

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY ON DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper on Christian Theology on Disability is zeroing on three important areas that affect people with disabilities (PWD). In the first place, it digs the emerging field of theology in line with disability studies, starting with an introduction to disability studies to reflection on what significance disability perspective may have on current theology. Then, it explores ways in which religious traditions have either engaged or failed to engage philosophies of disability and impairment. Finally, concepts that touch on normalcy or human healthy are explored alongside advocacy and access issues related to religious practices such as preaching, religious education and biblical interpretation.

Introduction

The prevalence estimates of people with disabilities based on two large data sources; the World Health Organization (WHO) World Health Survey of 2002–2004, from 59 countries, and the WHO Global Burden of Disease study, 2004 indicate that one billion people worldwide are disabled in one way or the other.⁵¹ It is further stated that people with disabilities are nearly three times more likely to report being denied care than non-disabled people; two times more likely to find healthcare provider skills or equipment inadequate for their needs; four times more likely to report being treated badly by health professionals.⁵² The Fact sheet No 352 that was reviewed in December 2014 states:

Over a billion people are estimated to live with some form of disability. This corresponds to about 15% of the world's population. Between 110 million (2.2%) and 190 million (3.8%) people 15 years and older have significant difficulties in functioning. Furthermore, the rates of disability are increasing in part due to ageing populations and an increase in chronic health conditions.⁵³

For sure, ‘disability’ has been understood in a negative sense even by most people living with disabilities. This is why we find most of them begging on street corners as one way to attract sympathizers. Thus, disability has been perceived as ‘tragedy’, an object for charity, and on the other hand as the disabled person’s challenge.

This worrying information and the fact that most churches do not seem to fully embrace and

⁵¹ World Report on Disability, 2011. Accessed at http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf. (WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data) on 26th June 2015, (p. XI and 24-26). Also on <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs352/en/>. Accessed on 26th June 2015.

⁵² 2014 Action on Disability and Development (ADD International). Accessed at <http://www.add.org.uk/facts-about-disability>. Accessed on 26th June 2015.

⁵³ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs352/en/>. Accessed on 26th June 2015.

address the issue at grassroots level, this paper explores the correct theological position the church should take instead of being silent. As a faith based person and a church leader, I am motivated to undertake this study to offer a fundamental theological perspective that goes beyond arguments about sin and impairment, or disability as punishment, or miracles or no miracles to establish the correct position Christians (faith based people) should proceed with in regard to accommodating the disabled people in the church and the world.

Aims

The aim of this study is to

1. Explore the emerging field of theology in line with disability studies, starting with an introduction to disability studies to reflection on what significance disability perspective may have on current theology.
2. Discover ways in which religious traditions have either engaged or failed to engage philosophies of disability and impairment in an effort to provide the church with comprehensive responses based on the theological point of view.
3. Advocate and make recommendations to on how best to deal with issues of disability. These recommendations will include religious practices such as preaching, religious education and biblical interpretation.

Disability Defined

Some philosophers believe that the definition of disability is extremely contentious. This is so because it is only in the earlier century that the term was used to refer to a distinct class of people. Disability has been used either as a synonym for –inability or as a reference to legally imposed limitations on rights and powers. This made it so difficult to come up with a clear definition until recently in around the year 2006⁵⁴

Despite such thorny issues, WHO understands –disability as an umbrella term that covers all kinds of impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions.⁵⁵ Merriam Webster defines the term as a condition (such as an illness or an injury) that damages or limits a person's physical or mental abilities as well as the condition of being unable to do things in the normal way.⁵⁶ In the United Kingdom Legislation, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 stated that a person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. It is further stated that –disabled person means a person who has a disability.⁵⁷ Additionally, WHO states that disability is not just a health problem. It is a complex phenomenon that reflects the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which one lives.⁵⁸ David Pfeiffer's position states,

⁵⁴Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2014). Accessed at<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/disability/>. Center for the Study of Language and Information (CSLI), Stanford University. Accessed on 24th June 2015.

⁵⁵World Health Organization. Accessed at<http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/> on 27th June 2015.

⁵⁶Merriam Webster. Accessed at<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disability> on 27th June 2015, (2015 Merriam Webster Incorporated).

⁵⁷United Kingdom Legislation. Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Accessed at<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/50/contents> on 29th June 2015

⁵⁸World Health Organization.

Disability does not refer to a deficit in a person. Disability refers to a value judgment that something is not being done in a certain, acceptable way. Just as race is not a viable biological term and has no "scientific" definition, disability has no "scientific" or even a commonly agreed upon definition. Disability is not based on functioning or normality or a health condition, but on value judgements concerning functioning, normality, and health. In other words, the term disability is based on ideology and social class.⁵⁹

Furthermore, Pfeiffer asks the crucial question, –What is the disability paradigm?‖ His question goes beyond the paradigm to the philosophies that are stated as the outcomes of disability. Thereafter, he makes a sweeping statement that it is not practical to identify disability and cannot be defined or measured. He says:

Drawing on the nine versions just presented, the disability paradigm sets forth the following ideas: (1) carrying out social roles and tasks produces discrimination; (2) the organization of society also produces discrimination; (3) an impairment in no way signifies tragedy and a low quality of life and to assume so is discriminatory; (4) people with disabilities are an oppressed minority; (5) all people need various services in order to live independently; (6) all people have agendas most of which result in discrimination, but especially discrimination based on disability; (7) everyone will eventually become disabled; (8) there is no "normal" human behavior which can be the basis of social policy; and (9) discrimination against persons with disabilities is found everywhere at all times. In summary, identifying as a person with a disability is an ideological act, the term disability is an ideological term, and there is no commonly accepted way to identify or define disability and to measure it.⁶⁰

Types of Disability

There are different kinds of disabilities even though many people look at disability as only a physical challenge. At Johns Hopkins University through their Student Disability Services they presented nine plus one types of disabilities, which are adapted in this section.⁶¹

1. Attention: Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/AttentionDeficit/Hyperactivity Disorders

This as a neurological condition that affects both learning and behavior. It originates from chronic disturbances in the areas of the brain that regulate attention, impulse control, and the executive functions, which control cognitive tasks, motor activity, and social interactions. The challenge is medically treatable, but not necessarily curable.

2. Blindness or Low Vision

Mostly blindness is considered as the loss of useful sight. It can be temporary or permanent. There are countless causes of blindness. Some sources call blindness as visual handicap or visually challenged. Some groups classify blindness in these three categories:

⁵⁹Disability Studies Quarterly, (David Pfeiffer)Vol 22, No 2 (2002) Accessed at <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/341/429> on 4th July 2015

⁶⁰Disability Studies Quarterly, (David Pfeiffer).Vol 22, No 2 (2002) Accessed at <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/341/429> on 4th July 2015.

⁶¹Johns Hopkins University: The [Office of Student Disability Services](http://web.jhu.edu/disabilities/faculty/types_of_disabilities/speech.html) accessed at http://web.jhu.edu/disabilities/faculty/types_of_disabilities/speech.html on 1st July 2015. (Baltimore)

- "Totally blind" in which a person cannot see anything and has to depend on other senses or being guided.
- "Legally blind" in which the person has less than a very small percentage of vision in the more functional eye or a very limited field of vision (20 degrees at its widest point).
- "Low vision" in which a severe vision loss in distance and near vision. Such people use a combination of vision and other senses to perform day to day activities, and they may require adaptations in tools they use.

3. Brain Injuries

These are damages of any sort to the brain that affect the body systems in some ways. Such injuries occur in many ways. For example, traumatic brain injury, which is typically the outcome of accidents; in this case insufficient oxygen to the brain, stroke, poisoning, or infection, these, may also cause brain injury. It is believed that brain injury is one of the fastest growing types of disabilities, especially in the age range of 15 to 28 years.

4. Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing

Deafness is defined as the inability to understand speech through hearing even when sound is amplified. Another level of deafness is a profound one in which a person cannot hear anything at all; they are unable to detect sound, even at the highest volume possible. Such people require different accommodations depending on several factors, including the degree of hearing loss, the age of onset, and the type of language or communication system they use. They may use a variety of communication methods, including lip reading, cued speech and a signed language.

5. KnowledgeAcquisition Disabilities

Knowledge acquisition disabilities are neurologically based and may interfere with the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical skills. They affect the way in which affected people process and/or express information. A knowledge acquisition disability is usually characterized by difficulties in processing information.

6. Medical Disabilities

Medical disability is an intrinsic condition to the person that may reduce the individual's quality of life, and cause clear disadvantages to the individual. Of such may include respiratory, immunological, neurological, and circulatory systems.

7. Physical Disabilities

Most of physical disabilities result from congenital conditions, accidents, or progressive neuromuscular diseases. These disabilities may include conditions such as spinal cord injury (paraplegia or quadriplegia), cerebral palsy, spina bifida (split spine), amputation, muscular dystrophy, cardiac conditions, cystic fibrosis, paralysis, polio/post-polio, and stroke.

8. Psychiatric Disabilities

Psychiatric disabilities refer to a varied range of behavioral and/or psychological problems

characterized by nervousness disorders, mood disorders (including depression disorders), schizophrenia disorders, and/or a compromised assessment of reality. These behaviors persist over time. At times such behaviors resurface due to seasons and/or activities but many times they are not in response to a particular event. Although many individuals with psychiatric disabilities are stabilized using medications and/or psychotherapy, their abnormal behavior may resurface if not observed on regular basis.

9. Speech and Language Disabilities

Speech and language disabilities may result from hearing loss, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, and/or physical conditions. These may include difficulties in voice projection, fluency problems such as stuttering and stammering, and in articulating particular words or terms.

10. Albinism

Albinism is mostly a hereditary condition also called achromia, achromasia, or achromatosis. It results from deficiency in the production in melanin and by the partial or complete absence of pigment in the entire body. This genetic disease is found in humans from all races as well as in mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians.⁶²

The Challenge

As earlier discussed, it is important to remember that there are many different types of disabilities and as such these are also subject to different severities. There are two major challenges well-known to people with disabilities. First, is the attitudinal barriers that come from the way people think and treat the disabled people and secondly, the physical barriers, which include buildings and their settings: stairways, blocked lifts or access routes and narrow doorways. Such barriers are not usually considered when constructing church buildings and church platforms for stress-free accessibility. A crucial question to this challenge is: Does a wide range of persons with disabilities have an opportunity to take advantage of the church's program in such areas as architecture/space, programs, communication, alternative formats and technology?

Going back to one of the major challenges stated above, the common attitudinal barrier is stigma and discrimination. Stigmatization is humiliation whether in an actual sense or jokingly. It is sad to say that there are times when discrimination comes from biological parents and relatives. Some parents do not want people to know that they have a physically challenged child or an albino baby. They lock such children in homes. Others cover them in blankets for people not to see them. Consequently, such children are denied access to social environments and basic education. Places like church areas are no-go zones for fear of self-embarrassment. Other parents and church leaders look at these disabled people as individuals who will waste their time and resources in the church. Norman Sartorius says, –A restriction of the possibility of participation in normal social life and limitations in the pursuit of personal happiness are often grave and depressing for the person with an impairment that causes a disability.⁶³ Furthermore, he states:

⁶²Medical News Today. Accessed at www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/245861.php on 2nd July 2015.

⁶³PubMed Central (PMC). Volume 48 (3), 2007 Jun. Accessed at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2080544/> on 3 July 2015. (National Institutes of Health's National Library of Medicine [NIH/NLM]) (Bethesda).

Mental disorders probably carry more stigma (and consequent discrimination) than any other illness. The stigma does not stop at the persons who are suffering from a stigmatized illness. Their immediate and even remote families often experience significant social disadvantages. The institutions that provide mental health care are stigmatized. Stigma reduces the value of the persons who have a mental disorder in the eyes of the community and the government. Medications that are needed in the treatment of mental disorders, for example, are considered expensive even when their cost is much lower than the cost of drugs used in the treatment of other illnesses: they are not considered expensive because of their cost but because they are meant to be used in the treatment of people who are not considered to be of much value to the society.⁶⁴

Related to the two challenges discussed above, there is a theological challenge which many Christians embrace. This is a –wholesalel ideology that disability is a direct result of sin either by the concerned individual or the biological parent. It is believed to be a resultant curse from a sinful act or acts. As such, these people should not be given a grin. They are considered sinners and deserve to bear the consequences of their action. Linked to this notion are few instances in the Bible where Jesus healed disabled individuals and gave commands that demonstrated a connection between sin and the ailment.

A case in point is an invalid man (John 5:1-15) who sat at the Bethesda pool for thirty eight years. The Bible clearly says –Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—blind, the lame and paralyzed.l Jesus himself passed by and saw his condition. He healed the man instantly. The healing is followed by a stern warning, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."

Another similar case is one that took place when Jesus just returned to Capernaum (Mark 2:1-12). Four men brought to him a paralytic. These people removed the roof above Jesus, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which he laid. At that moment, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ... "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." The man rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

Similarly, there was an incident of a certain man (Luke 9:37-43) for whom the crowd cried out to Jesus for help saying, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son... a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him.l At that Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy.

Furthermore, average Christians do not accept the fact that a mental patient can be given a chance to attend a worship service and further accept the Gospel. This may be an extreme but the truth is that the Gospel is for all people (Matthew 24:14 and Romans 1:14-15). An epileptic person needs the Gospel too. All people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and have the right to the Gospel despite the challenges they may face.

Religious Traditions versus Philosophies of Disability and Impairment

As earlier alluded, the common understanding of many Christians and the general public is that disability is a direct punishment for wrongdoing. It is perceived as a direct result of sinful acts against God. Some of us may recall days we refrained from killing small insects or laughing at any disabled person for fear that in return we shall give birth to a disabled person or we will be disabled.

⁶⁴Ibid

Such belief is carried to institutions and is reflected in the way people with disability are barred from leadership positions as well as being stigmatized for their presumed lack of faith. Such belief forces people and people with disabilities themselves to view disability as a virtuous suffering. That is, the suffering that must be endured in order to be forgiven and cleansed, a teaching that encourages passive acceptance of social barriers for the sake of obedience to God.

M. Miles in the article that was posted by the Independent Living Institute states:

There have indeed been many academic studies and commentaries of Christian texts (embracing also particular Jewish texts) that derive from Middle Eastern history, and in which disability and disabled people have some place. There has also been a very long Christian presence across Asia, and some involvement with disability. A considerable quantity exists of reference works, such as lexicons of ancient Middle Eastern languages, or encyclopedias of culture and religion, which have been developed mainly by European scholars and which incidentally contain detailed studies on particular disability-related words.⁶⁵

Additionally, Miles asserts that on impairment and disability, deafness and blindness, infirmity, handicap, deformity and devalued identity, family and social responses, appear mainly in odd corners and footnotes of both ancient and more recent literature of religion, law, moral philosophy, ethics, folklore, anthropology, history, sociology, etc.⁶⁶ Similarly, David Pfeiffer seemed to score a point when he clearly stated:

Until recently the dominant paradigm regarding disability (not disability studies) was the deficit model which is not to be found, and should not be found, in disability studies because it conflicts with the disability paradigm. The deficit model says that the person with a disability has a deficit which must be corrected. This model is still very much alive outside of disability studies and infects many people doing disability research outside of the field of disability studies.⁶⁷

Selected Scriptural Themes on Disability

Cutting the Bible across one will not miss such diseases as epilepsy, blindness, deafness, dumbness, leprosy, mental disorder associated with demons and paralysis that are associated with disabilities. Biblically, these diseases are commonly attributed to God. Most writers of the Old Testament stated clearly that God was in charge of such afflictions on the people as a way of punishing them for wrongdoings. It was God's expression of wrath for disobedience. In Leviticus 26:14-16, God firmly speaks to the Israelites that the consequence for their disobedience will be an affliction with disease which included blindness. He says, "But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments...I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life." During the time God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah he used blindness as a punishment. The Bible reads, –And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the

⁶⁵Independent Living Institute (ILI) M. Miles (2007)Disability and Deafness. Accessed at <http://www.independentliving.org/docs7/miles200707.html> on 4th July 2015

⁶⁶Ibid. ,

⁶⁷Disability Studies Quarterly, (David Pfeiffer).Vol 22, No 2 (2002) Accessed at <http://dsq.sds.org/article/view/341/429> on 4th July 2015

door. In Deuteronomy 28:28-29 God pronounces curses for disobedience and the Bible reads, "The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind, and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways."

From the book of Zechariah 11:17, God demonstrated an anger by making a statement to the shepherd who was deserting his flock. He said "Woe to my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be wholly withered, his right eye utterly blinded!" The statement speaks of visual impairment and paralysis as punishments to such a lazy shepherd. Additionally, in 2 Chronicles 26:16-23, God struck King Uzziah with leprosy till his death because of his unfaithfulness. The Bible clearly states "because the Lord had afflicted him" (vs 20). In Zephaniah 1:17 the same God warns His people that He bring distress on the people because they were sinning against Him. He says, "They will walk like blind men."

As previously discussed, Jesus healed the physically impaired man who had been invalid for thirty-eight years, staying by the pool of Bethesda waiting for a healing miracle. By way of caution, Jesus told the impaired man after the miracle, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you." (John. 5:14). Undoubtedly the statement of Jesus indicates that He evidently expressed a connection between the man's incapacity and a certain disobedience. Likewise, when Jesus healed the paralytic man lowered through the rooftop (Mark. 2:1-12), He said to him: "Son, your sins are forgiven." ... "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." (Vs 5, 11). Jesus' command indicated that there was some connection to the man's impairment and sin. Such statements are not common although there are many implied passages directly related to the notion where healing was administered by Jesus. The Lord unmistakably portrays physical disability as an obstruction to the exercise of the priestly office for the descendants of Aaron. He openly told Moses to speak to Aaron about the office's requirements. He said:

...none of your offspring throughout their generation who has a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his God. For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or a man who has an injured foot or an injured hand, or a hunchback or a dwarf or a man with a defect in his sight, or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles. No man of the offspring of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer the Lord's food offering; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. He may eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy things, but he shall not go through the veil or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries, for I am the Lord who sanctifies them (Leviticus 21:16-23).

God's command demonstrates that physical disabilities disqualified Aaron's descendants from serving as priests and presenting offerings on behalf of the people. Wholeness of the body represented God's purpose that the priests were to serve as examples of the fullness of life as God intended; consequently they would be most effective in God's service when free from physical imperfections. Still though, God's requirement for a perfect body in the priesthood prefigured Christ's moral perfection (Hebrews 9:13-14).⁶⁸

⁶⁸Donald C. Stamps, Ed., *Life in the Spirit Study Bible*. Grand Rapids, 2003, 188-189.

Quoting an unpublished article of J. Hull (2000) Pauline A. Otieno states that Jesus used such an expression as "blind" in referring to the abuse in the Gospel of Matthew. Thus, when He confronted certain groups of people, he described them as "blind guides" (Matt.23: 16, 24), "blind fools" (v.17), and "blind Pharisees" (v.26). Such verses give a reproachful image of blindness. Furthermore, Jesus called sighted people blind fools and taught that the blind people could not lead the blind. They will both fall into a ditch. Such metaphoric use of disability as a symbol of sin, disobedience, unbelief, and ignorance aggravates the notion of disability as one viewed from a moral perspective.

Pauline A. Otieno concludes one of his discussions by saying:

Although biblical and theological views of disability have led to a discriminatory and exclusive approach to viewing people with disability it is important to point out that perspectives that take an emancipatory and inclusive approach to disability issues are also found in the Bible and Christian theology.⁶⁹

Concurring with Otieno's view is what we hear God speaking about restoring the Israelites from the Babylonian captivity back to Jerusalem. The Lord told them:

Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here (Jeremiah 31:8).

Similarly, the Lord spoke about rescuing Zion. He made a seemingly reversal statement of what was stated earlier in some other passages. Both the afflicted and the lame will be restored. He emphatically stated that He will reign over them from that time forth and forevermore. It is a clear restoration motif. Here is the declaration:

In that day... I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and for ever more.

Furthermore, God foresaw a day when salvation will be extended to every person including people with disabilities. He made a declaration that is noted by Isaiah in Chapter 29 verse 18. He says, -In that day, the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. God, furthermore sees a day when great things will happen to people with disability. This is a clear indication of inclusiveness. These people must be reached, accommodated and be appreciated if they will be part of the kingdom. The task is so certain as demonstrated by the powerful declaration quoted by Isaiah in Isaiah 35:5-6. He says:

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.

⁶⁹Disability Studies Quarterly, [Vol 29, No 4 \(2009\)](#) by Pauline A. Otieno. Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Disability: Implications on the Rights of Persons with Disability in Kenya. Accessed at <http://dsq.sds.org/article/view/988/1164> on 5th July 2015.

Related to the predicted restoration of God's people is the manifesto Jesus made the very day He stood in one of the temples announcing His earthly presence. He quoted Isaiah 61:1-2;

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus' manifesto is amplified in the parables He gave the Pharisees and the disciples in Luke 14:1-24 just after healing a man who had dropsy in the course of dining at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. The two parables, the Parable of the Wedding Feast and the Parable of the Great Banquet are crucial to this inclusion of the discriminated. In the second parable, the Parable of the Great Banquet the owner of the banquet gets angered by the excuses the invitees gave. In the anger he asks his servants to go out into the highways and byways to bring in the poor and the mutilated. He told them: "Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame." Jesus paints a picture that refuses to marginalize people with disability in a sense.

It is not surprising to hear Jesus clarifying about the house of God after He cleansed the temple in Matthew 21:12-16 as He said "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' which was followed by multitudes coming to Him for deliverance. In verse 14 it is stated "And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them" a clear implication of inclusiveness. Similarly, it is again not astonishing to hear Jesus responding positively to John's disciples' question at the time John himself was in prison but was hearing that people with disability were being assisted on a daily basis. He himself was still in prison for the Gospel's sake. Jesus' response indicated that it was truly the time for the reversal of what was believed that people with disability had no place in the Kingdom. The question was simple: "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Jesus responded to the question by simply saying:

Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." (Matthew 11:4-6).

This should not surprise any reader or Christian. The truth of the matter is that all human beings are created by one and only one God and more than that are created in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27). Therefore, all human beings (people) are equal before God (James 2:1-9) regardless of culture, background, nation, physical challenges and the list goes on. Paul in Romans 2:11 clarified that "For God does not show favoritism (partiality)." Thus, all human beings are entitled to enjoy life irrespective of inborn infirmities or maladies that come in due course.

What this Implies

The clear tone in the discussion is that something has to be done to accommodate people with disabilities. There is no room for segregation in the house of God, neither is there room for marginalization. All are equal and have to be treated so. Absolutely, all need the same Gospel for the sake of eternal life with their Creator. Otieno comments:

Consequently, it is imperative that church leaders develop an inclusive world view so that PWDs are sought out with the gospel and welcomed into Christian fellowship, and so that the church of Christ becomes an effective catalyst in bringing about change in cultural attitudes towards people with disabilities. The church as a whole "must recognize the spiritual and material needs of PWD and their families, and respond in a Christ like manner" (Govig, 1989: 98). To ignore the existence of disabilities is to deny reality; to ignore people with disabilities is sinful.⁷⁰

Furthermore, Otieno sheds more light on what he calls the missions of the church. In his conviction he says:

One of the missions of the church is to facilitate the integration of disability issues into the whole spectrum of the life of the church and society while at the same time giving adequate attention to those special and unique areas necessary to equalization of opportunities. One of these areas includes advocacy in disability human rights concerns. This means working with the churches towards participation and inclusiveness of PWD in the spiritual, social, and development life in church and society and advocating for the general improvement of services for persons with disabilities. The church must become an advocate for and with them.⁷¹

Truthfully, the church should not have room for discrimination in the name of Scriptures. The church must be the true salt of the earth and the proper light of the world. Jesus Himself taught, "You are the salt of the earth. ... You are the light of the world. ... In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:13-16). The primary advocacy for the inclusion of people with disabilities in every field of life and ministry should come from Christians through their practice. The world should learn and emulate how Christians handle such challenged people. In relation to people with disorders, the General Council of the Assemblies of God in United States of America during their General Presbytery agreed and stated that:

Those with mental disabilities can respond to the presence of the Holy Spirit. Paul reported the answer he received when he asked that his thorn in the flesh be removed: -The Lord said to me, _My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'_ll(2 Corinthians 12:9). We can trust God to reveal His power through the weakness of those with disabilities.⁷²

Recommendations

a) Inclusiveness/Integration

People with disabilities ought to be treated as peers for them to feel accommodated. The communities' attitude towards them should demonstrate that they are accommodated to

⁷⁰ Disability Studies Quarterly, (Pauline A. Otieno).

⁷¹ Ibid.,

⁷²The General Council of the Assemblies of God. Ministry to People with Disabilities. Accessed at http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/position_papers/pp_downloads/pp_disabilities.pdf on 7th July 2015. (August 11, 2000: Springfield).

participate in every social aspect of the society's development. Their experiences and gratification must be treated the same way other people in the society are treated.

Once more, The General Council of the Assemblies of God, USA notes that people with disabilities are essential to the wholeness of the Christian community. In a culture that worships physical perfection, devalues human life, and takes pride in disposability, the church must protect the helpless, vulnerable, disenfranchised, including people with disabilities. They are people created in God's image, possessing dignity, value, and purpose.⁷³

b) Accommodation

Accommodation includes adapting church activities in paving the way for persons with disabilities to feel recognized and appreciated. At KY Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service Lanny Taulbee presented three categories of reasonable accommodations.⁷⁴ They are:

- i) Modifications or adjustments to an application process to permit an individual with a disability to be considered for a position (such as providing application forms in alternative formats like large print or Braille);
- ii) Modifications or adjustments necessary to enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of the position (such as providing sign language interpreters); and
- iii) Modifications or adjustments that enable individuals with disabilities to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of service and volunteering (such as removing physical barriers in a cafeteria or lounge).

c) Accessibility

Construction sites and programs should be accessible to people with disabilities. That is, the Architectural work and space must provide facilities for such people. Programs and communication should always be done with these people in mind.

d) Advocating for Rights

In line with what was discussed earlier that some families tend to hide their disabled members and do not take them to institutions of learning or allow them to fellowship with their friends freely for fear of shame associated with the disability, the church should take a front bench in advocating and protecting the rights of these people. The church should at all cost emulate the example of Jesus Christ by breaking down all kinds of barriers and reaching out to touch these people with disabilities on their point of needs.

Conclusion

Now is the time to break the silence. The church should rise up and lead the way. The answer to transform the word is first with the church and then other groups like the governments and non-governmental organizations. In the Bible Mordecai told Esther a blunt statement, -For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish" (Esther 4:14). It should not be so with the Church. The time to rise up is now. "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts ..." (Hebrews 3:15).

⁷³The General Council of the Assemblies of God, USA

⁷⁴Corporation of National and Community Service. Accessed

at http://www.nationalservice.gov/home/no_fear_act/index.asp on 6th July 2015. Also found on <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/adahandbook/FREG1.txt>