual strength of a person, as Frankl mentions: "The prisoner who had lost faith in the future—his future—was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay. Usually this happened quite suddenly, in the form of a crisis, the symptoms of which were familiar to the experienced camp inmate" (Frankl 2020, pp. 99–100). It appears that spiritual life could determine the physical state of a person. Hope and belief are of major importance especially in the case of disabled populations in order to limit the risk of late disease progression.

3. Proposed Solutions for Transforming Loneliness

In May 2020, the United Nations proposed a framework of response to COVID-19 titled: "A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19". This report deals with a multitude of factors which could be improved in order to ensure an easier life for disabled populations. They include aspects of health, support services, social protection and employment, education, prevention of and response to violence or humanitarian assistance[4]. However, what is lacking is that there is no mention of the spiritual well-being of a person. In my

opinion, access to religious services or any form of spirituality is an important part of the general well-being of a person, strengthening the right to freedom of religion and belief. Therefore, I try to identify a two-folded solution for reframing loneliness into empowerment in an Eastern Christian context, taking into account the intrinsic need of humans for spirituality. Certainly, there are multiple types of disability which need to be addressed. If for vision and hearing disabilities, mobility and physical impairments, it is easier to work on a conscious process of accepting and understanding the value of loneliness, and in the case of people with mental disabilities, it might be a hard task which could even add more complexity by introducing a new concept called aloneness (Andersson et al. 2015, p. 4). It is beyond the scope of this paper to include special cases of severe cognitive or intellectual disabilities which affect one's ability to perform religious disciplines and adopt conscious decisions. This condition is called clinically significant religious impairment and is defined as a "reduced ability to perform religious activities, achieve religious goals, or to experience religious states, due to a psychological disorder" (Hathaway 2003, p. 114). In this approach, I will ground my discourse on selected texts from *Apophthegmata Patrum*, a fifth century collection of sayings attributed to the Desert Fathers and Mothers living in the desert of Egypt (Ward 1984) and also on the writings of contemporary spiritual elders and saints of the Orthodox Church.

3.1. Resisting Bullying: Building Community and Foreshadowing the Healing Communion with God in His Kingdom

First, how can people with disabilities build community and make friends? Is there any simple way of overcoming bullying and its effects? Abba Poemen, an ascetic of the fourth century, pronounced a very interesting word when addressing one of his disciples, which can be easily adopted in a context of loneliness and disability: "A brother going to market asked Abba Poemen, 'How do you advise me to behave?' The old man said to him, 'Make friends with anyone who tries to bully you and sell your produce in peace" (Ward 1984, p. 189). This phrase has a double implication: it promotes a type of ascetical humility by accepting bullying behaviors and at the same time its ultimate goal is acquiring inner peace (St. Symeon the New Theologian 1999, p. 30). In the Eastern Orthodox understanding, acquiring the peace of the soul is one of the most important aspects of spiritual life. For disabled populations, accepting with humbleness their disability and trying to keep a climate of peace is a key element in building community and it is indeed a strong image of the healing communion with God in His Kingdom. And now let us turn to a 20th century saint, Silouan the Athonite, who addressed this issue of accepting others and building a merciful heart: "But I would ask you: supposing God were to give you a fair place in paradise and you saw burning in the fire the man to whom you had wished the tortures of hell—would you really even then not feel pity for him, whoever he might be, even an enemy of the Church? Or is it that you have a heart of iron? But there is no place for iron in paradise" (Sophrony 1974, p. 40). This is the image of the Kingdom of God, where the hearts of people are melted in the love of God and where peace and humility reign.

Definitely, in a pandemic context, a virtual community can be created, which could include online bible studies, Sunday schools or similar activities, making sure that a community is still maintained. However, the solution is not merely building a social context. There is still a need for something more. The social context has to become a community of people sharing the same values. And this is especially visible in an enlightening conversation between Abba Poemen and Abba Anoub, in which the latter concluded: "Now we are seven brethren; if you wish us to live together, let us be like this statue, which is not moved whether one beats it or whether one flatters it. If you do not wish to become like this, there are four doors here in the temple, let each one go where he will" (Ward 1984, p. 33). This is an ascetical invitation towards cultivating humility and stillness. In a Christian understanding, the small community of people has to become a healing and meaningful society of brothers and sisters.

Finally, I would like to bring another contemporary writer from the Eastern Orthodox world, Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica. When he evaluates the general atmosphere in the daily life of Christians, he sees an increased loneliness: "And so people engage in many activities: philosophy, rational thinking, scientific research—but all that is very short-lived. The comfort lasts a very short time, and then depression and despondency set in. People on this earth generally feel very lonely, even when they are among their closest family members. This is due to our fallen nature" (Thaddeus of Vitovnica 2009, p. 125). One could notice his stress on building something more than a simple community of people or social connectedness. Any relationship should be centered on the relationship with God, as this is an everlasting one. In that way a person will become less dependent on external relationships.

3.2. Identifying the Positive Value of Solitude in the Eastern Orthodox Ascetical Theology

In the patristic exposition of the fourth and fifth centuries, silence was often perceived as a virtue. Moreover, for the following centuries, living alone was a desirable way of life for thousands of monastics in the Egyptian and Palestinian territories. Let me cite here a clear instruction given by Theodoros the Great Ascetic to his followers: "You must avoid continually wasting time outside your cell, if you have indeed chosen to practice stillness. For it is most harmful, depriving you of grace, darkening your mind and sapping your aspiration . . . So restrict your relationships with other people, lest your intellect should become distracted and your life of stillness disrupted" (Theodoros the Great Ascetic 1983, p. 25).

The life of stillness should have been the object of this monk's quest. Therefore, any external relationships were seen as unnecessary and even destructive for one's aspiration. For him, a distracted mind and intellect were unable to work diligently on the daily main tasks of watchfulness (guarding the mind), constant remembrance of God and inner prayer. If we turn back to a contemporary context, where leading such a life of complete stillness is not the object of many, I propose a solution found by Abba Poemen: "If three men meet, of whom the first fully preserves interior peace, and the second gives thanks to God in illness, and the third serves with a pure mind, these three are doing the same work" (Ward 1984, p. 171). Therefore, gratitude in daily life has a transformative power that is comparable with other old virtues of ascetic life. This method is inclusive and accessible to all. It is again confirmed by Amma Syncletica, who provides us with a draft of a framework of changing the perspective on life, from a negative and sorrowful one, to a positive one, through thankfulness: "If illness weighs us down, let us not be sorrowful as though, because of the illness and the prostration of our bodies we could not sing, for all these things are for our good, for the purification of our desires... If illness then weakens this sensuality the reason for these practices is superfluous. For this is the great asceticism: to control oneself in illness and to sing hymns of thanksgiving to God" (Ward 1984, p. 232).

But still, one might truly question: why was all this effort of running away from any social environment towards a life of complete seclusion? People were born to live in a community, so why would someone choose isolation? An important quote of a Desert Father, Abba Alonius, summarizes it well: "If a man does not say in his heart, in the world there is only myself and God, he will not gain peace" (Ward 1984, p. 35). So, this was a radical action which had a very well-established aim: acquiring inner peace. It was indeed radical, even more, a radical orthodoxy in the patristic understanding, which is quite different from today's evolution of the term. Thus, in the context of disabled people, radical loneliness has the potential to lead to inner peace; it can be transformed to a form of solitude, which is followed by stillness. It should not be seen as a major factor of stress if it is voluntarily assumed in a positive light.

There is a famous episode of Abba Arsenius who was searching for a personal way of salvation. While praying, "a voice came saying to him, 'Arsenius, flee from men and you will be saved' . . . Having withdrawn to the solitary life he made the same prayer again and he heard a voice saying to him, 'Arsenius, flee, be silent, pray always, for these are the

source of sinlessness'" (Ward 1984, p. 9). My sense is that for ascetical theology there is a clear line when it comes to solitude. Silence and solitude are beneficial factors for gaining inner peace and a sinless life. It is not solitude which is valuable here, it is just a means towards avoiding distraction of the mind, which has been so problematic for the Patristic Christian tradition.

Research shows that comparing oneself with others results in decreased self-esteem (Lee 2020, p. 3). Related to this, Abba Bessarion found a safe solution for his disciples: "A brother who shared a lodging with other brothers asked Abba Bessarion, 'What should I do?' The old man replied, 'Keep silence and do not compare yourself with others'" (Ward 1984, p. 42). Therefore, silence and watchfulness become also a safe solution for an increased risk of distraction in cases where acute loneliness could trigger thoughts of anxiety and dissatisfaction with one's own way of life, appearance or body image (Quittkat et al. 2019, p. 2).

Here again I would like to bring a text of Elder Thaddeus which explains why this radical isolation, either spiritual or physical, has a positive value in ascetical theology: "There are times when people become depressed and despondent, which is a type of pride in its own way. If a person loves the things of this world, this will invariably lead to despondency, for he will not find God in them. Each human being feels lonely at times, even when he is among people, until the moment he becomes free from the things of this world. At that point, God comes to comfort him. The soul feels lonesome because the power of Grace diminishes in it due to its interest in the things of this world. One cannot go both ways!" (Thaddeus of Vitovnica 2009, p. 139). Radical renunciation of any possessions and relationships with the external world is what the early Christian ascetics did. This whole process could be easily seen as a continuous search for meaning. If in Frankl's case, the end of this search could have easily been an object or an abstract imaginative idea; here, ascetics have a clear goal in finding God and experiencing the uncreated grace and light of Tabor. It is a meaningful quest which fuels their daily struggle.

One could object here that Elder Thaddeus proposes a theology which is neither inclusive, nor contextual, promoting an outdated form of denial of the world, compared with the contemporary paradigms in other Christian traditions, where it is clearly affirmed the universal character of redeeming the world which invites people to delight in it[5]. My sense is that here Elder Thaddeus does not merely propose a simple renunciation of the world, but more a reassessment of the attachments with the world which could trigger different passions. Orthodox theology has always been ascetic, which means it proposes a framework for a healing therapeutic model. Due to its vast experience with the art of fighting against passions, it can discern the finest movements of the body and of the spirit which can ultimately turn into passions. This is why there is the need to work for building a full communion with God and avoid being trapped into loneliness. Having achieved this favorable context, man can experience that kind of spiritual quietness or stillness where God is more visible. "Be still, and know that I am God"[6]—this is the prophetic message of God which was later used by the Hesychast movement and its mental (noetic) prayer, and it could be translated in a contemporary language as: get rid of all the false noises, and hear My voice.

4. Conclusions

This paper has attempted to show that social isolation and inactivity have a profound effect on one's quality of life. In recent times, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the social life of many. When it comes to disabled populations, emotional well-being is greatly affected by an increasing trend of social isolation and depressive symptoms are common among them. Research shows that disabled people report higher feelings of emotional loneliness than non-disabled people and this is a significant driver of poor well-being. Without forcing a positive perspective on being lonely, there is an opportunity in transforming involuntary loneliness into a form of spiritual solitude by benefiting from the Eastern Orthodox ascetical theology.

The article made use of Viktor Frankl's work, *Man's Search for Meaning*, where he describes his harsh experiences as a prisoner in concentration camps. Frankl proposed a psychotherapeutic method for transforming the human mind which consisted in identifying a positive purpose in life. Hope and belief are of major importance, especially in the case of disabled populations who face challenges, anxiety or discouragement.

Then, based on Frankl's thesis of transforming the human mind by identifying a positive purpose in life, the paper proposed two solutions for transforming loneliness into empowerment in an Eastern Christian context, in those cases which are not marked by severe cognitive or intellectual disabilities. Firstly, disabled populations could work on building community and foreshadowing the healing communion with God in His Kingdom. This implies building something more than a simple community of people; building a way of life centered on the relationship with God, as an everlasting one. Secondly, one could identify the positive value of solitude in the Eastern Orthodox ascetical theology. Elders like Abba Poemen, Alonius, Arsenius or Amma Syncletica always emphasized the potential positive value that solitude could bring and encouraged their disciples in leading a life of silence and solitude, as a simple way of acquiring inner peace. Thus, in the context of disabled people, radical and involuntary loneliness could be overcome, and it can be advantageously transformed into a form of solitude, which is followed by stillness in a charismatic action of the Holy Spirit. And a life of stillness has always been the object of a monk's quest. In this respect, transforming loneliness into solitude and finding a positive value of solitude can greatly improve the spiritual and emotional well-being of people with disabilities by reducing any stressful conditions that often accompany loneliness. This is using religion as a helpful means of coping with loneliness.

Notes

[1]　See the Red Cross UK report of August, 2021, dealing with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the disabled communities. Available online: https://www.redcross.org.uk/stories/health-and-social-care/social-care/why-loneliness-affects-so-many-disabled-people (accessed on 12 November 2021).

[2]　Available online: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/bulletins/disabilitywellbeingandlonelinessuk/2019 (accessed on 12 November 2021). See the updated 2020 online version at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsondisabledpeopleingreatbritain/may2020 (accessed on 12 November 2021).

[3]　See the report titled "The risks of loneliness in Aotearoa New Zealand following COVID-19 and how public policy can help" in Alone Together, available online: https://helenclark.foundation/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/alone-together-report-min.pdf (accessed on 10 October 2021). See the 2020 edition at: https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2021-04/apo-nid311945.pdf (accessed on 12 May 2022).

[4]　See the United Nations report of May 2020, titled: "A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19". Available online: http://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Policy-Brief-A-Disability-Inclusive-Response-to-COVID-19.pdf (accessed on 12 May 2022).

[5]　In the Presbyterian Church, for example, where during a Sunday service hymn it is clearly affirmed the universal character of redeeming the world: "Not denying the world, but delighting in it, Not condemning the world, but redeeming it, Through Jesus Christ, By the power of the Holy Spirit". Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Order of Worship, 2021, available online: http://presbyterianclinton.org/Portals/0/Bul_06-27-2021.pdf (accessed on 17 May 2022).

[6]　This is an excerpt from Psalm 46:10 (ESV), a prophetic text and an invitation from God for a life of stillness.

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