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Inkarnasi, Tabernakel, dan Tubuh Orang Percaya: Teologi Kehadiran Allah bagi Kaum Marginal dan Disabilitas

Incarnation, Tabernacle, and the Body of Believers: A Theology of Divine Presence for the Marginalized and Disabled

Oey Natanael Winanto
Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia
Christian Academy, Santiago, Chile
Email: natanaelwinanto@yahoo.co.id

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Abstrak: *Teologi kehadiran ilahi telah lama menjadi tema sentral dalam tradisi Kristen, tetapi implikasinya bagi penyandang disabilitas dan kelompok yang terpinggirkan masih kurang dikaji secara terpadu. Artikel ini bertujuan membangun sintesis teologis yang menghubungkan tabernakel sebagai tempat kediaman Allah di tengah umat-Nya, inkarnasi Kristus sebagai penggenapan dan pusat penafsiran motif tersebut, dan tubuh orang percaya sebagai bait Roh Kudus, dengan disabilitas sebagai lensa kritis utama. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka melalui empat langkah: pengumpulan sumber, analisis tematik, interpretasi hermeneutis, dan aplikasi kontekstual. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa (1) tabernakel menyatakan kehendak Allah untuk berdiam di tengah umat, tetapi aksesnya bertingkat dan, dalam teks seperti Imamat 21:16-23, bersyarat secara jasmani; (2) inkarnasi, yang dalam Yohanes 1:14 diungkapkan dengan bahasa "berkemah", mengambil tubuh manusia yang rentan secara utuh dan membuka akses kepada Allah melalui tubuh Kristus (Ibrani 10:19-20); dan (3) tubuh orang percaya, secara korporat maupun perorangan, menjadi tempat kediaman Roh sehingga martabat setiap anggota tidak bergantung pada kemampuan fisik atau status sosial. Artikel ini juga menunjukkan bahwa sintesis tersebut menuntut kehati-hatian terhadap harapan eskatologis yang menghapus disabilitas dan terhadap pemakaian kaum marginal sebagai simbol semata. Implikasi praktisnya dirumuskan dalam kerangka audit bagi gereja yang inklusif.*

Kontribusi: *Artikel ini berkontribusi pada teologi disabilitas dan teologi kontekstual melalui kerangka tabernakel–inkarnasi–tubuh yang menghadapi teks-teks pengecualian dalam Alkitab secara jujur dan merumuskan implikasinya bagi gereja di Indonesia.*

Kata Kunci: *teologi kehadiran ilahi; inkarnasi dan perwujudan; ruang sakral tabernakel; gereja inklusi disabilitas; iman komunitas marginal.*

Abstract: The theology of divine presence has long been a central theme in Christian tradition, yet its implications for persons with disabilities and other marginalized groups remain underexamined in an integrated way. This article builds a theological synthesis that connects the tabernacle as God's dwelling in the midst of his people, the incarnation of Christ as the fulfilment and interpretive center of that motif, and the believer's body as temple of the Holy Spirit, with disability as the primary critical lens. It employs a qualitative literature-review method in four steps: source collection, thematic analysis, hermeneutical interpretation, and contextual application. The findings show that (1) the tabernacle expresses God's will to dwell among his people, but its access is graded and, in texts such as Leviticus 21:16–23, conditioned by bodily criteria; (2) the incarnation, expressed in John 1:14 as a "tabernacling", takes up vulnerable

human flesh fully and opens access to God through the body of Christ (Hebrews 10:19–20); and (3) the body of believers, corporately and individually, becomes the dwelling of the Spirit, so that the dignity of every member does not depend on physical ability or social status. The article also shows that this synthesis requires caution toward eschatological hopes that simply erase disability and toward using marginalized persons as mere symbols. Its practical implications are expressed in an audit framework for inclusive churches.

Contribution: This article contributes to disability theology and contextual theology through a tabernacle–incarnation–body framework that honestly confronts the exclusionary texts of Scripture and spells out implications for the church in Indonesia.

Keywords: divine presence theology; incarnation and embodiment; tabernacle sacred space; disability inclusion church; marginalized communities faith.

INTRODUCTION

How God is present among human beings is one of the oldest questions of Christian theology. Scripture answers it with a recurring movement of divine dwelling: God walks in Eden, commands a sanctuary so that he may "dwell in their midst" (Exod. 25:8), fills the tabernacle with glory (Exod. 40:34–35), becomes flesh and "dwells" among us (John 1:14), and indwells the community and the bodies of believers by the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Eph. 2:22). Biblical-theological studies trace this movement from Eden to the tabernacle, the temple, Christ, and the church (Beale, 2004; Patanan et al., 2024; Pundiono & Tandana, 2022). The link between the first two stages is explicit in the Greek of John 1:14, where the verb *eskēnōsen* ("pitched his tent", "tabernacled") deliberately recalls the tent of meeting (Keener, 2003; Koester, 2001).

This theology of presence is usually presented as good news in general terms. Yet it has to be tested at the margins. According to the World Health Organization (2022), roughly 1.3 billion people, about one in six of the world's population, live with a significant disability. Indonesia has committed itself legally to their rights through the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Republik Indonesia, 2011) and through Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities (Republik Indonesia, 2016). The theological question for the church is therefore not only legal or social. It is whether the doctrines by which the church speaks of God's nearness actually include those whose bodies and social positions have often placed them outside the circles of honor and access. Disability theologians have shown that Christian traditions have at times linked impairment with sin or divine punishment and have treated disabled people as objects of charity rather than as agents and subjects of theology (Creamer, 2009; Eiesland, 1994; Reynolds, 2008).

Existing scholarship addresses the three motifs of this article separately. As Table 1 shows, a first stream of Indonesian biblical-theological work examines the tabernacle and the dwelling of God (Patanan et al., 2024; Pundiono & Tandana, 2022), the incarnation (Gulo et al., 2022), the intimacy of the Father–child relationship (Gulo & Putrawan, 2023), and the Spirit in the church and in the Trinity (Pangumbahas et al., 2021; Putrawan & Ayuk, 2025; Sarono & Tubagus, 2021). These studies provide valuable exegetical and doctrinal material, but none of them asks what the motifs mean for persons with disabilities. A second stream, disability theology, has made the incarnate and risen Christ central to its argument (Eiesland, 1994) and has developed accounts of vulnerability, hospitality, and the Spirit (Brock & Swinton, 2012; Creamer, 2009; Reynolds, 2008; Yong, 2007). Biblical disability studies have, in addition, examined the texts that exclude bodies from cultic space, notably Leviticus 21:16–23 and 2 Samuel 5:8 (Avalos et al., 2007; Olyan, 2008; Schipper, 2006). A third stream consists of contextual studies of marginalization in Indonesia, which so far have focused on gender and religious minorities (Natanael & Tandana, 2026; Sugiri, 2026).

The purpose of this article is to construct a synthetic theology of divine presence that integrates the tabernacle, the incarnation, and the indwelling of the Spirit in the body of believers, with persons with disabilities, and by extension other marginalized groups, as critical interlocutors. The central thesis has three parts. First, the tabernacle establishes God's will to dwell in the midst of his people, but with graded and, in some texts, bodily conditioned access. Second, the incarnation, expressed in John 1:14 as a "tabernacling" in vulnerable flesh, relocates the sanctuary in a human body and opens access to God "through his flesh" (Heb. 10:19–20). Third, the Spirit's indwelling of the community and of individual believers extends temple status and priestly access to every member, whatever their physical ability or social position (1 Cor. 12:22–24; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Although the title names the incarnation first, because it is the interpretive center of the argument, the analysis follows the canonical order.

The research gap is therefore more precise than the absence of any disability perspective. Disability theology already engages incarnation, resurrection, and the church. What is missing, particularly in the Indonesian literature, is a single argument that (a) follows the biblical motif of divine dwelling from tabernacle to incarnation to the body of believers, (b) reads it with persons with disabilities as a critical interlocutor, and (c) does not avoid the texts in which the tabernacle system itself restricts access on bodily

grounds. A claim that the tabernacle was simply "accessible to all" would be historically doubtful and would be unconvincing to disabled readers who know Leviticus 21. The argument developed here is more modest, and more demanding: the tabernacle gives proximity without equal access, and the biblical trajectory from tabernacle to incarnation to the body of believers can be read as God's opening of that access.

Table 1. Mapping of the literature and the position of this study.

Stream	Representative sources	Main contribution	Limitation relevant to this study
Indonesian biblical and doctrinal studies	Patanan et al. (2024); Pundiono & Tandana (2022); Gulo et al. (2022); Gulo & Putrawan (2023); Pangumbahas et al. (2021); Sarono & Tubagus (2021); Putrawan & Ayuk (2025).	Dwelling of God (Eden–tabernacle–temple), incarnation, Father–child relation, the Spirit and the church.	Disability and exclusionary texts not addressed; each study treats one motif.
Disability theology and biblical disability studies	Eiesland (1994); Reynolds (2008); Yong (2007); Creamer (2009); Brock & Swinton (2012); Olyan (2008); Schipper (2006); Avalos et al. (2007).	Disabled God, vulnerability, hospitality, critique of ableism, analysis of Lev. 21 and 2 Sam. 5:8.	Tabernacle–temple–body trajectory rarely developed as one argument; little Indonesian engagement.
Contextual studies of marginalization in Indonesia	Natanael & Tandana (2026); Sugiri (2026).	Resilience of religious-minority women; Gal. 3:28 as response to gender-based persecution.	Not about disability; transfer to disability is analogical only.
This study	Biblical texts and the sources above.	A single dwelling trajectory (tabernacle → incarnation → body of believers → new creation) read through disability, including the hard texts.	Literature-based; no empirical data from persons with disabilities.

Source: author's analysis.

The article contributes in three ways: (1) it supplies a coherent biblical-theological trajectory in which disability is a critical lens rather than an application added at the end; (2) it takes seriously the exclusionary texts and the objections to inclusive readings, including objections from within disability theology itself, particularly concerning eschatology; and (3) it derives an audit framework that churches in Indonesia can use to test whether their practices reflect the theology they confess (Table 3). Terms are used as follows. "Persons with disabilities" (Indonesian *penyandang disabilitas*) follows Law No.

8 of 2016 and the Convention. “Marginalized” refers to persons or groups whose access to honor, resources, or participation is socially or religiously restricted. The main case is disability, and other marginalized groups are discussed where the sources justify it.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature-review method in biblical and systematic theology. The qualitative approach suits the research object, because concepts, texts, and meanings cannot be reduced to quantitative measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The literature-review method in theological research collects, reads, and interprets existing texts and documents so that they can be brought into a reasoned synthesis (Zaluchu, 2021).

Sources were selected purposively according to three inclusion criteria: (1) primary biblical texts that speak of the dwelling of God (tabernacle, temple, incarnation, indwelling Spirit) or of the access of bodies and marginalized persons to the divine presence; (2) scholarly books, commentaries, and journal articles that interpret those texts or the corresponding doctrines, including patristic and conciliar sources on the incarnation; and (3) scholarly work on disability and marginalization from theological and biblical-studies perspectives, in Indonesian or English. Popular devotional works and sources whose content could not be matched to the claim they were used to support were excluded. A large share of the Indonesian sources comes from a small number of journals; this clustering is acknowledged as a limitation in the Conclusion. One cited study (Natanael & Tandana, 2026) is co-authored by the present author and is used only as a contextual illustration, not as theological proof.

The analysis proceeds in four steps (Figure 1). First, sources are collected and identified. Second, thematic analysis codes the material under the motifs of dwelling, flesh and body, access, and marginalization. Third, hermeneutical interpretation reads each text in its historical, literary, and canonical context. Fourth, contextual application brings the results into dialogue with objections and with the situation of persons with disabilities and the church in Indonesia. Steps one to three are applied to each motif in the Results; step four and the synthesis are applied in the Discussion. Scripture is cited from the Hebrew and Greek texts, with English wording close to the English Standard Version and Indonesian readers referred to the Terjemahan Baru; original-language terms are given only where the argument depends on them. The author writes from

within the Christian tradition and from an Indonesian context, and this location shapes the reading.

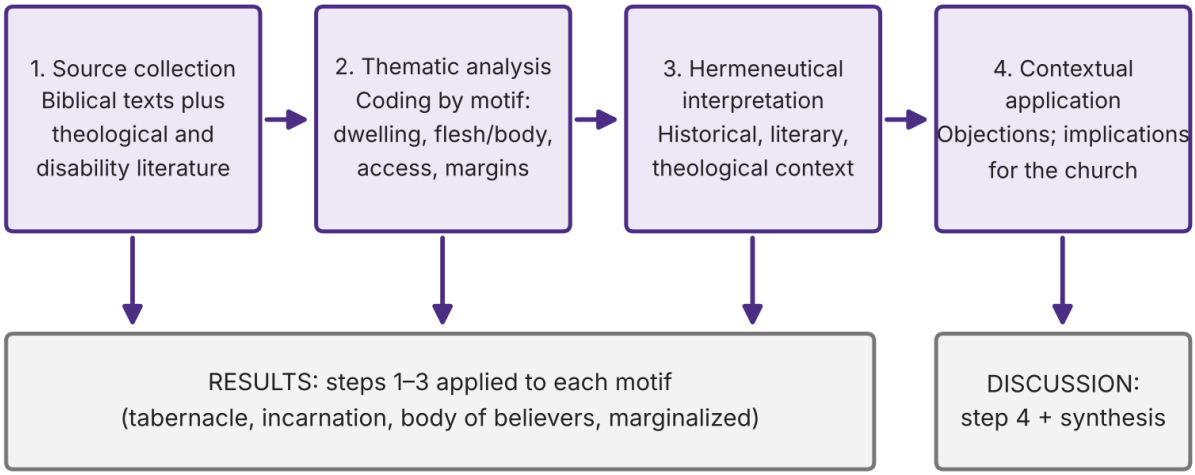


Figure 1. Research procedure and its relation to the Results and Discussion.
Source: author's design.

To strengthen the reliability of the analysis, each theological claim in the Results is tied to a biblical text and to a source that actually addresses that text or doctrine, rather than to a general citation at the end of a paragraph. Claims that go beyond what a source argues are marked as the author's own inference.

RESULT

The analysis yields four sets of findings, presented in canonical order: the tabernacle as God's dwelling with graded access; the incarnation as God's tabernacling in vulnerable flesh; the body of believers as temple; and the presence of God with the marginalized. Table 2 summarizes them.

The Tabernacle: God Dwells in the Midst, Access Is Graded

The tabernacle is introduced as God's own initiative: "let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Exod. 25:8; see also Exod. 29:45–46; Lev. 26:11–12). The narrative of Exodus ends when the glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34–35), and during the wilderness journey the tent stands at the center of the camp, with the tribes arranged around it (Num. 2). Pundiono and Tandana (2022) read this as the actual dwelling of God among his people and the first term of a tripartite sequence that runs from tabernacle to temple to the believer. Patanan et al. (2024) observe that the tabernacle's cherubim and lampstand evoke Eden (Exod. 25:18–22, 31–40; 26:31), which

suggests that the sanctuary was meant to restore a communion lost in Eden; Beale (2004, 2018) develops the same intuition under the heading of Eden as a garden temple, a proposal that remains debated but is widely discussed. Averbeck (2003) describes the tabernacle as a portable form of Sinai, in which the holiness of God's presence travels with the people.

The same texts also show that this presence was protected by degrees of access. The courtyard was open to the lay worshiper, the Holy Place to the priests, and the Holy of Holies only to the high priest, and only on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). The Levites and priests camped between the tent and the other tribes (Num. 1:50–53; 3:38). Bodily condition was one of the criteria of this system. Leviticus 21:16–23 forbids a descendant of Aaron who is blind, lame, or has another defect from approaching the veil or the altar, "that he may not profane my sanctuaries" (v. 23), although the same text allows him to eat the holy food (v. 22). The text concerns priestly office, not lay worshipers in general, but scholars of biblical disability note that it ties bodily difference to unfitness for the closest access to God (Olyan, 2008). A later text, 2 Samuel 5:8, which is difficult in its own right, reports a saying that "the blind and the lame shall not come into the house", and Schipper (2006) shows that the David narrative uses disability ambiguously, as in the treatment of Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9).

The Torah also contains protective provisions: it forbids insulting the deaf or placing a stumbling block before the blind (Lev. 19:14) and pronounces a curse on those who mislead the blind on the road (Deut. 27:18). The prophets then begin to widen the circle. Isaiah 56:3–8 promises the foreigner and the eunuch a place within God's house and "a name better than sons and daughters", and states that God's house will be called "a house of prayer for all peoples". The first finding is thus twofold. The tabernacle expresses the will of God to be near, and it also exposes how bodily criteria shaped access to that nearness. A theology of presence that omits the second half is not credible to disabled readers (Eiesland, 1994).

The Incarnation: God Tabernacles in Vulnerable Flesh

John 1:14 states that the Word "became flesh and dwelt among us", and the verb *skēnoō* places the incarnation within the tabernacle tradition: the glory (*doxa*) that filled the tent now becomes visible in the flesh of Jesus (Keener, 2003; Koester, 2001). Colossians 1:19 and 2:9 speak of the fullness of deity dwelling in Christ "bodily", and

Hebrews 2:14–18 stresses that he shared "flesh and blood" and can sympathize with weakness (see also Heb. 4:15). Gulo et al. (2022) argue that the humanity of Jesus does not contradict God's omnipotence but is its proof, and this reading fits the Pauline pattern in which the power of God is displayed in what appears weak. The Council of Chalcedon (451) confirmed that the one Christ is truly God and truly human "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation" (Tanner, 1990). The body of Jesus, in other words, was not a temporary container but belongs permanently to his identity.

Patristic theology drew the soteriological consequence: what is not assumed is not healed (Gregory of Nazianzus, 2002). In this formula "healing" means salvation of the whole human nature, including the body, and does not mean the removal of every impairment. The incarnation therefore gives a theological basis for the claim that human bodies as such, including disabled bodies, are bearers of dignity. The relation between divine presence and suffering remains a long-debated question (Kilby & Davies, 2019), and the incarnation does not answer it by explaining suffering. It answers by presence: God shares human vulnerability from within.

The incarnation also reverses the tabernacle's access structure. Hebrews 10:19–20 speaks of entering the sanctuary "by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh". The veil that guarded the Holy of Holies is here identified with a human body. This is a second major finding: the flesh of Christ is the place where the access that Leviticus 21 restricts is opened. Eiesland (1994) adds a further observation. The risen Christ presents his impaired hands and feet to the disciples (Luke 24:39; John 20:27), so that the resurrection does not erase his wounds. She proposes that he is therefore "the disabled God", a God who knows impairment and is not made less divine by it. Later disability theologians have built on this proposal and also refined it, noting that crucifixion wounds are not congenital impairments and that analogies must be drawn carefully (Creamer, 2009; Reynolds, 2008; Yong, 2007).

The gospel narratives also reject the retributive logic that links impairment to personal sin. When the disciples ask whose sin caused a man's blindness, Jesus answers that it was neither the man's nor his parents' (John 9:1–3). The second half of the verse, "that the works of God might be displayed in him", is sometimes read as giving disability a purpose, and this reading is contested. The minimum that the text secures is the rejection of the causal link between impairment and sin.

The Body of Believers: Temple, Spirit, and Body of Christ

Pundiono and Tandana (2022) trace the movement from tabernacle to Solomon's temple to the believer. The New Testament deepens this movement in three steps. Jesus speaks of his own body as the temple (John 2:19–21). The Spirit then makes the community a dwelling place of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16, which combines Lev. 26:12 and Ezek. 37:27; Eph. 2:19–22). Finally, the individual body is also called a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). The grammar matters. In 1 Corinthians 3:16 "you" is plural and the temple is the community, whereas in 6:19 the singular "body" appears in a context of sexual ethics (Fee, 1987; Thiselton, 2000). The body-as-temple language therefore cannot be turned into an ideal of a flawless individual body. Temple status is conferred by the indwelling of the Spirit and not by the physical condition of the person.

This is why 1 Corinthians 12 is the key text for disability. Paul describes the church as one body with many members and states that "the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (v. 22), that greater honor is given to the parts that lack it (vv. 23–24), and that "if one member suffers, all suffer together" (v. 26). Pangumbahas et al. (2021) and Sarono and Tubagus (2021) show that the Spirit constitutes the church and distributes gifts for the common good, and the text applies this to persons whom ordinary social standards regard as weaker. Putrawan and Ayuk (2025) note that the Spirit's presence is not bound to a physical location. This point is useful for those who cannot reach a building, but it does not remove the duty to make buildings reachable, since the Spirit dwells in bodies and communities that gather.

The New Testament also extends priestly access to all believers. The restriction in Leviticus 21 applied to a priest with a bodily defect, but 1 Peter 2:5 and 2:9 call the whole community a "holy priesthood" and "royal priesthood", and Ephesians 2:18 states that all have "access in one Spirit to the Father". This is the third finding: what the Levitical system limited by lineage and bodily condition is, in Christ, granted to every member. Paul's own testimony of weakness (2 Cor. 12:7–10) shows that the apostle located the power of Christ in embodied weakness. The thorn in the flesh is not identified in the text, and it should not be equated with disability without further argument; the passage cannot be used to justify leaving barriers in place.

God's Presence with the Marginalized

The biblical witness consistently associates God's nearness with the lowly. God sees the affliction of his people and comes down to deliver them (Exod. 3:7–8). The one who dwells "in the high and holy place" also dwells "with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit" (Isa. 57:15). The Psalter says that the Lord opens the eyes of the blind and lifts up those who are bowed down (Ps. 146:7–9). In the Gospels, Jesus announces good news to the poor and release to the captives (Luke 4:18–19), identifies himself with the hungry, the sick, and the imprisoned (Matt. 25:31–46), and, in a parable of the banquet, commands that "the poor and crippled and blind and lame" be brought in (Luke 14:12–24). Matthew 21:14 records that "the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them", a scene that many interpreters read as reversing the saying in 2 Samuel 5:8. In Acts 8:26–39 an Ethiopian eunuch, a foreigner and a bodily minority who had come to worship in Jerusalem, is baptized, which fulfils the promise of Isaiah 56.

Table 2. Synthesis of the findings.

Motif	Key texts	What it affirms	Tension or caveat that must be kept
Tabernacle	Exod. 25:8; 40:34–35; Num. 2; Lev. 16; Lev. 21:16–23; Isa. 56:3–8	God wills to dwell in the midst of the people	Proximity is not equal access; bodily criteria restrict priestly approach
Incarnation	John 1:14; Col. 2:9; Heb. 2:14–18; Heb. 10:19–20; Luke 24:39; John 9:1–3	God shares vulnerable flesh and opens access through Christ's body	"Healing" in patristic usage is not cure; Eiesland's "disabled God" needs careful analogy
Body of believers	1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 12:12–26; Eph. 2:18–22; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9	Temple status and priestly access belong to all, and the weaker members are indispensable	1 Cor. 6:19 is not an ideal of the perfect body; the thorn in 2 Cor. 12 is not identified as disability
Marginalized	Exod. 3:7–8; Isa. 57:15; Luke 14:12–24; Matt. 21:14; Matt. 25:31–46; Acts 8:26–39	God's nearness is not ruled by status or bodily condition	Do not romanticize or instrumentalize; the application of Gal. 3:28 and of minority-women studies to disability is analogical

Source: author's analysis of the biblical texts and the cited literature.

Togatorop et al. (2024) read the parable of the laborers (Matt. 20:1–16) as a statement about the kingdom of God and justice for the marginalized in the context of economic change. A careful reading supports the point that the landowner's generosity secures the livelihood of day laborers who were hired late, but the parable is first of all

about the logic of grace and not a code for particular social groups. Sugiri (2026) argues from Galatians 3:28 that the gospel dismantles distinctions of gender, ethnicity, and status. The application to disability is by analogy, supported by 1 Corinthians 12:13 and 12:22–24, and should be developed with disabled readers and not simply on their behalf. Natanael and Tandana (2026) show how women from Christian minority groups in Indonesia build resilience through community support, spiritual practice, and collective action. Their study concerns gender and religious minority status, and it illustrates that marginalization does not remove agency; it does not demonstrate anything about disability as such.

Taken together, the four sets of findings show a consistent pattern in which God's presence is first given in the midst of the people, then embodied, then spread to all believers, and in each stage the persons most easily pushed to the edge are a test of whether the presence is truly shared. The pattern does not mean that God is absent from others, nor that marginalized persons are morally or spiritually superior. It means that their exclusion contradicts the direction in which the biblical story moves.

DISCUSSION

An Integrative Model: The Trajectory of Divine Dwelling

The results can be brought together in a single trajectory (Figure 2). In the tabernacle, God dwells in the midst of Israel, and access is graded. In the incarnation, the Word tabernacles in flesh, and the flesh of Christ becomes the way into the sanctuary. In the body of believers, the Spirit dwells in the community and in each member, and access and priesthood are given to all. In the new creation, God dwells with humanity and the temple is no longer needed, "for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev. 21:3, 22). The trajectory should be read as a progression in the way God's dwelling is mediated and not as an evolution in which earlier stages are discarded. The Old Testament sanctuary remains revelation, and its restrictions are read in the light of their fulfilment in Christ.

The model has a critical function at each stage. Applied to the tabernacle, it asks who is near and who is kept at a distance. Applied to the incarnation, it asks whose body God has taken as his own. Applied to the believers, it asks whose members are treated as indispensable. And applied to the new creation, it asks what hope is held out for bodies

that now live with impairment. These questions are the means by which the theology of presence is tested, and they lead to the objections discussed below.

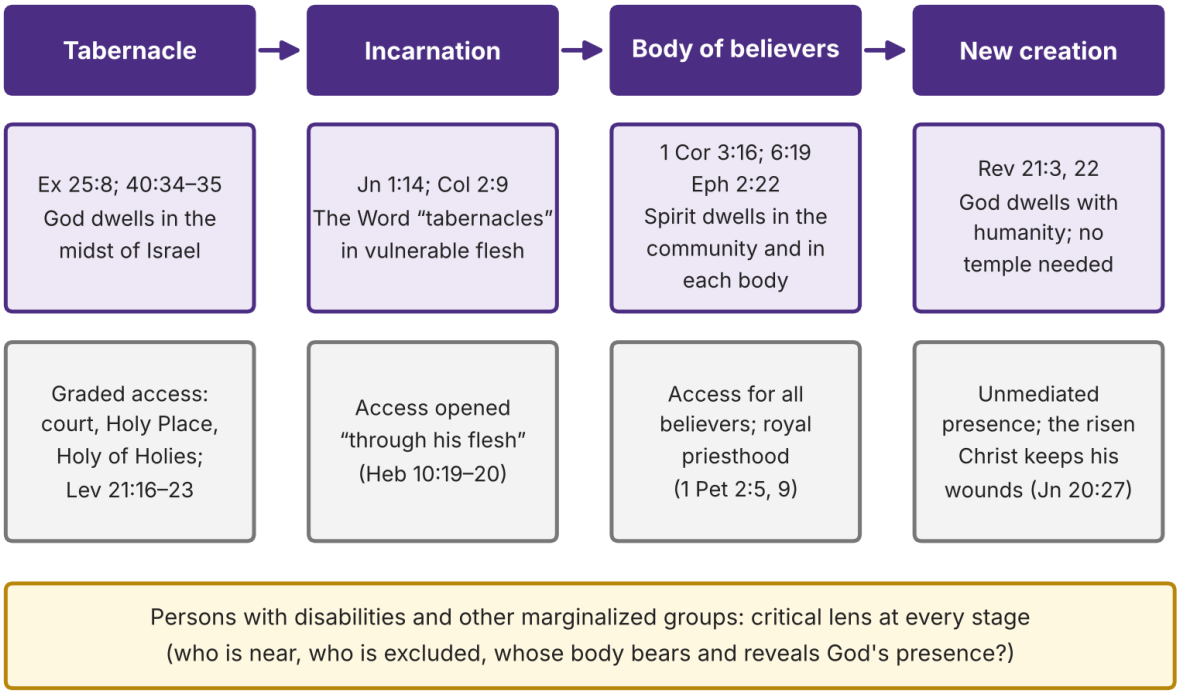


Figure 2. Trajectory of divine dwelling and of access, read through disability.
Source: author's design, based on the texts cited in the Results.

Trinitarian Grounding

The three stages are not accidental; they correspond to the work of the triune God. Gulo and Putrawan (2023) examine Jesus' address to God as Father and the intimacy of that relationship, and the access that Christ opens is in the first place access to this Father. The Son enters flesh (Gulo et al., 2022). The Spirit then dwells in the church and distributes gifts to its members (Pangumbahas et al., 2021; Sarono & Tubagus, 2021). Social and participatory doctrines of the Trinity have often been used to argue that the church should mirror the mutual love of the divine persons (Fiddes, 2000; Moltmann, 1981). They are also criticized for projecting human social ideals onto God (Kilby, 2000). This article therefore uses the Trinity in a restrained way: the pattern of dwelling is grounded in the economy of salvation, in what Father, Son, and Spirit do, and it is not derived from speculation about an ideal community in God's inner life.

Objections and Tensions

Levitical purity and the argument from wholeness. The strongest objection to an inclusive reading is textual. Leviticus 21 restricts bodily defect in the priesthood, and Deuteronomy 28:27–29 lists blindness and other afflictions among the curses of the covenant, so that physical wholeness appears to be a sign of blessing. Three responses are offered. First, the priestly restriction concerns an office within a particular cultic system and cannot be extended to the worth of persons. Second, the canonical trajectory moves against the use of bodily criteria for access: Isaiah 56:3–8, Matthew 21:14, Acts 8:26–39, and 1 Peter 2:9 all point in this direction, and Jesus explicitly denies that impairment is a mark of sin (John 9:3). Third, the church should not explain these texts away. They have been used to exclude, and the honest reading is that the tabernacle system and the fulfilment in Christ stand in tension that the church has to acknowledge and not conceal.

Transcendence and immanence. A theology of presence can seem to domesticate God, as if God could be contained in a building or a body. Solomon already acknowledged that heaven cannot contain God, much less the temple (1 Kgs. 8:27), and Paul repeats that God does not live in houses made by hands (Acts 17:24). Barth (1956) is often taken as the voice of divine transcendence, and he does insist on God's freedom. In *Church Dogmatics* I/2 he also treats the incarnation as God's free act of self-revelation in which the Word becomes flesh, so that transcendence and nearness are held together in Christ and not set against each other. Presence, in this reading, is gift and not possession: God makes himself available without becoming available for control.

Eschatology and cure. A common formulation presents the resurrection as the point at which physical limitations are simply transformed. This needs qualification. Disability theologians warn that a hope that simply abolishes disability can imply that disabled lives are defective until repaired, and it can postpone justice to a future state (Creamer, 2009; Eiesland, 1994; Yong, 2007). The New Testament does speak of the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23) and of a transformed resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:42–44). It also presents a risen Christ who keeps the marks of his wounds (Luke 24:39; John 20:27). A defensible position is therefore that the eschatological hope concerns the redemption of whole persons and the end of suffering, exclusion, and injustice, without prescribing which particular impairments disappear, and without allowing the future to excuse present barriers.

Romanticization and instrumentalization. It is tempting to say that marginalized persons are privileged bearers of God's presence. The sources support a narrower claim: God is near to the lowly, and the church has much to learn from them (Isa. 57:15; 1 Cor. 12:22–24; Natanael & Tandana, 2026). The claim becomes harmful if it turns persons into symbols of spiritual lessons for others, or if it implies that suffering is good for those who suffer. The dignity of the person must not depend on usefulness to the congregation. The proper response is participation: persons with disabilities should hold authority as interpreters of their own experience and as leaders, in line with the disability-rights principle "nothing about us without us" (Charlton, 2000).

Analogy and extrapolation. Part of the supporting literature concerns gender and religious-minority status, not disability (Natanael & Tandana, 2026; Sugiri, 2026). The analogies are theologically legitimate because they rest on the same logic of the body of Christ, but they need to be tested against disability-specific scholarship and, above all, against the testimony of disabled persons. This is one reason why the conclusions are presented as a framework for testing and not as empirical findings.

Practical Implications: An Audit Framework for Churches

The theology developed above implies that a church's claim to embody God's presence can be examined by looking at how it handles space, liturgy, leadership, teaching, and public witness. Table 3 translates the findings into an audit framework. The practices are normative proposals derived from the theological argument and have not been tested empirically. Churches in Indonesia can also use Law No. 8 of 2016 as a reference for the accessibility standards that should apply to places of worship.

Table 3. Audit framework for a church that embodies God's presence.

Dimension	Theological ground	Practices to examine	Indicators
Space and access	Tabernacle, Heb. 10:19–22: access is opened through Christ's flesh	Ramps, accessible toilets and seating, clear signage, hearing loops, quiet spaces, safe evacuation routes.	A wheelchair user can enter, sit with the congregation, and reach the pulpit and the Lord's Table.
Worship and language	Incarnation; John 9:1–3	Sign interpretation, large print, captioning, sensory-aware liturgy; avoid using disability as a metaphor for sin or ignorance.	Disabled persons can follow and take part in the whole service; no sermon ties impairment to guilt.

Dimension	Theological ground	Practices to examine	Indicators
Leadership and gifts	1 Cor. 12:22–24; 1 Pet. 2:9	No bodily criteria for offices or ministries; mentoring and shared leadership.	Persons with disabilities hold teaching, pastoral, and decision-making roles.
Teaching and pastoral care	John 9; Eph. 2:18	Teaching on disability and ableism; support for families; rejection of retributive explanations.	Pastoral care does not require cure as a condition of belonging.
Public witness	Matt. 25:31–46; Luke 14:12–24	Advocacy for accessibility and rights under Law No. 8/2016; partnership with disability organizations.	The church takes part in local advocacy and supports employment and education.
Participation	1 Cor. 12:26; Charlton (2000)	Consultation of disabled members in every audit and design decision.	Audit results are reported back and acted on, with disabled members as co-decision makers.

Source: author's synthesis from the Results and Discussion.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that the tabernacle, the incarnation, and the indwelling of the Spirit in the body of believers form one trajectory of divine dwelling that must be read with persons with disabilities as critical interlocutors. The tabernacle shows God's will to dwell in the midst of his people, while its graded and, in Leviticus 21, bodily conditioned access exposes the exclusion that the trajectory addresses. The incarnation, described in John 1:14 as a tabernacling in flesh, relocates the sanctuary in a vulnerable human body and opens access through that body (Heb. 10:19–20). The indwelling of the Spirit gives every member temple status and priestly access, so that the weaker members are indispensable (1 Cor. 12:22). The consequences for the church are concrete: it is called to remove barriers of space, language, leadership, and attitude, to share authority with disabled persons, and to advocate for their rights in society.

The study has several limitations. It relies on secondary literature and on the interpretation of texts, and it does not include empirical data from persons with disabilities. The Indonesian sources come from a limited number of journals, and some of them are used to support analogies and not direct claims about disability. The audit framework has not been tested. Further research should therefore (1) conduct qualitative or ethnographic studies of how persons with disabilities in Indonesian churches

experience divine presence and exclusion; (2) test and refine the audit framework in congregations; (3) examine intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, which this article treats only indirectly; and (4) explore the relation between disability theology and other contextual theologies, such as feminist, liberation, and ecological theology.

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