



# Mission Sparks

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15th Edition

THE BEAM IN OUR EYE:  
DISCRIMINATION AND PEOPLE  
WITH DISABILITY.





# Mission Sparks

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MISSION SPARKS:  
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## EDITORIAL NOTE

Dear Readers,

The Mission Sparks 15th edition is brought to you with the theme “The Beam in Our Eye: Discrimination and People with Disability.” According to the General Act on Equal Treatment (AGG), discrimination is the less favorable treatment of a person on the grounds of age, disability, ethnic origin, race, gender, religion or belief or sexual orientation (Section 1 AGG) which cannot be justified by objective reasons.<sup>1</sup> From the human rights perspective, discrimination occur when a person unable to enjoy his or her human rights or other legal rights on an equal basis with others because of an unjustified distinction made in policy, law or treatment.<sup>2</sup>

Prejudice based on concepts of identity, and the need to identify with a certain group drives discrimination since there are different kind of identities. The discriminatory practices, regulation and law can be found in the family, society and even in the religious institutions like church.

The authors in this edition highlight the issue of discrimination against people with disabilities and refugees and offer theological basis to bring justice for people with disabilities and refugees:

**Tabita Kartika Christiani** criticized the understanding of ableism, normalcy and perfection. According to her, ableism, normalcy and perfection exist in the Bible and often become a source of reference for judgment of people with disabilities. She emphasized the importance to change the diaconia in the church not only from charity to empowerment but to justice so that people with disabilities get their rights. She called the church to repent by

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1 <https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/EN/about-discrimination/what-is-discrimination/forms-of-discrimination/forms-of-discrimination-node.html>

2 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/discrimination/>

undoing ableism, normalcy, and perfection, and by developing an inclusive ecclesiology that invites people with disabilities to fully participate in the church.

Examples of discrimination against people with disabilities and how theological understandings make it more difficult for people with disabilities and their family were also raised by **Marthalena Sinaga**. According to her, it is important to have an adequate theological understanding to remove the stigma against the people with disabilities and their families who understand what happen to them as a result of sin. She argued that Holy Communion understood as a missional symbol would be a doorway to a better understanding. A new name is given to reinterpret the event of Christ that embraces all marginalized people who are also saved by Him. With such an understanding, the stigma of people with disabilities as abnormal and sinful can be removed.

**Martinus Dam Febrianto** raised the theme of refugees as a group which often discriminated. He raised the example of Rohingya refugees in Indonesia and how the Jesuit community assisted the refugees. According to him, theological perspectives play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward migration and influencing policy decisions. For this reason, Martinus Dam Febrianto emphasized the importance of critiquing exclusive actions. In his article, he explains the transformative power of biblical narratives such as the story of the Good Samaritan to promote a more inclusive and compassionate response to those who are vulnerable such as refugees.

This edition also contains one article written by **Hardiyan Triasmoroadi** based on his experience during UEM Jewish-Christian-Moslem conference in Manila in February 2024. His theme is not related to people with disabilities or refugees but to the theme of exploring prayer for the dead.

Hardiyan Triasmoroadi argued the importance of adopting prayers for the dead in the protestant church to provide space for the memory of the departed, “memorize the absent”, and encouraged protestant church to construct a doctrine for that.

Enjoy reading!

Dr. Dyah Ayu Krismawati – Chief Editor





# **DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN CHURCH AND DIACONIA WORK**

*Rev. Prof. Tabita Kartika Christiani, Ph.D.*

## **ABSTRACT**

Discrimination against persons with disabilities happens in church and diaconia work. It starts with the way the church interprets some biblical passages, which recognizes persons with disabilities as second-class creatures. This leads to exclude persons with disabilities from fully participating in church life. Diaconia work has changed from charity to empowerment, but it is not enough, because empowering persons with disabilities does not necessarily mean changing people's minds, which hold ableism, normalcy, and perfection as standard of recognizing people. In order to change this situation, the church needs to intentionally undo ableism, normalcy, and perfection in the life of the church; to welcome persons with disabilities participating in the church life; and change diaconia work from charity to empowerment to justice.

**Keywords:** discrimination, persons with disabilities, church, diaconia

## **INTRODUCTION**

Discriminations against vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, happen in church and diaconia work. Persons with disabilities are usually discriminated due to ableism that is very strong in the church. Ableism looks at a person from his or her ability, therefore persons with disabilities are regarded as not-abled or disabled. Along with ableism, there are also other standards used in church, namely normalcy and perfection. All these three



standards exclude persons with disabilities from fully participating in the church life. This paper starts with discussion on discrimination against persons with disabilities in church, then discrimination against persons with disabilities in diaconia work. After that this paper proceeds to analyze some basic reasons for discrimination against persons with disabilities, namely ableism, normalcy, and perfection. At the end, this paper suggests some ways in which the church could repent and transform herself in order to combat discrimination.

## **DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN CHURCH**

Discrimination against persons with disabilities in church starts with an interpretation on Genesis 1:26–27,

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (NRS)

Theological discussions raise a question: in what way does a human show God’s image (in Latin: *imago Dei*, from the Hebrew word *tselem*)? Traditionally there are four answers, namely, (1) rationality or capacity to think; (2) morality or the capacity to feel guilty, ashamed and responsible; (3) spirituality or capacity for religious experience; and (4) an upright physical posture. “The intellect has persisted in the Christian tradition as the primary feature of the *imago Dei* due to the association between the Christian doctrine of Christ as the divine Logos or wisdom and the Aristotelian doctrine of human beings as rational or reasoning creatures.”<sup>1</sup>

As a result, persons with intellectual, mental, and physical disabilities are recognized as second-class or not fully human, because they do not have one or more of human’s capacities as God’s

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<sup>1</sup> Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity*, Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007, 172.

image. This kind of teaching in church becomes a theological reason for discrimination against persons with disabilities. As second-class human, persons with disabilities cannot fully participate in the church life, such as to be ordained ministers, elders, and other forms of leadership. Sometimes there are challenges for persons with disabilities to participate in catechism classes, and then going for confirmation, where they confirm the promises that were made by their parents when they were baptized during their childhood. In many churches, confirmation becomes a prerequisite for taking part in Holy Communion. Without confirmation, someone will never be able to take part in Holy Communion.

Another passage, which is usually used to discriminate against persons with disabilities, is 1 Corinthians 12. This passage describes the church as the body of Christ, where each member needs the other, and no one can stand out; all are one, so that praise or suffering is felt by the whole body. However, the metaphor of body can be problematic from a disability perspective. Who is meant as the weakest and least respected part of the body in verses 22-23? Usually, people immediately say they are persons with disabilities. Actually, 1 Corinthians 12 wants to describe the diversity of forms, functions, abilities, positions of each person that are different from one another, but all are equal and need each other.

Amos Yong wrote, “an ecclesiology of disability will reject conventional ableism which marginalizes persons with disabilities who are considered as weaker, less honorable members of the church, or members who are less needed because they make only a small contribution.”<sup>2</sup> Conventional ableism is an understanding that views persons with disabilities as people who are unable to do anything, so they are called disabled. In line with conventional ableism is normalcy, which uses the standard of normal as a measure, therefore, those who are different are considered abnormal or disabled. Likewise, there is an understanding that uses the measure of perfection, which call those who are different as imperfect. Ableism, normalcy, and perfection demeans persons with disabilities.

The church needs to repent, by changing of mind and concept, not to hold ableism, normalcy, and perfection anymore. Persons with and without disabilities are equal. They are all parts of the church. They have the same rights in the church, including in leadership.

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2 Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011, 93.

Everyone, whether with or without disabilities, can contribute to the community, according to their gifts and talents.

## **DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN DIACONIA WORK**

How the church practice diaconia is usually in the same way as when the teaching was established. For example, diaconia in Calvin's teachings. John Calvin (1509–1564) lived at the end of the medieval era, when poverty was endemic and begging was common in most parts of Europe. At that time, begging even received theological justification as providing special merit for the salvation of the almsgivers. Besides, beggars were regarded as "holy men" who followed Christ by abandoning all worldly goods.<sup>3</sup> Some people may romanticize poverty by quoting Jesus' words, "You always have the poor with you, ..." (John 12:8 NRSV) – an attitude that leads them to be passive toward poverty. Calvin, on the contrary, did not let poverty dominate people's lives. He tried to combat and overcome poverty by his teaching on *diaconia*, which "forms an integral part of Calvin's Ecclesiology."<sup>4</sup>

The urgent need for the order of deacons was very strong during Calvin's stay in Geneva. At that time there were many refugees from several different countries who moved to Geneva. Calvin himself was a refugee from France, leaving Paris because of the "Cop affair."<sup>5</sup> Upon his arrival in Geneva, he was introduced to the General Hospital with its two types of controllers, the procurators and the hospitallers. The General Hospital was located in a former convent of the Sisters of St. Clare. The sisters had moved to the neighboring town of Annecy in order to continue their life as Catholic sisters after the Reformation in Geneva. The General Hospital helped more

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3 Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvinism and Social Welfare," *Calvin Theological Journal* 17 (1982). 213.

4 Hans Scholl, "The Church and the Poor in the Reformed Tradition," *Ecumenical Review* 32 (1980). 246.

5 Cop was Calvin's good friend and colleague who in his inaugural speech as an elected rector of the University of Sorbonne, Paris, cited not only the works of French Humanist and Erasmus, but also Luther's sermon. This caused both Cop and Calvin to flee to save themselves from assassination, because France did not accept Reformation. Cop escaped to Basle, Calvin to Angoulême, where he wrote the first edition of the *Institutes*, then to Basle, where he published his writing in 1536. See Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations*, Oxford, OX, UK and Cambridge, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, 253.

and more poor Protestants who had fled from areas of Catholic repression. In 1540s, the General Hospital was overloaded, and the procurators were considering closing it. But then a wealthy refugee, David Busanton, willed a significant sum of money to the poor before he died – with Calvin at his side. This contribution allowed the Hospital to stay open.<sup>6</sup>

Control of the General Hospital was handled by a board of procurators and a hospitaller. The board of procurators was a standing committee who governed the city. Its members were elected yearly, but they could be reelected for several terms. Usually those members were wealthy people, such as prosperous merchant or professional men. The procurators met once a week to review the operation of the General Hospital and to decide the grants for poor families. The hospitaller was the administrator of the General Hospital, responsible for the daily administration. He and his family lived together with the poor in the General Hospital. He organized the workers to raise crops on lands belonging to the institution. His wife organized the cooks to bake bread and make wine for the people in the General Hospital as well as for other poor families. Also, there was a teacher in residence to educate the children, a barber-surgeon and a pharmacist to take care of health, and several servants.

The General Hospital was intended to assist the poor: the orphans, the crippled, the elderly, and others who could not take care of themselves.<sup>7</sup> Calvin urged wealthy people to help the poor, because for him the poor reminded the wealthy of their common humanity as created in the image of God. This common humanity was a strong justification for the wealthy to be willing to help the poor. Calvin wrote,

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6 Jeannine E. Olson, "Social Welfare and the Transformation of Polity in Geneva," in *The Identity of Geneva: The Christian Commonwealth, 1564-1864*, ed. John B. Roney and Martin I. Klauber, Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1998, 156.

7 The General Hospital was not a hospital in the modern sense, namely, for taking care of sick people. Rather, it was an "all-purpose welfare institution." See Jeannine E. Olson, "The Bourse Française: Deacons and Social Welfare in Calvin's Geneva," *Pacific Theological Review* Winter (1982). 19. The General Hospital was founded in 1535 by lay people who later invited Calvin to Geneva. See Robert M. Kingdon, "Social Welfare in Calvin's Geneva," *American Historical Review* 76 (1971). 52

Therefore, whoever be the man that is presented to you as needing your assistance, you have no ground for declining to give it to him .... Say that he is unworthy of your least exertion on his account; but the image of God, by which he is recommended to you, is worthy of yourself and all your exertions.<sup>8</sup>

Even today, in many churches, the practice of diaconia is just the same as in Calvin's time, by establishing something like the General Hospital, namely rehabilitation centers. Persons with disabilities are gathered in a boarding school, where they live, study, and learn life skills. Many of them live in that place in all time of their lives. They are disconnected from their families. Even some families are happy with that, because it is not easy to raise children with disabilities. Then people from churches would come to visit or celebrate Christmas as part of diaconia work. This kind of diaconia is charity, which looks at persons with disabilities as not able to support their own lives, that they need help in all their lifetime. Even if they are able to sing and play music instruments, they perform in churches for fundraising. They are just entertainers, not part of the church. This kind of diaconia is discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Fortunately, nowadays many churches are aware of their faults, so they start to change diaconia work, from charity to empowerment. Persons with disabilities are no more living together in a boarding rehabilitation center. They live with their families, and come to the center only for education or health treatment. They are empowered to be able to live economically independent. They have skills, they work, and even open jobs for others.

The church, however, still needs to repent and transform her diaconia work, from charity to empowerment to justice. In empowerment there is no guarantee that discrimination disappeared. The church can empower persons with disabilities, but at the same time still hold ableism, normalcy, and perfection in her mind. Persons with disabilities are not part of the church. They are object of diaconia work, in the form of empowerment.

Therefore, in repentance, the church needs to transform diaconia work from charity to empowerment to justice for persons

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<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. 1 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989, Book III, Chapter VII, number 6. 11, 12.

with disabilities. It starts with changing of mind and concept, not to hold ableism, normalcy, and perfection anymore. Diaconia is working together with persons with disabilities in equality. The way the church live in all aspects are transformed. Persons with disabilities are not the others or strangers anymore. They are parts of the church. Justice for persons with disabilities means they have the same rights in the church, including in leadership. Their ways of thinking and the ways they live daily life are recognized as equal as of those who are without disabilities. So, they are appreciated, heard, and considered in every decision-making in the church.

## **UNDOING ABLEISM, NORMALCY, AND PERFECTION TOWARD A JUST CHURCH**

### *Ableism*

Fiona Kumari Campbell defines ableism as “a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human.”<sup>9</sup> She compares her definition with a similar one, written by Veronica Chouinard, who defines ableism as “ideas, practices, institutions, and social relations that presume ablebodiedness, and by so doing, construct persons with disabilities as marginalized and ... largely invisible “others.”<sup>10</sup> Both definitions show ableism uses ablebodiedness as a standard to recognize or categorize persons, which turns to discriminate against persons with disabilities as disabled people. “The processes of ableism, like those of racism, induce an internalization or self-loathing which devalues disablement.”<sup>11</sup> The process of internalization could make people not aware of, and think that it is natural, or it has to be like that. It makes undoing ableism is not easy.

Using Paulo Freire concept of education, it needs a process of conscientization, which is defined as “the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives

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9 Fiona Kumari Campbell, *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Abledness*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 5.

10 Campbell, *Contours of Ableism*, 5.

11 Campbell, *Contours of Ableism*, 20.

and of their capacity to transform that reality.”<sup>12</sup> Conscientization empowers individuals to challenge oppressive structures and work towards a more just and equitable society. Freire himself did not relate his theory to disability issue, because his context was focusing on oppression of the poor and illiterate people. But his theory can be applied to other forms of oppression, including disability.

There are four steps in the process of conscientization: (1) Thematisation stage: individuals reflect on their experiences and identify the social, economic, and political structures that influence their lives, especially those which oppress and marginalize; (2) Codification stage: individuals critically examine the language and symbols that are used to reinforce existing power structures; (3) Decodification stage: individuals deconstruct their own assumptions and beliefs, and develop a critical understanding of the world around them; (4) Action stage: individuals use their newly developed critical consciousness to take action and work towards social change.<sup>13</sup>

### *Normalcy*

Normalcy standard is still used by many people. In this standard, persons with disabilities are recognized as “abnormal.” This then leads to some efforts to fix them into the normal standard, especially through medical means, as well as through non-medical means like exorcism, which is still happening in Indonesia. Persons with disabilities are often discriminated in many ways, and become target of bullying, persecution, and other forms of intolerance and violence. All these happen because persons with disabilities are recognized as different from the normal standard. Therefore, in order to undo normalcy as a standard, people need to accept and appreciate differences.

Lennard J. Davis explains that “[t]he word ‘normal’ as ‘constituting, conforming to, not deviating or differing from, the common type or standard, regular, usual’ only enters the English language around 1840” and the word ‘normalcy’ appeared only in

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12 Ana Cruz, “Paulo Freire’s Concept of Conscientização,” in Robert Lake and Tricia Kress, eds., *Paulo Freire’s Intellectual Roots: Toward Historicity in Praxis*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013, 172.

13 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972. Adapted systematically on [https://www.socialworkin.com/2023/04/what-is-conscientization-model-of-paulo.html#google\\_vignette](https://www.socialworkin.com/2023/04/what-is-conscientization-model-of-paulo.html#google_vignette) accessed on October 31, 2023.



1849 and 1857.<sup>14</sup> The concept of a norm implies that the majority of the population should somehow be part of the norm; therefore, persons with disabilities will be recognized as deviants.<sup>15</sup> Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko argue the need to rethink normalcy as the only standard of life, through which everyone should be measured whether he or she has a good life, because in it persons with disabilities become passive objects in many disciplines, and recognized as inferior.<sup>16</sup> Gareth M. Thomas and Dikaïos Sakellariou unpack the concept of normalcy within a context of how persons with disabilities go about their everyday lives.<sup>17</sup> They cite L. J. Davis who argues that, in order to understand disability, we must revisit the concept of ‘the norm, the normal body,’ because disability is still perceived as a disruption, a rebellion of the visual, of normalcy. The universalizing classification of disability is problematic as it denies bodily variation.<sup>18</sup> Chapters in the book they edit show that in everyday life persons with disability live normally, regardless of the complexity of different and distinctive conditions due to the variations of disability.

### *Perfection*

Perfection is usually related to physical appearance. Citing Liokaftos, Andrew Sparkes et.al. explain there are three periods of organized bodybuilding culture over the last 130 years.<sup>19</sup> In the early period, 1880s–1930s, body perfection is a set of objective ideal, which is based on notions of grace, balance, health, and moderation. In the middle period, 1940s–1970s, body perfection has an open-ended project, namely a celebration of muscle for muscle’s sake and a view that big is good but bigger is better. In the late period, 1980s–

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14 Lennard J. David, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*, New York: Verso, 1995, 22.

15 Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, 26–27.

16 Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko, *Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader*, Toronto: Canadian Scholar Press, 2009.

17 Gareth M. Thomas and Dikaïos Sakellariou, eds., *Disability, Normalcy, and the Everyday*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018.

18 Thomas and Sakellariou, eds., *Disability, Normalcy, and the Everyday*, 7.

19 Andrew C Sparkes, James Brighton, and Kay Inckle, “Imperfect Perfection and Wheelchair Bodybuilding: Challenging Ableism or Reproducing Normalcy?” *British Sociological Association*, Volume 52, Issue 6, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038517737476>.

present, body perfection is spatially and temporally contingent, varying from one individual to the next, or the same individual in different times. Today body perfection is production and celebration of a contemporary, hard-core, extreme, and freaky body. From this explanation, there is no one standard of body perfection over time. It always changes. However, this discussion does not include body with disabilities. In this study, Sparkes et.al. finds that “drawing on notions of the bodybuilder as body-garde involved in a process of enfreakment that disrupts and transcends contemporary bodily ideals. Here variable self-reflexive bodybuilding projects can accommodate contingent conceptualization of perfection, including disability, with implications for disabled bodies and identities more broadly.”<sup>20</sup>

Even though the understanding of body perfection changes from time to time, standards apply to people with disabilities are usually the same, namely the ones from early period, which say that body perfection is a set of objective ideal, which is based on notions of grace, balance, health, and moderation. Based on these standards, persons with disabilities are recognized as not perfect or in an embarrassing condition. This causes persons with disabilities to feel ashamed of their bodies which are considered imperfect. This also causes parents to decide to abort the child they are carrying, who is known to have a disability.

Actually in the New Testament the word that is translated as perfect is *teleios*, which means consummate human integrity and virtue, or full grown, adult, of full age, mature. Jesus says “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). It means Jesus’ disciples are to grow toward maturity, with integrity and virtue. It does not mean not having any defect, as many people would think.

### *A Just Church*

The church could repent from discrimination against persons with disabilities by undoing ableism, normalcy, and perfection, and by developing an inclusive ecclesiology, which welcome persons with disability to fully participate. Yong mentions, “From a disability perspective, then, people with disabilities are by definition embraced as

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<sup>20</sup> Sparkes et.al., “Imperfect Perfection and Wheelchair Bodybuilding,” Abstract.

central and essential to a fully healthy and functioning congregation in particular, and to the ecclesial body in general.”<sup>21</sup>

In church life and diaconia work, persons with disabilities are not targets of charity, who should be pitied and depend on other people for their lives. Persons with disabilities are people who have the ability and independence, so they can contribute to the community, and participate fully. Brett Webb-Mitchell emphasizes that persons with disabilities are not objects of study or charity, but have a place, role and function in the Church as the body of Christ, according to gifts, talents and service to fellow members of the body of Christ creatively and imaginatively.<sup>22</sup> An inclusive church is a church that provides opportunities for persons with disabilities to fully participate in the faith community.

Inclusion has its roots in the Latin word which can be translated “to shut in” or “to close”. Persons with disabilities have the same rights to be included, “become confined”, and “closed” in the community of faith, with other people who are not disabled.<sup>23</sup> Thus persons with disabilities are not considered as a different group or a special group, but as an integral part of the church, just like the others. Webb-Mitchell developed the term “co-creation” to be an important part of this inclusion.

Persons with disabilities become involved (included) more than just entering the church, being counted in the statistical data of church members, or being well received at the church, but are treated equally with other church members, connected and related to each other, so they can have the opportunity to be involved and together to create worship, prayer, education, fellowship, and service to others.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the church must adapt, rethink, re-imagine, and reconsider what is considered “normal” in worship, prayer, fellowship, education and ministry, to provide a place for persons with disabilities.

However, after a decade, the word “inclusion” is recognized as inadequate. Churches who adopt inclusion only add programs for persons with disabilities to be included, but do not change their understanding on disability. Ableism, normalcy, and perfection

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21 Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, 95.

22 Brett Webb-Mitchell, *Beyond Accessibility: Toward Full Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Faith Communities*, New York: Church Publishing, 2010, 9-10.

23 Webb-Mitchell, *Beyond Accessibility*, 18.

24 Webb-Mitchell, *Beyond Accessibility*, 20.

are still strong in the church. As a result, they look at persons with disabilities as a problem to be solved with church programs. They could not see that the problem was not in the persons with disabilities themselves, but in the concept of ableism, normalcy, and perfection they hold. Therefore, the latest discussion is how to move from inclusion to justice. The church repents and transforms herself to change ableism, normalcy, and perfection to justice. The struggle for justice for persons with disability changed the way people in the church – with and without disabilities – live together. Erin Raffety shows, through her research with an ordained minister with cerebral palsy, that inclusion and belonging are not enough for the church in welcoming persons with disabilities. She argues, “belonging may not be the sign of Christian community that we imagine it to be in that it often demands much more of disabled people than able-bodied people to fit and conform to a norm and standard that is not Jesus.”<sup>25</sup> Persons with disabilities have to show that they are able to perform like persons without disabilities in order for them to be accepted in a certain position, or to be involved in a certain ministry. Raffety suggests that the church needs to move from inclusion to justice. She contends, “the decolonizing work of disability justice distinguishes it from accommodations, inclusion, or diversity recognition. Disability justice advocates actively confront colonialism and its systems, often betraying the very situations, nationalities, and politics to which they seem to belong in search of a broader, wholistic identity.”<sup>26</sup> She adds that “disability justice, interdependence, collective access, and collective liberation, seek to free one another in a collaborative move toward justice in which we take responsibility for one another.”<sup>27</sup> By disability justice, persons with disabilities are not targets of church programs and diaconia work. Rather, together with all persons in the church they take the same responsibility for one another. This leads Raffety to propose disabled leadership, where “disabled leaders must be listened to, believed, trusted, and allowed to be who they are and follow the Spirit, whether that leadership is immediately recognizable to others or not.”<sup>28</sup>

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25 Erin Raffety, *From Inclusion to Justice: Disability, Ministry, and Congregational Leadership*, Waco: Baylor University Press, 2022, 118.

26 Raffety, *From Inclusion to Justice*, 122.

27 Raffety, *From Inclusion to Justice*, 122.

28 Raffety, *From Inclusion to Justice*, 163.

## CONCLUSION

In a world where ableism, normalcy, and perfection are the standard, people with disabilities are not always welcome in many aspects of life, including in church and diaconia work. There are discriminations against persons with disabilities in church and diaconia work. Therefore, the church should repent from holding ableism, normalcy, and perfection; and also from practicing diaconia as charity to empowerment to justice.

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# **NORMALITY AND SIN: CONTESTING THE MARGINALIZATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH THE LENS OF THE EUCHARIST COMMUNION AS A MISSIONAL SYMBOL OF THE CHURCH**

*Marthalena Sinaga*

## **BACKGROUND**

“Many deny that their children have disabilities.” “Her grandmother wouldn’t let us take her granddaughter to our dormitory. It’s no use, he said! Even though we have explained that we will take care of her, protect her, and teach her how to at least take care of herself.” “They were not sent to school and were taken to church on the grounds that their children would not be able to follow the lessons or that they would disrupt the worship services that were taking place. Besides, they will be made fun of by their friends and their teachers will not pay attention to them.” “The situation inside the house is also upsetting. The child doesn’t have his own bedroom. She was left to sleep in the living room without proper bedding. Meanwhile, their other children, who they say are normal, have their bedrooms.” “Some were left sitting in the corner of the living room. She was left alone, she didn’t bathe for days, she smelled of urine, and her food was given erratically. The child is skinny because she is malnourished.” “They are not taken care of because they are considered less than normal; it makes it difficult for the family, and it seems like the family is being punished if a child has a disability. They feel that



their sin is very great because their child is not normal.” People with disabilities are often considered abnormal because of differences in their body conditions and abilities, so they often face discrimination in everyday life. Not only that, they are considered sinners so they are left alone. This statement summarizes all the experiences of my conversation with the owner of a shelter for people with disabilities in Nias. The conversation took place in June 2023.

People with disabilities are very often stigmatized as abnormal, useless, and all efforts made for them will be in vain. Lennard J. Davis, an expert on disability studies in America, said that people with disabilities are “us.” “They are us,” he said. However, marginalization and discrimination often occur among Persons with Disabilities due to social constructions that incorrectly define the “normal way” which ultimately creates “problems” for Persons with Disabilities. Social misconstruction makes people with disabilities unable to obtain their rights, which should be equal to those who are not disabled. This is not only seen in social life. Church life also often shows this discrimination, resulting in a lack of facilities and services for people with disabilities. This paper aims to challenge the stigma that people with disabilities are abnormal and sinful. The Holy Communion as a missional symbol is the lens I use to challenge this stigma. Holy Communion as a missional symbol is a new name given to reinterpret the event of Christ embracing all marginalized people who are also saved by Him.

## DISCUSSION

### *Law on Persons with Disabilities and Definition of Disability*

The issue of disability is not a new one, but it has been a hot topic in Indonesia recently. America itself has discussed disability issues from 1960–1970 and has become very active since the late 1980s. Finally, in 1990, there were approximately 43 million disabled people in America and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) declared the Equality for People with Disabilities Act. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) refers to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 challenging the myths, attitudes, segregation practices, and employment that make people with disabilities poor and housebound.<sup>1</sup> This movement fights for the fulfillment of the rights

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<sup>1</sup> Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, 19–20.

of Persons with Disabilities both in the family and in public spaces. Fulfillment of these rights includes how Persons with Disabilities get access to education, health, transportation, salaries and legal protection as appropriate. Apart from that, the most important thing in this struggle is how Persons with Disabilities can obtain all their rights without feeling the slightest discrimination.<sup>2</sup> This struggle was not easily approved, but went through a long process in the American Constitutional Court and the American Congress. Then there are regulations that take into account the rights that Persons with Disabilities must obtain in their lives every day. This is done in an effort to invite everyone to see the whole person. It can be seen that this struggle is a movement for equality that must be felt by everyone, including people with disabilities, because they are also humans. In other words, this struggle is a humanitarian struggle in order to humanize humans.

Indonesia has regulated its laws for people with disabilities in Law no. 8 of 2016. This law was issued to regulate equal rights and opportunities so that people with disabilities receive prosperity in their lives.<sup>3</sup> Law no. 8 of 2016 article 1 paragraph 1 states that:

Persons with Disabilities are anyone who experiences long-term physical, intellectual, mental and/or sensory limitations in interacting with the environment and may experience obstacles and difficulties in participating fully and effectively with other citizens based on equal rights.<sup>4</sup>

The law illustrates that persons with disabilities are not limited to those who do not have incomplete limbs. In the narrative of this law, the various disabilities that a person who is ultimately called a Person with Disabilities may have are shown. The various types of disabilities are clearly stated in article 4 paragraphs 1 and 2 (in the same Law, No. 8 of 2016) which include people with physical disabilities, people with intellectual disabilities, people with mental disabilities, and people with sensory disabilities. This variety of disability can occur in a person singly, doubly, or multi over a long period of time by medical personnel in accordance with statutory

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2 Davis, *The End of Normal: Identity in a Biocultural Era*, 2.

3 Fajri et al., *Kajian Disabilitas, Tinjauan Peningkatan Akses Dan Taraf Hidup Penyandang Disabilitas Indonesia : Aspek Sosioekonomi Dan Yuridis*, 8.

4 Fajri et al., 9.

provisions.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that people with disabilities are not limited to people with physical disabilities. This law aims to protect people with disabilities from gaining access similar to people who do not have disabilities in everyday life.

### *Normal and New Normality*

People with disabilities are often compared to someone who is not normal because they have a disproportionate body shape and condition, do not hear well, and cannot see. This is associated with people with physical disabilities. In addition, they are considered abnormal because they are unable to speak clearly, lack responsive thinking, or do not respond to people who interact with them. Cases like this are associated with someone who is intellectually disabled.

People with disabilities are often categorized as abnormal people and are often objects of pity in society and their families. Not only that, they are considered troublesome and annoying people. They often receive inhumane treatment because they are considered useless. This picture shows that Persons with Disabilities experience multiple layers of discrimination, they are labeled as Persons with Disabilities as well as Persons with Abnormalities. This idea of abnormality is built on, differentiated from, and supported by “abnormal” body shapes that are adapted to societal standards or norms.<sup>6</sup> The idea of abnormality attached to Persons with Disabilities shows that people or communities who do not feel disabled set themselves up as a standard of normality. Indirectly, they are building a very high wall of separation from people with disabilities who are considered abnormal. This reality is inversely proportional to the recognition and acceptance of people who have a sexual orientation different from hetero. Also, the opposite is true for acceptance for those of color. This recognition went through a long struggle along with the times that eroded discrimination against black people by white people. Those who identify as white have embraced those of color. Likewise, people who admit that they are straight take part in the struggle to fulfill the rights of those who are gay, bisexual, and transgender. This happens because it is impossible for those with

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5 Fajri et al., 9.

6 Davis, *Bending Over Backwards Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*, 1–2.

white skin to change color to black, yellow, red, and so on. Also, those who have a heterosexual sexual orientation will not be gay.<sup>7</sup>

The above reality is very rare for people with disabilities. Only a few people who consider themselves “normal” pay attention to people with disabilities. Davis stated firmly that basically all humans have the potential to become disabled. In other words, people who consider themselves normal can also become Persons with Disabilities.<sup>8</sup> Davis also emphasized that disability will be a part of a person’s identity, but is not desired by most people. This rejection will make someone feel awkward if they meet a person with a disability. Not only become awkward, he will also avoid discussing the topic of disability and he will not pay attention to the rights that people with disabilities must receive. In fact, Davis emphasized that People with Disabilities in America are the largest minority and a group that is too large to be ignored and not given protection.<sup>9</sup>

The concept of normal humans has developed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This research was initiated by Adolphe Quetelet, a statistician, and Sir Francis Galton, by creating a normal curve in humans. These two initiators have their own characteristics in explaining the normal side of humans. Quetelet describes a normal human being as someone who has good height, strength, intelligence and beauty. These characteristics were considered ordinary and nothing special by Galton. For this reason, he describes humans with hyper normality, namely someone who is stronger, smarter, smarter, and someone who has more influential social and political class in order to run a better government and social system.

This study conducted by Galton is useful for assessing political and economic actors in order to create a democratic system that strengthens the consolidation of strong or weak states, institutions, bodies, and cultures. This study illustrates that a normal person is someone who is capable of carrying out political and economic work and even bringing good name to the nation. For this reason, it can be seen that someone who has incomplete body parts will be unable to do work in the world of politics and economics. Therefore, the assumption of a normal body leads a person to define their body based on societal norms and standards.

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7 Davis, 3–4.

8 Davis, 5.

9 Davis, 6.

Galton's idea gave rise to the assumption that normal bodies are those who have a beautiful face, a good body, straight hair, good eyes, and white skin. Meanwhile, someone who has colored skin, comes from indigenous communities, is a foreigner or an immigrant is considered someone who is abnormal. It can be seen that the concept initiated by Galton shows that there is competition over one's body in society. This constructed normality forces everyone to conform to the idea of normality of a white, Eurocentric, capable, developed, heterosexual, and male person.<sup>10</sup> This idea clearly marginalizes people who do not meet society's standards, including people with disabilities.

Davis, in responding to this idea, uses the term diversity as the new norm. The diversity initiated by Davis wants to show a world that is not limited by the gold standard that is often applied wherever someone is. For this reason, this diversity welcomes everyone without limits.<sup>11</sup> However, disability, which is included in the concept of diversity, is almost never mentioned in body visualizations and advertisements sold in society. Visualizations that are often advertised include bodies that are perfect and ideal according to society's standards.

The neoliberal concept that states diversity is everything turns out to have its own standards; that the visualization of the body being advertised leads people to see something diverse within certain limits. In other words, embracing a diverse body is to choose supporting aspects of diversity that attract the paradigm of the viewer. Once again, people with disabilities, obesity, depression, cognitive or affective impairment, and anorexia are not featured in the visualization.<sup>12</sup>

The statement above shows the dichotomy of diversity subjectivity and disability subjectivity. The subjectivity given to the visualized body is a postmodern concept of subjectivity that is malleable, mobile, and can be placed in a complex series, socially constructed, and accompanied by strong elements. Meanwhile, disability is seen as something fixed, defined sharply by medical diagnosis. Also, disability is seen as a position or condition so

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10 Davis, *The End of Normal: Identity in a Biocultural Era*, 4–6.

11 Davis, 8.

12 Davis, 9.

despicable as “a life not worth living.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, disability will never be included in the subjectivity criteria of diversity itself.

In order to see if diversity includes disability and diversity can include abnormality, subjectivity must be broadly constructed. In this case, older models of identity associated with the ideology of ‘normal’ can be considered essentialist and hierarchical. Whereas, newer notions of identity seem to be chosen, constructed and democratic.<sup>14</sup> Davis emphasizes his concept of diversity in one term “biocultural.” This notion of biocultural helps everyone to understand the very complex identities embodied by the body itself. This complexity occurs because of the biological body, the cultural, historical, social, and political systems that surround it. In other words, this biocultural notion helps to see a disability identity that is completely different from the diversity that Davis himself had envisioned.

The disabled body is constructed as a fixed identity, seen as something abnormal, medically determined, and not socially constructed. This happens because disability itself is not seen as a similar identity as many people see race, gender and other identities. Another reason is because disability is seen as a medical problem and not a way of life that can be chosen by the person with it themselves. Many people may want variety in everything, but this is not the case with the body that must be treated. In this case the word normal still applies forcefully. Not only that, “normal” is often what the doctor says when someone checks the condition of their cholesterol, blood pressure, and problematic bodily functions. The word “normal” does not only apply to those with physical disabilities, but also those with cognitive and affective disorders. To heal and normalize a “damaged” body, try to make the best of your lifestyle. The interventions of surgeons and pharmacists are designed in such a way as to restore “normalcy” or the deviant body to the deviant body. The statement above is supported by the reality of what happens to children who feel that their bodies are not too tall so they take height-increasing drugs. I also experienced this reality when I was growing up as a teenager because I had a short stature, different from my siblings and friends. I bought a device from an orthopedic center to improve my body posture. Not only that, someone who has crooked or misaligned teeth also fixes them to a “normal” position.

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13 Davis, 8.

14 Davis, 9.

Cases like this arise because of normal standards created by society in order to return to something normal. Please remember that cases like the above are supported by insurance funds. However, this is not the case with disabilities.

In this case, disability is an abnormal form based on medical diagnosis. Davis himself called this “undiverse.” Disability becomes something that is not diverse because diversity itself implies celebration and choice. Meanwhile, to become disabled, each person cannot choose unless the person undergoes a medical diagnosis. Therefore, disability will not be seen as a lifestyle or identity. However, it is seen as a fixed category. In other words, disability itself has been suspended by normality and subsumed into a state of exception.<sup>15</sup> This means that disability is seen as a person’s identity who has diverse needs, just like other non-disabled humans who have their own needs. For example, someone who needs medicine to survive, someone who is paralyzed needs a wheelchair, and so on.

The normal created by societal institutions here is a configuration that emerges in certain events. Normality is an idea that emerged as a result of progress, industrialization, and the ideological consolidation of bourgeois power. For this reason, the implications of normalcy greatly affect the culture of the local community. The spread of ideology in various ways is very dependent on existing societal norms. In this case, normal body shape and abilities are an example of this. A person’s physical differences become ideological differences. The character of Persons with Disabilities is always marked by ideological meanings constructed by society in accordance with applicable normative standards. Davis, encourages everyone to be aware of reversing the power dominated by certain groups regarding the normal and instituting alternative ways when thoughts about the abnormal arise.<sup>16</sup> This effort was made to develop the issue of disability in society.

From the explanation above it can be seen that being normal is everyone’s hope. However, this normal standard marginalizes and even discriminates against Persons with Disabilities because they are considered abnormal. Apart from that, Persons with Disabilities are considered as someone who needs pity and is a passive object because they are considered incapable of doing work. The statement that people with disabilities is an identity and a despicable life

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<sup>15</sup> Davis, 8–9.

<sup>16</sup> Davis, Sanchez, and Luft, “The Disability Studies Reader,” 15.



condition shows that being disabled is being abnormal and sinful. Abnormalities in social construction eliminate the image of humans who were created in the image and likeness of God. Through this article, I state that the concept of normality creates discrimination against Persons with Disabilities and offers a construction of disability theology about God who embraces all marginalized people without exception by giving a new name or renaming the Holy Communion as a missional symbol so that there is a new normality in understanding Persons with Disabilities themselves.

## **HOLY COMMUNION AS A MISSIONAL SYMBOL FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

### *Sin and Disability*

Persons with disabilities are stigmatized as sinners in the family and society. Isabella Novsima Sinulingga, an Indonesian disability theologian, said that in congregational life, the disability experienced by a person is a punishment for sin.<sup>17</sup> This statement is in line with

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17 Sinulingga, "Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual," 55. conversations of theological anthropology still employ a medical model lens, which perceives disability merely as bodily and intellectual impairments, thus failing the standard of "normal." Normalcy unilaterally defines disability and dictates normative approaches toward persons with disabilities. Consequently, persons with disabilities are perceived in Indonesia as merely objects of charity to be pitied. On the other hand, they remain susceptible to suffering violence. These trends owe to the fact that Indonesian society does not adequately provide either tangible resource considerations or sufficient social support. Lacunae in the theological literature concerning disability in Indonesian contexts foment in the life of the church further challenges for persons with disabilities. For persons there with intellectual disabilities, in particular, the situation is even more severe, as their condition is regarded a kind of punishment for sin and further stigmatized as abnormal. This article offers a constructive theology of disability to dismantle the myth of normalcy, which reduces persons with disabilities to being merely impaired organisms within society. Theological musings on the beauty of all creation, the perichoretic relationship within the Trinity, the doctrines of imago Dei and imago Christi are taken up in this essay, to offer an inclusive theology expressly for persons with intellectual disabilities." "author":{"dropping-particle":"","family":"Sinulingga","given":"Isabella Novsima","non-dropping-particle":"","parse-names":false,"suffix":""},"container-title":"Indonesian Journal of Theology","id":"ITEM-1","issued":{"date-parts":[["2015"]]},"page":"35-60","title":"Keindahan dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual","type":"article-journal"},"locator":"55","uris":["http://www.mendeley.com/documents/?uuid=7d4f850d-72de-4528-bec6-d264823a7590"]},"mendeley":{"formattedCitation":"Sinulingga, \"Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,\" 55.\"","plainTextFormattedCitation":"Sinulingga,

my experience in Nias when I met a dormitory owner for Persons with Disabilities (I stated this in the narrative in the Introduction). He said that there were several families who had children with disabilities who were undergoing punishment for their sins and were suffering disgrace. This statement is an illustration of marginalization and discrimination against Persons with Disabilities. Sadly, there are passages in the Bible that are used to legitimize that theology supports marginalization and links sin with disability. The Gospel of John 5:14, Luke 5:18–26, and John 9:1–3 are examples that are often used and quoted to prove that disability is a sign of moral imperfection or God’s retribution for sins that have been committed.<sup>18</sup> This means that there is a relationship between sin and disability. Eiesland said that the connection between sin and disability is an allusion to the divine image and tarnishes everything that is considered holy as written in the Old Testament and New Testament. Ideally, everything that represents God must be perfect and complete (Lev. 17–26; Heb. 9:14). The interpretation of these passages by interpreters shows the physical perfection and absolute freedom that exists in humans, but excludes the reality of the lives of Persons with Disabilities who basically do not have perfection and wholeness.<sup>19</sup>

In my opinion, legalizing the meaning of Bible passages in order to give values, determine whether someone is sinful, and is undergoing punishment, is an exclusive attitude because they consider themselves normal and without a sin. In fact, basically all humans have shortcomings and of course sin. Again, I quote Sinulingga who says that sin itself occurs when a person does not admit that he is someone who is frail, vulnerable, or imperfect.<sup>20</sup>

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“Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,” 55.”,“previouslyFormattedCitation”:”Sinulingga, “Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,” 55.”,“properties”:{“noteIndex”:20},“schema”:”https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”}

18 Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, 71.

19 Eiesland, 72.

20 Sinulingga, “Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,” 55.conversations of theological anthropology still employ a medical model lens, which perceives disability merely as bodily and intellectual impairments, thus failing the standard of “normal.” Normalcy unilaterally defines disability and dictates normative approaches toward persons with disabilities. Consequently, persons with disabilities are perceived in Indonesia as merely objects of charity to be pitied. On the other hand, they remain susceptible to

I agree with Sinulingga's opinion because humans will forget the other gifts given to them, namely their own fragility and limitations when they avoid this reality. In my opinion, humans will be perfect if their fragility and limitations are exist, accepted, and acknowledged. However, it cannot be denied that normal standards influence efforts to perfect oneself so as not to appear fragile and limited so that rejection of the gift of fragility and limitations occurs. For this reason, perfection of the body, beauty of hair, skin, beautiful face, neat teeth and tall height will be strived for as best as possible.

This also influences the concept of suffering experienced by humans which is told through the stories of holy men in the Bible such as Lazarus and Job. Because suffering is often associated with sin. Painful life stories are proof that the suffering that occurs must be endured as a way to obtain heavenly rewards. Indeed, in this case theology does not clearly describe disability as a path to heavenly grace. However, it will be very dangerous if this continuation is allowed. Persons with Disabilities will be encouraged to understand the unfair social situations that are happening to them. Also, Persons with Disabilities are encouraged to accept the fact that they are isolated from the social environment because of their helplessness.

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suffering violence. These trends owe to the fact that Indonesian society does not adequately provide either tangible resource considerations or sufficient social support. Lacunae in the theological literature concerning disability in Indonesian contexts foment in the life of the church further challenges for persons with disabilities. For persons there with intellectual disabilities, in particular, the situation is even more severe, as their condition is regarded a kind of punishment for sin and further stigmatized as abnormal. This article offers a constructive theology of disability to dismantle the myth of normalcy, which reduces persons with disabilities to being merely impaired organisms within society. Theological musings on the beauty of all creation, the perichoretic relationship within the Trinity, the doctrines of imago Dei and imago Christi are taken up in this essay, to offer an inclusive theology expressly for persons with intellectual disabilities.", "author": [{"dropping-particle": "", "family": "Sinulingga", "given": "Isabella Novsima", "non-dropping-particle": "", "parse-names": false, "suffix": ""}], "container-title": "Indonesian Journal of Theology", "id": "ITEM-1", "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2015"}]}, "page": "35-60", "title": "Keindahan dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual", "type": "article-journal", "locator": "55", "uris": [{"http://www.mendeley.com/documents/?uuid=7d4f850d-72de-4528-bec6-d264823a7590"}], "mendeley": {"formattedCitation": "Sinulingga, \"Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,\" 55.\""}, "plainTextFormattedCitation": "Sinulingga, \"Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,\" 55.\""}, "previouslyFormattedCitation": "Sinulingga, \"Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,\" 55.\""}, "properties": {"noteIndex": 23}, "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}]

In the end, this situation supports all non-disabled people to surrender and passively respond to the situation, thereby calling the situation a “test from the Divine.”<sup>21</sup> This perspective on suffering as a medium for purification and an effort to obtain heavenly rewards does not only link sin and disability. However, those who feel they have not experienced “healing” (because of the disability they experience) will continue to harbor their sin (the recognition that I am a sinner) in their lives. Apart from that, the theology of suffering itself encourages people with disabilities to fully accept situations of social injustice as a sign of their obedience to God. Indirectly, this situation encourages Persons with Disabilities to appreciate their status as second class society in the social and church environment.<sup>22</sup> In general, statements about second class status describe people who are marginalized, pushed aside, oppressed, and given no space in society. Sinulingga said that theology in this case the church perpetuates normalism in its practice.<sup>23</sup> The consequence of this

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21 Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, 72.

22 Eiesland, 73.

23 Sinulingga, “Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,” 37. conversations of theological anthropology still employ a medical model lens, which perceives disability merely as bodily and intellectual impairments, thus failing the standard of “normal.” Normalcy unilaterally defines disability and dictates normative approaches toward persons with disabilities. Consequently, persons with disabilities are perceived in Indonesia as merely objects of charity to be pitied. On the other hand, they remain susceptible to suffering violence. These trends owe to the fact that Indonesian society does not adequately provide either tangible resource considerations or sufficient social support. Lacunae in the theological literature concerning disability in Indonesian contexts foment in the life of the church further challenges for persons with disabilities. For persons there with intellectual disabilities, in particular, the situation is even more severe, as their condition is regarded a kind of punishment for sin and further stigmatized as abnormal. This article offers a constructive theology of disability to dismantle the myth of normalcy, which reduces persons with disabilities to being merely impaired organisms within society. Theological musings on the beauty of all creation, the perichoretic relationship within the Trinity, the doctrines of imago Dei and imago Christi are taken up in this essay, to offer an inclusive theology expressly for persons with intellectual disabilities. “author”:{“dropping-particle”:“”,“family”:“Sinulingga”,“given”:“Isabella Novsima”,“non-dropping-particle”:“”,“parse-names”:false,“suffix”:“”}],“container-title”:“Indonesian Journal of Theology”,“id”:“ITEM-1”,“issued”:{“date-parts”:[[“2015”]]},“page”:“35-60”,“title”:“Keindahan dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual”,“type”:“article-journal”},“locator”:“37”,“uris”:{“http://www.mendeley.com/documents/?uuid=7d4f850d-72de-4528-bec6-d264823a7590”}],“mendeley”:{“formattedCitation”:“Sinulingga, “Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,” 37.”,“plainTextFormattedCitation”:“Sinulingga,

action is that people with disabilities only become the center of attention temporarily and are not important because there is neglect of segregation between people with disabilities and people who consider themselves “normal.” Finally, this action legalizes the statement that Persons with Disabilities are objects of pity who are always recipients of donations and alms.<sup>24</sup> I agree with Eiesland’s opinion which says that the concept of giving alms to people with disabilities actually makes them isolated from the social environment, aka they become strangers because they are isolated by the social system. This statement shows how unqualified people with disabilities are to do work, become annoying and useless people and need to receive mercy.

In my opinion, disability is not a despicable suffering nor is it a life that is not worth living, it is not a punishment for sin, and it is not the marginalization or discrimination of humans. However, disability is a life that must be lived as “normal people” live, accepting and recognizing them. Recognition and acceptance of the existence of Persons with Disabilities must be carried out by social communities who consider themselves normal. Also, the church must be firm in discussing disability issues in its services, not just mere chatter. Also, when talking about disabilities, it doesn’t end with building a disability house, but actually preparing accessible facilities, and educating the congregation about disabilities. If this idea is put into practice as well as possible, the church will develop itself to let go of the double-minded attitude that considers Persons with Disabilities to be objects to be belittled and admired because the help given to them covers other needs. In fact, when discussing disabilities, the church is destroying segregation that marginalizes people with disabilities and paving the way to destroy discrimination in society.

This is where the church is challenged to express its perspective on how to view Persons with Disabilities, whether viewing them from a moral, medical, social or solidarity perspective. Also, the church is challenged on how to live the gift of salvation given by God through Jesus Christ whose body was divided. This challenge encourages the church to be inclusive because the church is no longer thinking

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“Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,” 37.”,“previouslyFormattedCitation”:”Sinulingga, “Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,” 37.”},“properties”:{“noteIndex”:26},“schema”：“https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”}

24 Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, 74.

about “them,” but “us.” Apart from that, the church is not trapped in the stigma given to people with disabilities, who are abnormal and sinful. However, the church is a space and place that accepts and acknowledges the existence of Persons with Disabilities. Apart from that, this reality shows the church’s faith response which embodies the embrace of God’s love given to all people. In the end, the church itself exists for Persons with Disabilities as a community full of empathy, creating equality that eliminates discriminatory ableism because it judges people based on their abilities or capabilities, and fights stigma or labeling against Persons with Disabilities.

## **HOLY COMMUNION AS A MISSIONAL SYMBOL FOR THE MARGINALIZED<sup>25</sup>**

Holy Communion is one of the sacraments celebrated by Protestants. The Holy Communion symbolizes God’s grace that has been given to humans through Jesus Christ who came to the world, His death, and His resurrection. However, in practice the Holy Communion is more often interpreted narrowly by some people or churches. The meaning of Holy Communion only stops at the meaning of forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Meanwhile, almost never interpret the Holy Communion as a Christ Event which includes His work in the world: healing the sick, raising the dead, teaching, feeding, and instructing. Also, all the series of His life, death, and resurrection which are a series of events that are intertwined when celebrating the Holy Supper.

Believers receive Holy Communion in the church which is a place of communion with other people and also with God. Harald Hegstad firmly said that the church is a community of believers who are united together in Christ, experiencing an encounter with the Triune God because they have a very intimate relationship under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> I compared Hegstad’s definition of the church with

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25 The title of this sub-chapter was used as the title of the author’s thesis at the Jakarta Theological College in 2019 with the title, “Holy Communion as a Symbol of Mission: Liturgy as a Church Mission Response to Marginalization” which was written with the guidance of Dr. .Septemmy E. Lakawa and Dr. Rasid Rachman. Likewise, the title of the author’s research at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Protestant Theological University Amsterdam in 2019. The research was entitled “Eucharis as a Mission Symbol: An Inclusive and Friendly Church to Express Gender Justice in the Batak Protestant Christian Church”. This article has undergone changes from the thesis and research sections.

26 Hegstad, *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible*, 2.

that given by Letty M. Russell, a feminist theologian. He said that the church is a community of believers who fellowship together, as a place of meeting, and also describes Christian life in several places, cities, or homes. In other words, the church is universal because all believers who enter it are part of the people who are waiting for the second coming of the Lord. The church becomes a sign of Christ's presence in the world, everyone comes into it. Also, the church becomes a sign of the believer's faith.<sup>27</sup> These two definitions show that the church is an open community for everyone who comes into it. The church is visible, the church is actually present in the world. Hegstad said that the visible church leads its people to become aware of the church's missionary journey in the world. The mission of the church defines who the church is as a whole.<sup>28</sup> The question is what is the church's mission towards Persons with Disabilities who are often marginalized or discriminated against in their daily lives?

Holy Communion as a missional symbol is a response of believers' faith which is practiced in daily life. The missional symbol originates from the words of Jesus "Do This," Which is based on anamnesis events or remembering Christ. For me, the anamnesis event leads everyone to carry out the work of salvation based on the events of Christ: His life, death and resurrection. Therefore, Holy Communion as a Christ Event does not forget the joy of the gifts from God that have been received and the space or place for giving thanks. Remembering the events of Christ helps the church to actively participate in sharing and implementing the gift of joy in its daily lives, in this case accepting and recognizing the existence of Persons with Disabilities. For this reason, the Holy Communion as a missional symbol opens the closed church fence so that people who have received the Holy Communion come out of the church, carrying out a mission to the marginalized by sharing the gift of salvation with all creation without exception.

I declare that the Holy Communion is a missional symbol because through the symbol the believer is helped to know who he believes in; in this case Christ. Eiesland said that symbols are very important in religious life. Symbols help someone to understand and discover the values contained in something symbolized. Not only that, symbols have power in social or individual life because with community symbols or a person can build and regulate their

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27 Russel, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, 42-43.

28 Hegstad, *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible*, 13.



self-confidence and the values they acquire, as well as the cultural ethos they live in. I agree with Eiesland's statement. However, there are many symbols in society, including symbols of oppression for those who are marginalized because of the normal standards of existing society. Reinterpreting and giving new names to symbols in social society eliminates discrimination, marginalization and marginalization of Persons with Disabilities. Eiesland says that symbols create normative standards for human interaction that legitimize social structures, political arrangements, and behavioral tendencies, shape cultural tools, and offer a vision of what could be. For this reason, symbols must be re-named so that thoughts and behavior do not return to familiar and habitual structures.<sup>29</sup> Renaming symbols is very important for marginalized groups. Giving this name transforms the way of thinking and behaving, giving birth to a new definition of someone who considers themselves not disabled in seeing people with disabilities. Here, Holy Communion is given a new name that means it is not just about forgiveness of sins, but as a missional symbol for the marginalized as a sign of the people's active participation in the real world.

Holy Communion as a missional symbol explains the participation of believers in daily life. This means that Holy Communion is not locked as a ritual in the church. However, it is a form of participation of everyone gathered and a real action as proof of receiving Holy Communion. Not only that, all non-disabled people understand why they do Holy Communion and also why they do theology. Martha L. Moore-Keish in her book *Do this in Remembrance of Me: A Ritual Approach to Reformed Eucharistic Theology* says that when believers (Christians) partake of Holy Communion, they are actually describing the relationship between the liturgy and their social life. Sharing bread, healing wounds, reconciliation, and creating justice in life are missional symbols in the meaning of Holy Communion. It is clear that the invitation to Holy Communion is an invitation for all believers to act beyond the limits of what they consider normal. Congregants are invited to open the closed church fences and do justice to all mankind without exception. Because, Russell sees that most churches that celebrate Holy Communion are exclusive churches. They do not do justice to the marginalized people in society. Russel wants to eliminate this discrimination by giving a

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29 Eiesland, 91.

new meaning and a new name to the Holy Communion as the Lord's Supper table that welcomes everyone.<sup>30</sup>

This event symbolizes that the locked fence has opened to welcome those who were previously rejected by the rich, the powerful, and are now welcomed by God. Holy Communion as a missional symbol breaks social boundaries and social normality by sharing the banquet table with marginalized people, including people with disabilities. Eating together creates a space for dialogue and mutual listening and breaks down boundaries.<sup>31</sup> Finally, people with disabilities can also enjoy heavenly food, become colleagues with God who sit together, and share stories together. New relationships were created because the perception of Persons with Disabilities as the second class was destroyed. The stigma of people with disabilities as objects of pity and people full of sin was broken. The main manifestation can be seen from the church which truly provides a place and opportunity to fully participate in fellowship for Persons with Disabilities.

In line with this statement, Eiesland gave a new name to Christ, who is often called the Suffering Servant, to Jesus Christ as the Disabled God. Eiesland gives a new meaning to the ritual of Holy Communion for the self and body of Christ which is celebrated in order to affirm the dignity of the bodies of Persons with Disabilities. Also, re-understand the meaning and function of the church as a community that distributes justice for people with disabilities. This new meaning encourages everyone who is not disabled and people with disabilities to transform, be able to adapt, and continue to fight against discrimination that is endemic in society and the church.<sup>32</sup> Not only that, this new meaning eliminates viewpoints, eliminates oppression and discrimination, creates a community full of empathy, builds equality, shows a sincere embrace as friends of Persons with Disabilities, and does not make Persons with Disabilities the object of jokes in conversation.

The Holy Communion as a missional symbol for the marginalized will become real if everyone recognizes the diversity in society. Not only that, he realized that there were other gifts within himself, namely fragility and limitations so that he was able to accept

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30 Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me: A Ritual Approach to Reformed Eucharistic Theology*, 146–47.

31 Moore-Keish, 76–77.

32 Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, 94.

people with disabilities as the same people as him. Therefore, Holy Communion as a missional symbol is a manifestation of an inclusive church, sharing the Lord's table for everyone without exception, a symbol of solidarity, accepting others as co-workers, and transformation for the realization of the church's mission. So, Holy Communion as a missional symbol breaks normality and sin for certain people (read: People with Disabilities), boundaries of exclusivity, and discrimination for People with Disabilities because they are neighbors who are truly missed in the church and society.

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# **NORMALITAS DAN DOSA: MENGUGAT MARGINALISASI KAUM DISABILITAS DENGAN LENSE PERJAMUAN KUDUS SEBAGAI SIMBOL MISIONAL GEREJA**

*Marthalena Sinaga*

## **LATAR BELAKANG**

“Banyak yang menyangkal kalau anaknya disabilitas.” “Neneknya tidak membolehkan kami membawa cucunya ke asrama. Tidak ada gunanya, katanya! Padahal, kami sudah menjelaskan bahwa kami akan merawat, melindungi, dan mengajari mereka, minimal bagaimana mereka memperhatikan dirinya.” “Mereka tidak disekolahkan dan diantar ke gereja dengan alasan anak mereka tidak akan mampu mengikuti pelajaran atau akan mengganggu ibadah. Selain itu ia akan diolok-olok oleh temannya, dan gurunya tidak akan memperhatikannya.” “Situasi di dalam rumah pun memprihatinkan. Anak itu tidak memiliki ruang tidur sendiri. Ia dibiarkan tidur di ruang tamu tanpa alas tidur yang layak. Sementara itu, anak-anak mereka yang lain, yang mereka sebut normal, memiliki kamar tidur.” “Ada yang dibiarkan duduk di pojok ruang tamu. Dibiarkan begitu saja, tidak mandi sehari-hari, bau pesing, dan makanannya diberikan tidak menentu. Anak itu kurus karena kurang gizi.” “Mereka tidak diperhatikan karena dianggap kurang normal, membuat susah keluarga, dan sepertinya keluarga sedang menjalani hukuman kalau ada anaknya yang disabilitas. Mereka merasa sedang merasakan bahwa dosa mereka sangat

besar gara-gara anak-anak mereka yang tidak normal.”<sup>1</sup> Penyandang Disabilitas sering dianggap tidak normal karena perbedaan kondisi dan kemampuan tubuhnya sehingga mereka sering mendapatkan diskriminasi dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Tidak itu saja, mereka adalah orang-orang berdosa sehingga dibiarkan saja. Pernyataan ini merangkum semua pengalaman percakapan saya dengan bapak pemilik rumah singgah disabilitas di Nias. Percakapan tersebut terjadi pada bulan Juni 2023 yang lalu. Penyandang disabilitas sangat sering mendapatkan stigma tidak normal, tidak berguna, dan segala usaha yang dilakukan untuk mereka akan sia-sia. Lennard J. Davis seorang ahli studi disabilitas di Amerika mengatakan bahwa para penyandang disabilitas adalah “kita”. “Mereka adalah kita,”<sup>2</sup> katanya. Namun, peminggiran dan diskriminasi sering kali dialami para penyandang disabilitas karena konstruksi sosial yang salah mendefinisikan “cara normal” yang akhirnya menciptakan “masalah” bagi penyandang disabilitas.<sup>3</sup> Kesalahan konstruksi sosial menjadikan penyandang disabilitas tidak bisa memperoleh hak yang seharusnya diperoleh. Hak yang sama yang diperoleh orang-orang yang bukan disabilitas. Hal ini tidak hanya dilihat dari kehidupan bermasyarakat. Kehidupan bergereja pun acap kali memperlihatkan diskriminasi tersebut hingga minimnya fasilitas dan pelayanan bagi penyandang disabilitas. Tulisan ini hendak menggugat stigma bahwa penyandang disabilitas adalah orang yang tidak normal dan berdosa. Perjamuan Kudus sebagai simbol misional adalah lensa yang saya gunakan untuk menggugat stigma tersebut. Perjamuan Kudus sebagai simbol misional merupakan penamaan baru yang diberikan untuk memaknai ulang peristiwa Kristus yang merangkul semua orang marginal yang juga turut serta diselamatkan oleh-Nya.

## **UNDANG-UNDANG TENTANG PENYANDANG DISABILITAS DAN DEFINISI DISABILITAS**

Isu tentang disabilitas sebenarnya bukanlah isu baru, tetapi sangat hangat dibicarakan di Indonesia akhir-akhir ini. Amerika sendiri sudah membicarakan isu disabilitas dari tahun 1960–1970 dan menjadi sangat gencar sejak tahun 1980 akhir. Akhirnya, pada

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1 Sinaga, “Wawancara Durian Dan Disabilitas.”

2 Davis, *Bending Over Backwards Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*, 4–5.

3 Davis, *The Disability Studies Reader Second Edition*, 3.

tahun 1990, sekitar 43 juta penyandang disabilitas di Amerika dan *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) mendeklarasikan Undang-Undang Kesetaraan bagi para penyandang disabilitas. *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) merujuk pada Hak Sipil Tahun 1964 yang menentang mitos, sikap, praktik segregasi, dan pekerjaan yang menjadikan penyandang disabilitas miskin dan tidak bisa tinggal di rumah.<sup>4</sup> Pergerakan ini memperjuangkan pemenuhan hak-hak penyandang disabilitas, baik dalam keluarga maupun di ruang publik. Pemenuhan hak tersebut meliputi bagaimana penyandang disabilitas mendapatkan akses pendidikan, kesehatan, transportasi, gaji, dan perlindungan hukum sebagaimana mestinya. Selain itu, hal yang paling utama dalam perjuangan ini adalah bagaimana penyandang disabilitas memperoleh semua haknya tanpa merasakan diskriminasi sedikit pun.<sup>5</sup> Perjuangan ini tidak dengan mudah disetujui, tetapi melalui proses panjang dalam Mahkamah Konstitusi Amerika maupun Kongres Negara Amerika. Kemudian, terjadilah pengaturan-pengaturan yang memperhatikan hak yang harus diperoleh penyandang disabilitas dalam hidupnya setiap hari. Hal ini dilakukan dalam upaya mengajak semua orang untuk melihat manusia seutuhnya. Dapat dilihat bahwa perjuangan ini adalah pergerakan kesetaraan yang harus dirasakan oleh semua orang, termasuk penyandang disabilitas, karena mereka juga manusia. Dengan kata lain, perjuangan ini adalah perjuangan kemanusiaan dalam rangka memanusiakan manusia.

Indonesia sendiri telah mengatur undang-undang untuk para penyandang disabilitas dalam UU No. 8 Tahun 2016. Undang-undang ini diterbitkan untuk mengatur kesamaan hak dan kesempatan agar para penyandang disabilitas mendapat kesejahteraan dalam hidupnya.<sup>6</sup> Undang-Undang No. 8 Tahun 2016 pasal 1 ayat 1 menyebutkan bahwa:

Penyandang Disabilitas adalah setiap orang yang mengalami keterbatasan fisik, intelektual, mental, dan/atau sensorik jangka waktu yang lama dalam berinteraksi dengan lingkungan dapat mengalami hambatan dan kesulitan untuk

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4 Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, 19–20.

5 Davis, *The End of Normal: Identity in a Biocultural Era*, 2.

6 Fajri et al., *Kajian Disabilitas, Tinjauan Peningkatan Akses dan Taraf Hidup Penyandang Disabilitas Indonesia: Aspek Sosioekonomi dan Yuridis*, 8.

berpartisipasi secara penuh dan efektif dengan warga negara lainnya berdasarkan kesamaan hak.<sup>7</sup>

Undang-undang di atas menggambarkan bahwa penyandang disabilitas tidak terbatas pada mereka yang tidak memiliki anggota tubuh yang tidak lengkap. Dalam narasi undang-undang tersebut diperlihatkan ragam disabilitas yang kemungkinan dimiliki oleh seseorang yang akhirnya disebut penyandang disabilitas. Ragam disabilitas tersebut dimuat jelas pada pasal 4 ayat 1 dan 2 (dalam Undang-undang yang sama, no. 8 Tahun 2016) yang meliputi penyandang disabilitas fisik, penyandang disabilitas intelektual, penyandang disabilitas mental, dan penyandang disabilitas sensorik. Ragam disabilitas ini dapat terjadi pada diri seseorang secara tunggal, ganda, atau multi dalam jangka waktu yang lama oleh tenaga medis sesuai dengan ketentuan perundang-undangan.<sup>8</sup> Jelas terlihat bahwa penyandang disabilitas tidak terbatas pada penyandang disabilitas fisik. Undang-undang ini bertujuan melindungi para penyandang disabilitas untuk memperoleh akses yang serupa dengan orang-orang yang bukan penyandang disabilitas di tengah kehidupan sehari-hari.

## **NORMAL DAN NORMALITAS BARU**

Penyandang disabilitas sering disandingkan dengan seseorang yang tidak normal, sebab mereka memiliki bentuk dan keadaan tubuh yang tidak proporsional, kurang mendengar dengan baik, dan tidak bisa melihat. Ini dilekatkan dengan penyandang disabilitas secara fisik. Selain itu, mereka dianggap tidak normal karena tidak mampu berbicara dengan jelas, kurang berpikir tanggap, atau tidak merespons orang yang berinteraksi dengannya. Kasus seperti ini dilekatkan dengan seseorang yang disabilitas secara intelektual.

Penyandang disabilitas sering dikategorikan sebagai orang yang tidak normal dan sering kali menjadi objek rasa kasihan di tengah masyarakat dan keluarganya. Tidak hanya itu, mereka dianggap orang yang menyusahkan dan mengganggu. Mereka sering kali mendapat perlakuan tidak manusiawi karena dianggap tidak berguna. Gambaran tersebut memperlihatkan bahwa penyandang disabilitas memperoleh diskriminasi berlapis. Mereka dicap sebagai

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<sup>7</sup> Fajri et al., 9.

<sup>8</sup> Fajri et al., 9.



penyandang disabilitas sekaligus penyandang ketidaknormalan. Gagasan “tidak normal” ini dibangun atas, dibedakan dari, dan ditopang oleh bentuk-bentuk tubuh “abnormal” yang disesuaikan dengan ukuran atau standar atau juga norma masyarakat.<sup>9</sup> Gagasan “tidak normal” yang disandangkan kepada penyandang disabilitas memperlihatkan bahwa orang atau komunitas yang tidak merasa disabilitas menjadikan dirinya sebagai standar normal. Secara tidak langsung, mereka sedang membangun tembok pemisah yang sangat tinggi dengan penyandang disabilitas yang dianggap tidak normal itu. Realitas ini berbanding terbalik dengan pengakuan dan penerimaan untuk orang-orang yang memiliki orientasi seksual yang berbeda dengan hetero. Juga, berbanding terbalik dengan penerimaan bagi mereka yang memiliki kulit berwarna. Pengakuan ini melewati perjuangan panjang seiring dengan perkembangan zaman yang mengikis diskriminasi terhadap orang kulit hitam oleh orang kulit putih. Mereka yang mengakui dirinya sebagai kulit putih telah merangkul mereka yang memiliki kulit berwarna. Demikian pula dengan orang-orang yang mengakui dirinya *straight* ikut ambil bagian dalam perjuangan pemenuhan hak bagi mereka yang *gay*, biseksual, dan transgender. Hal ini terjadi karena tidak mungkin mereka yang memiliki kulit putih akan berubah warna menjadi hitam, kuning, merah, dan lain sebagainya. Juga, mereka yang memiliki orientasi seksual heteroseksual tidak akan menjadi *gay*.<sup>10</sup>

Realitas di atas sangat sedikit sekali terjadi pada penyandang disabilitas. Hanya sedikit orang yang menganggap diri “normal” yang menaruh perhatian untuk para penyandang disabilitas. Davis mengatakan dengan tegas bahwa pada dasarnya semua manusia memiliki potensi menjadi disabilitas. Dengan kata lain, orang yang menganggap dirinya normal itu pun dapat menjadi penyandang disabilitas.<sup>11</sup> Davis juga menegaskan bahwa disabilitas akan menjadi bagian yang menunjukkan identitas seseorang, tetapi tidak diinginkan oleh sebagian besar orang. Penolakan ini akan menjadikan seseorang menjadi canggung apabila ia berjumpa dengan penyandang disabilitas. Tidak sekadar canggung, tetapi juga akan menghindari pembicaraan dengan topik disabilitas dan tidak memberikan perhatian pada hak-hak yang harus diterima

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9 Davis, *Bending Over Backwards Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*, 1–2.

10 Davis, 3–4.

11 Davis, 5.

oleh penyandang disabilitas. Padahal, Davis menegaskan bahwa penyandang disabilitas di Amerika adalah kaum minoritas terbesar sekaligus kelompok yang terlalu besar untuk diabaikan dan tidak diberikan perlindungan.<sup>12</sup>

Konsep manusia normal sudah berkembang sejak abad ke-19. Penelitian ini digagas oleh Adolphe Quetelet, seorang ahli statistik, dan Sir Francis Galton, dengan menciptakan kurva normal pada diri manusia. Kedua penggagas ini memiliki ciri khasnya sendiri dalam menjelaskan sisi normal diri manusia. Quetelet menggambarkan manusia normal itu adalah seseorang yang memiliki tinggi badan yang baik, kekuatan, kecerdasan, dan memiliki kecantikan. Ciri-ciri ini dianggap biasa-biasa saja dan tidak ada yang istimewa oleh Galton. Untuk itu, ia menggambarkan manusia dengan hipernormalitas, yaitu seseorang yang lebih kuat, lebih pintar, lebih cerdas, dan memiliki kelas sosial dan politik yang lebih berpengaruh demi menjalankan pemerintahan dan sistem masyarakat yang lebih baik lagi.

Kajian yang dilakukan oleh Galton ini berguna untuk menilai para pelaku politik dan ekonomi guna mewujudkan sistem demokrasi yang memperkuat konsolidasi negara, institusi, badan, dan budaya yang kuat atau lemah. Kajian ini menggambarkan bahwa seseorang yang normal adalah seseorang yang mampu melakukan pekerjaan politik dan ekonomi, bahkan mengharumkan nama bangsa. Untuk itu, dapat dilihat bahwa seseorang yang memiliki anggota tubuh yang tidak lengkap akan tidak mampu melakukan pekerjaan di dunia perpolitikan dan ekonomi. Oleh karena itu, anggapan tubuh yang normal tersebut menggiring seseorang untuk mendefinisikan tubuhnya berdasarkan norma dan standar masyarakat.

Gagasan Galton ini melahirkan anggapan bahwa tubuh yang normal adalah mereka yang memiliki paras yang cantik, tubuh yang bagus, rambut yang lurus, mata yang bagus, dan kulit putih. Sementara itu, seseorang yang memiliki kulit berwarna, datang dari masyarakat adat, orang asing atau imigran, dianggap sebagai seseorang yang abnormal. Dapat dilihat bahwa konsep yang digagas Galton ini memperlihatkan adanya kompetisi atas tubuh seseorang di dalam lingkungan masyarakat. Normalitas yang dibangun ini memaksa setiap orang untuk menyesuaikan diri dengan gagasan normalitas orang kulit putih, Eurosentris, seseorang yang mampu, negara maju, heteroseksual, dan laki-laki.<sup>13</sup> Gagasan ini jelas sekali meminggirkan

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<sup>12</sup> Davis, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Davis, *The End of Normal: Identity in a Biocultural Era*, 4-6.

orang-orang yang tidak memenuhi standar masyarakat tersebut, tanpa terkecuali penyandang disabilitas.

Dalam menanggapi gagasan ini, Davis menggunakan istilah "keberagaman" sebagai norma yang baru. Keragaman yang digagas Davis ini hendak memperlihatkan dunia yang tidak dibatasi dengan standar emas yang sering kali diberlakukan di mana pun seseorang berada. Untuk itu, keragaman ini menyambut semua orang tanpa batas.<sup>14</sup> Akan tetapi, disabilitas yang dimasukkan dalam konsep keberagaman itu hampir tidak pernah disinggung dalam visualisasi tubuh dan iklan-iklan yang dijajakan di dalam lingkungan masyarakat. Visualisasi yang sering diiklankan meliputi tubuh yang sempurna dan ideal menurut ukuran masyarakat.

Konsep neoliberal yang menyatakan keragaman adalah segalanya ternyata memiliki standar sendiri; bahwa visualisasi tubuh yang sedang diiklankan menggiring orang-orang melihat sesuatu yang beragam itu dalam batasan-batasan tertentu. Dengan kata lain, saat hendak merangkul tubuh yang beragam itu pun aspek-aspek pendukung keragaman dipilih yang menarik paradigma orang yang melihat. Sekali lagi, penyandang disabilitas, obesitas, depresi, lemah secara kognitif atau afektif, dan anoreksia tidak ditampilkan dalam visualisasi tersebut.<sup>15</sup>

Pernyataan di atas memperlihatkan dikotomi subjektivitas keragaman dengan subjektivitas disabilitas. Subjektivitas yang diberikan kepada tubuh yang divisualisasikan tersebut adalah konsep subjektivitas postmodern yang mudah dibentuk, bergerak, dan dapat ditempatkan dalam suatu rangkaian yang kompleks, dikonstruksi secara sosial, dan disertai dengan elemen yang kuat. Sementara itu, disabilitas dipandang sebagai sesuatu yang tetap, memiliki definisi yang ditentukan secara tajam oleh diagnosis medis. Juga, disabilitas itu dipandang sebagai posisi atau keadaan yang sangat hina sebagai "kehidupan yang tidak layak untuk dijalani".<sup>16</sup> Dengan kata lain, disabilitas tidak akan pernah masuk pada kriteria subjektivitas keragaman itu sendiri.

Untuk melihat apakah keragaman itu mencakup disabilitas dan ketidaknormalan, subjektivitas harus dibangun secara luas. Dalam hal ini, model identitas yang tua dan yang terkait dengan ideologi "normal" itu dapat dianggap sebagai sesuatu yang esensialis

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<sup>14</sup> Davis, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Davis, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Davis, 8.

dan hierarkis. Sementara itu, gagasan identitas yang lebih baru tampaknya dipilih, dikonstruksi, dan bersifat demokratis.<sup>17</sup> Davis menegaskan konsep keragaman yang ia tawarkan itu ke dalam istilah “biokultural.” Gagasan biokultural ini menolong setiap orang untuk memahami identitas yang sangat kompleks yang diwujudkan oleh tubuh itu sendiri. Kekompleksan itu terjadi karena tubuh biologis yang dimiliki, sistem budaya, sejarah, sosial, dan politik yang ada disekitarnya. Dengan kata lain, gagasan biokultural ini menolong melihat identitas disabilitas yang sama sekali berbeda dengan keragaman yang digagas oleh Davis itu sendiri.

Tubuh yang disabilitas itu dikonstruksi sebagai identitas yang tetap, dilihat sebagai sesuatu yang tidak normal, ditentukan secara medis, dan tidak dikonstruksi secara sosial. Hal ini terjadi karena disabilitas itu sendiri tidak dipandang sebagai identitas yang serupa sebagaimana orang banyak melihat ras, gender, dan identitas lainnya. Alasan lainnya adalah karena disabilitas dipandang sebagai masalah medis dan bukan cara hidup yang bisa dipilih oleh si penyandang itu sendiri. Banyak orang bisa saja menginginkan keragaman dalam segala hal, tetapi tidak demikian dengan tubuh yang harus diobati. Dalam hal inilah kata “normal” masih berlaku secara paksa. Tidak itu saja, “normal” kerap kali diinginkan keluar dari pernyataan dokter saat seseorang memeriksa keadaan kolesterolnya, tekanan darahnya, dan fungsi tubuhnya yang bermasalah. Kata “normal” ini tidak hanya berlaku bagi mereka penyandang disabilitas fisik, tetapi juga mereka yang menyandang gangguan kognitif dan afektif. Untuk menyembuhkan dan menormalkan kembali tubuh yang “rusak”, gaya hidup diusahakan dengan sebaik-baiknya. Campur tangan para ahli bedah dan farmasi dirancang sedemikian rupa untuk mengembalikan “kenormalan” pada tubuh yang menyimpang. Pernyataan di atas didukung dengan realitas yang terjadi pada diri anak-anak yang merasa tubuhnya tidak terlalu tinggi sehingga mereka mengonsumsi obat penambah tinggi badan. Realitas ini pun pernah saya alami saat tumbuh besar sebagai seorang remaja bertubuh pendek. Berbeda dengan saudara-saudara dan teman-teman saya. Saya pun membeli suatu alat dari pusat ortopedi demi mengusahakan pertumbuhan postur tubuh. Tidak itu saja, seseorang yang memiliki gigi bengkok atau tidak rapi pun memperbaikinya ke posisi “normal”. Kasus-kasus seperti ini lahir oleh karena standar normal yang diciptakan oleh masyarakat agar kembali pada sesuatu yang normal. Perlu diingat

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17 Davis, 9.

bahwa kasus-kasus seperti di atas didukung oleh tanggungan dana asuransi. Namun, tidak dengan kasus disabilitas.

Dalam hal ini, disabilitas adalah bentuk yang tidak normal atas dasar diagnosis medis. Davis sendiri menyebut ini “tidak beragam”. Disabilitas menjadi sesuatu yang tidak beragam karena keberagaman itu sendiri menyiratkan perayaan dan pilihan. Sementara itu, untuk menjadi disabilitas, tiap orang tidak dapat memilihnya kecuali orang tersebut menjalani diagnosis medis. Oleh karena itu, disabilitas tidak akan dilihat sebagai gaya hidup atau identitas. Akan tetapi, ia dilihat sebagai kategori yang tetap. Dengan kata lain, disabilitas itu sendiri telah ditanggihkan oleh normalitas dan dimasukkan ke dalam kondisi pengecualian.<sup>18</sup> Artinya, disabilitas dilihat sebagai identitas seseorang yang memiliki kebutuhan-kebutuhan sendiri, sama seperti manusia lain yang bukan disabilitas yang memilikinya sendiri. Misalnya, seseorang yang membutuhkan obat-obatan agar dapat bertahan hidup, seorang yang membutuhkan kursi roda karena kelumpuhan yang dialaminya, dan lain sebagainya.

Normal yang diciptakan lembaga masyarakat di sini adalah sebuah konfigurasi yang muncul pada peristiwa tertentu. Normalitas adalah gagasan yang muncul akibat kemajuan, industrialisasi, dan konsolidasi ideologis dari kekuatan kaum borjuis. Untuk itu, implikasi kenormalan sangat besar memengaruhi budaya masyarakat setempat. Penyebaran ideologi dalam berbagai hal sangat bergantung pada norma masyarakat yang ada. Dalam hal ini, kenormalan bentuk tubuh dan kemampuan menjadi salah satu contoh kasusnya. Perbedaan fisik seseorang menjadi perbedaan ideologi. Karakter penyandang disabilitas selalu ditandai dengan makna ideologis yang dibangun oleh masyarakat sesuai dengan standar norma yang berlaku. Davis mendorong setiap orang untuk memiliki kesadaran dalam membalikkan kekuasaan yang didominasi kelompok tertentu tentang yang normal dan melembagakan cara-cara alternatif ketika timbul pikiran tentang yang tidak normal.<sup>19</sup> Upaya ini dilakukan demi berkembangnya isu tentang disabilitas di tengah masyarakat.

Dari penjelasan di atas dapat dilihat bahwa menjadi normal adalah harapan semua orang. Namun, standar normal ini meminggirkan, bahkan mendiskriminasi penyandang disabilitas karena mereka dianggap tidak normal. Selain itu, para penyandang

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<sup>18</sup> Davis, 8–9.

<sup>19</sup> Davis, Sanchez, and Luft, “The Disability Studies Reader,” 15.

disabilitas dianggap sebagai seseorang yang memerlukan belas kasihan dan objek yang pasif karena dianggap tidak mumpuni melakukan pekerjaan. Pernyataan bahwa penyandang disabilitas adalah suatu identitas dan keadaan hidup yang hina memperlihatkan bahwa menjadi disabilitas adalah menjadi tidak normal dan berdosa. Ketidaknormalan atas konstruksi sosial menghilangkan citra manusia yang diciptakan segambar dan serupa dengan Allah. Melalui tulisan ini saya menyatakan bahwa konsep normalitas menciptakan diskriminasi terhadap penyandang disabilitas dan menawarkan konstruksi teologi disabilitas tentang Allah yang merangkul semua orang yang dipinggirkan tanpa terkecuali dengan memberi nama baru atau menamakan ulang Perjamuan Kudus sebagai simbol misional sehingga ada normalitas baru dalam memahami penyandang disabilitas itu sendiri.

## **PERJAMUAN KUDUS SEBAGAI SIMBOL MISIONAL BAGI PENYANDANG DISABILITAS**

### *Dosa dan Disabilitas*

Penyandang disabilitas mendapat stigma sebagai orang yang berdosa di dalam keluarga maupun masyarakat. Isabella Novsima Sinulingga, seorang teolog disabilitas Indonesia mengatakan bahwa dalam kehidupan berjemaat, disabilitas yang dialami oleh seseorang adalah hukuman atas dosa.<sup>20</sup> Pernyataan tersebut sejalan dengan

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20 Sinulingga, "Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual," 55. conversations of theological anthropology still employ a medical model lens, which perceives disability merely as bodily and intellectual impairments, thus failing the standard of \"normal.\" Normalcy unilaterally defines disability and dictates normative approaches toward persons with disabilities. Consequently, persons with disabilities are perceived in Indonesia as merely objects of charity to be pitied. On the other hand, they remain susceptible to suffering violence. These trends owe to the fact that Indonesian society does not adequately provide either tangible resource considerations or sufficient social support. Lacunae in the theological literature concerning disability in Indonesian contexts foment in the life of the church further challenges for persons with disabilities. For persons there with intellectual disabilities, in particular, the situation is even more severe, as their condition is regarded a kind of punishment for sin and further stigmatized as abnormal. This article offers a constructive theology of disability to dismantle the myth of normalcy, which reduces persons with disabilities to being merely impaired organisms within society. Theological musings on the beauty of all creation, the perichoretic relationship within the Trinity, the doctrines of imago Dei and imago Christi are taken up in this essay, to offer an inclusive theology expressly for persons with intellectual disabilities.\" au

pengalaman saya selama berada di Nias, saat berjumpa dengan seorang pemilik asrama bagi penyandang disabilitas (sudah saya utarakan dalam narasi di Pendahuluan). Ia mengatakan bahwa ada beberapa keluarga yang memiliki anak disabilitas sedang menjalani hukuman atas dosa dan sedang menanggung aib. Pernyataan ini merupakan gambaran marginalisasi sekaligus diskriminasi terhadap penyandang disabilitas. Mirisnya, ada nas di dalam Alkitab yang digunakan untuk melegitimasi bahwa teologi mendukung peminggiran dan menghubungkan dosa dengan disabilitas. Injil Yohanes 5:14, Lukas 5:18-26, dan Yohanes 9:1-3 adalah contoh yang sering digunakan dan dikutip untuk membuktikan bahwa disabilitas adalah tanda ketidaksempurnaan moral atau balasan Tuhan atas dosa yang sudah diperbuat.<sup>21</sup> Artinya, ada hubungan antara dosa dan disabilitas. Eiesland mengatakan bahwa keterhubungan antara dosa dan disabilitas adalah sebuah sindiran atas gambar Ilahi dan menodai segala sesuatu yang dianggap kudus, seperti yang dituliskan dalam Alkitab Perjanjian Lama dan Perjanjian Baru. Idealnya, segala sesuatu yang mewakili Allah haruslah sempurna dan utuh (Im. 17-26; Ibr. 9:14). Tafsiran atas nas-nas tersebut oleh para penafsir memperlihatkan kesempurnaan fisik dan kebebasan mutlak yang ada dalam diri manusia, tetapi mengecualikan realitas kehidupan para penyandang disabilitas yang pada dasarnya tidak memiliki kesempurnaan dan keutuhan.<sup>22</sup>

Menurut saya, pelegalan makna terhadap nas Alkitab dalam rangka memberi nilai, menentukan seseorang berdosa, dan sedang menjalani hukuman merupakan sikap eksklusif karena menganggap dirinya normal dan menganggap diri tidak berdosa. Padahal, pada

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21 Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, 71.

22 Eiesland, 72.

dasarnya semua manusia memiliki kekurangan dan tentunya berdosa. Lagi-lagi saya mengutip Sinulingga yang mengatakan bahwa dosa itu sendiri terjadi ketika seseorang tidak mengakui dirinya adalah seseorang yang ringkih, rapuh, atau tidak sempurna.<sup>23</sup> Saya setuju dengan pendapat Sinulingga tersebut, sebab manusia akan melupakan karunia lain yang diberikan dalam dirinya, yaitu kerapuhan dan keterbatasan itu sendiri saat mereka mengelak dari kenyataan tersebut. Menurut saya, manusia akan menjadi sempurna apabila kerapuhan dan keterbatasan itu ada, diterima, dan diakui olehnya. Namun, tidak dapat disangkal bahwa standar normal memengaruhi upaya menyempurnakan diri agar tidak terlihat rapuh dan terbatas sehingga penolakan atas karunia kerapuhan dan keterbatasan itu terjadi. Untuk itu, kesempurnaan tubuh, keindahan

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23 Sinulingga, "Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual," 55. *conversations of theological anthropology still employ a medical model lens, which perceives disability merely as bodily and intellectual impairments, thus failing the standard of \"normal.\" Normalcy unilaterally defines disability and dictates normative approaches toward persons with disabilities. Consequently, persons with disabilities are perceived in Indonesia as merely objects of charity to be pitied. On the other hand, they remain susceptible to suffering violence. These trends owe to the fact that Indonesian society does not adequately provide either tangible resource considerations or sufficient social support. Lacunae in the theological literature concerning disability in Indonesian contexts foment in the life of the church further challenges for persons with disabilities. For persons there with intellectual disabilities, in particular, the situation is even more severe, as their condition is regarded a kind of punishment for sin and further stigmatized as abnormal. This article offers a constructive theology of disability to dismantle the myth of normalcy, which reduces persons with disabilities to being merely impaired organisms within society. Theological musings on the beauty of all creation, the perichoretic relationship within the Trinity, the doctrines of imago Dei and imago Christi are taken up in this essay, to offer an inclusive theology expressly for persons with intellectual disabilities.*,"author":{"dropping-particle":"","family":"Sinulingga","given":"Isabella Novsima","non-dropping-particle":"","parse-names":false,"suffix":""},"container-title":"Indonesian Journal of Theology","id":"ITEM-1","issued":{"date-parts":[["2015"]]},"page":"35-60","title":"Keindahan dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual","type":"article-journal"},"locator":"55","uris":["http://www.mendeley.com/documents/?uuid=7d4f850d-72de-4528-bec6-d264823a7590"]},"mendeley":{"formattedCitation":"Sinulingga, \"Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,\" 55.\"","plainTextFormattedCitation":"Sinulingga, \"Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,\" 55.\"","previouslyFormattedCitation":"Sinulingga, \"Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,\" 55.\""},"properties":{"noteIndex":23},"schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}



rambut, kulit, paras cantik, susunan gigi yang rapi, dan tinggi badan yang semampai akan diusahakan sebaik mungkin.

Hal ini berpengaruh juga pada konsep penderitaan yang dialami oleh manusia yang diceritakan melalui kisah-kisah orang suci dalam Alkitab seperti Lazarus dan Ayub. Sebab, penderitaan itu pun sering dihubungkan dengan dosa. Kisah hidup yang menyakitkan menjadi bukti bahwa penderitaan yang terjadi harus ditanggung sebagai jalan untuk mendapatkan pahala surgawi. Memang, dalam hal ini teologi tidak menceritakan disabilitas sebagai jalan menuju anugerah surgawi secara kentara. Namun, akan sangat membahayakan apabila pelanggaran ini dibiarkan. Para penyandang disabilitas akan didorong untuk memaklumi situasi sosial yang tidak adil yang sedang terjadi pada diri mereka. Juga, penyandang disabilitas didorong untuk menyetujui kenyataan bahwa dirinya terisolasi dari lingkungan sosial karena ketidakberdayaan mereka. Pada akhirnya, situasi ini mendukung semua orang yang bukan disabilitas untuk pasrah dan pasif merespons situasi tersebut sehingga menyebut situasi tersebut sebagai “ujian dari yang Ilahi.”<sup>24</sup> Cara pandang terhadap penderitaan sebagai media pemurnian dan upaya mendapatkan pahala surgawi tidak hanya menghubungkan dosa dan disabilitas. Akan tetapi, mereka yang merasa tidak mengalami “penyembuhan” (karena disabilitas yang mereka alami) akan terus-menerus memendam keberdosaan mereka (pengakuan bahwa aku adalah orang yang berdosa) dalam hidup mereka. Selain itu, teologi penderitaan itu sendiri mendorong para penyandang disabilitas menerima sepenuhnya situasi ketidakadilan sosial sebagai tanda ketaatannya kepada Tuhan. Secara tidak langsung, situasi tersebut mendorong penyandang disabilitas menghayati status mereka sebagai masyarakat kelas dua dalam lingkungan sosial dan gereja.<sup>25</sup> Pada umumnya, pernyataan tentang status kelas dua menggambarkan orang-orang yang dimarginalkan, dipinggirkan, ditindas, dan tidak diberi ruang gerak dalam masyarakat. Sinulingga mengatakan bahwa teologi, dalam hal ini gereja, melanggengkan normalisme dalam praktiknya.<sup>26</sup> Konsekuensi dari tindakan tersebut

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24 Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, 72.

25 Eiesland, 73.

26 Sinulingga, “Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,” 37. *conversations of theological anthropology still employ a medical model lens, which perceives disability merely as bodily and intellectual impairments, thus failing the standard of “normal.” Normalcy unilaterally defines disability and dictates normative approaches toward persons with disabilities.*

adalah para penyandang disabilitas hanya menjadi pusat perhatian sementara dan tidak penting karena terjadi pembiaran segregasi atas diri penyandang disabilitas dan orang-orang yang menganggap dirinya “normal”. Akhirnya, perbuatan tersebut melegalkan pernyataan bahwa penyandang disabilitas adalah objek rasa kasihan yang senantiasa menjadi penerima sumbangan dan sedekah.<sup>27</sup> Saya setuju dengan pendapat Eiesland yang mengatakan bahwa konsep pemberian amal sedekah kepada para Penyandang Disabilitas justru menjadikan mereka terkucil dari lingkungan sosial alias menjadi asing karena terisolasi oleh sistem sosial. Pernyataan ini memperlihatkan betapa tidak mumpuninya Penyandang Disabilitas untuk melakukan pekerjaan, menjadi orang yang mengganggu, dan tidak berguna sehingga perlu mendapatkan belas kasihan.

Menurut saya, disabilitas bukan penderitaan yang hina dan juga bukan kehidupan yang tidak layak untuk dijalani, bukan hukuman atas dosa, dan bukan juga peminggiran atau pendiskriminasian manusia. Namun, disabilitas adalah kehidupan yang harus dijalani

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Consequently, persons with disabilities are perceived in Indonesia as merely objects of charity to be pitied. On the other hand, they remain susceptible to suffering violence. These trends owe to the fact that Indonesian society does not adequately provide either tangible resource considerations or sufficient social support. Lacunae in the theological literature concerning disability in Indonesian contexts foment in the life of the church further challenges for persons with disabilities. For persons there with intellectual disabilities, in particular, the situation is even more severe, as their condition is regarded a kind of punishment for sin and further stigmatized as abnormal. This article offers a constructive theology of disability to dismantle the myth of normalcy, which reduces persons with disabilities to being merely impaired organisms within society. Theological musings on the beauty of all creation, the perichoretic relationship within the Trinity, the doctrines of imago Dei and imago Christi are taken up in this essay, to offer an inclusive theology expressly for persons with intellectual disabilities.”, “author”:{“dropping-particle”:"", “family”:“Sinulingga”, “given”:“Isabella Novsima”, “non-dropping-particle”:"", “parse-names”:false, “suffix”:{}}, “container-title”:“Indonesian Journal of Theology”, “id”:“ITEM-1”, “issued”:{“date-parts”:[["2015"]]}, “page”:“35-60”, “title”:“Keindahan dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual”, “type”:“article-journal”, “locator”:“37”, “uris”:[“http://www.mendeley.com/documents/?uuid=7d4f850d-72de-4528-bec6-d264823a7590”]], “mendeley”:{“formattedCitation”:“Sinulingga, “Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,” 37.”, “plainTextFormattedCitation”:“Sinulingga, “Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,” 37.”, “previouslyFormattedCitation”:“Sinulingga, “Keindahan Dalam Disabilitas: Sebuah Konstruksi Teologi Disabilitas Intelektual,” 37.”}, “properties”:{“noteIndex”:26}, “schema”:“https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”}

27 Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, 74.

seperti “orang normal” jalani, menerima, dan mengakui mereka. Pengakuan dan penerimaan terhadap keberadaan penyandang disabilitas ini harus dilakukan oleh masyarakat sosial yang menganggap dirinya normal. Juga, gereja harus tegas membicarakan isu disabilitas dalam pelayanannya bukan sekadar *ngobrol* belaka. Juga, saat membicarakan disabilitas tidak selesai pada pembangunan rumah disabilitas, namun benar-benar menyiapkan fasilitas yang dapat diakses, dan melakukan edukasi pada jemaat tentang disabilitas. Apabila gagasan tersebut dipraktikkan dengan sebaik-baiknya maka, gereja tersebut sedang membangun dirinya untuk melepaskan sikap mendua hati yang menganggap penyandang disabilitas adalah objek yang diremehkan sekaligus disanjung karena pertolongan yang diberikan kepada mereka menutupi kebutuhan-kebutuhan yang lain. Padahal, pada saat membicarakan disabilitas gereja sedang menghancurkan segregasi yang meminggirkan penyandang disabilitas dan membuka jalan untuk menghancurkan diskriminasi dalam lingkungan masyarakat.

Di sinilah gereja ditantang untuk mengutarakan perspektifnya dalam memandang penyandang disabilitas. Apakah memandang mereka dari sisi moral, medis, sosial, atau solidaritas. Juga, gereja ditantang bagaimana menghayati karunia keselamatan yang diberikan Allah melalui Yesus Kristus yang tubuh-Nya terpecah-pecah itu. Tantangan ini mendorong gereja untuk menjadi inklusif, karena gereja tidak lagi memikirkan “mereka”, tetapi “kita”. Selain itu, gereja tidak terjebak dalam stigma yang diberikan kepada penyandang disabilitas, tidak normal, dan berdosa itu. Namun, gereja adalah ruang dan tempat yang menerima dan mengakui keberadaan penyandang disabilitas. Selain itu, realitas ini memperlihatkan respons iman gereja yang mewujudkan rangkulan kasih Allah yang diberikan kepada semua orang. Pada akhirnya, gereja itu sendiri hadir bagi penyandang disabilitas sebagai komunitas yang penuh empati, menciptakan kesetaraan yang menyingkirkan *ableism* yang diskriminatif karena menilai orang berdasarkan abilitasnya atau kemampuannya, dan melawan stigma atau *labelling* terhadap penyandang disabilitas.

#### *Perjamuan Kudus sebagai Simbol Misional bagi yang Dimarginalkan<sup>28</sup>*

Perjamuan Kudus adalah salah satu sakramen yang dirayakan umat Protestan. Perjamuan Kudus menyimbolkan kasih karunia Tuhan

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<sup>28</sup> Judul pada sub bab ini pernah dijadikan judul tesis penulis di Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Jakarta pada tahun 2019 dengan judul, “Perjamuan Kudus sebagai

yang telah diberikan bagi manusia melalui Yesus Kristus yang datang ke dunia, mati, dan dibangkitkan. Namun, pada praktiknya Perjamuan Kudus lebih sering dimaknai secara sempit oleh sebagian orang atau gereja. Pemaknaan Perjamuan Kudus hanya berhenti pada pemaknaan pengampunan dosa dan kehidupan yang kekal. Sementara itu, hampir tidak pernah Perjamuan Kudus dimaknai sebagai peristiwa Kristus yang meliputi pekerjaan-Nya di dunia: menyembuhkan orang sakit, membangkitkan orang mati, mengajar dan memberi makan. Juga, semua rangkaian kehidupan, kematian, dan kebangkitan-Nya yang adalah rangkaian peristiwa yang saling berkelindan saat merayakan Perjamuan Kudus itu.

Orang percaya menerima Perjamuan Kudus di dalam gereja, yang merupakan tempat bersekutu dengan umat lainnya dan juga dengan Tuhan. Harald Hegstad dengan tegas mengatakan bahwa gereja adalah komunitas orang percaya yang bersekutu bersama di dalam Kristus, mengalami perjumpaan dengan Allah Tritunggal karena memiliki hubungan yang sangat intim atas bimbingan Roh Kudus.<sup>29</sup> Saya membandingkan definisi gereja oleh Hegstad dengan yang diberikan oleh Letty M. Russel, seorang teolog feminis. Ia mengatakan bahwa gereja adalah komunitas orang percaya yang bersekutu bersama, sebagai tempat perjumpaan dan juga menggambarkan kehidupan kekristenan di beberapa tempat, kota, atau rumah. Dengan kata lain, gereja itu universal karena semua orang percaya yang masuk ke dalamnya adalah bagian dari orang-orang yang menanti kedatangan Tuhan yang kedua kalinya. Gereja menjadi tanda kehadiran Kristus di dunia, semua orang datang ke dalamnya. Juga, gereja menjadi tanda iman orang percaya.<sup>30</sup> Kedua definisi tersebut memperlihatkan bahwa gereja adalah keterbukaan persekutuan bagi semua orang yang datang ke dalamnya. Gereja itu kelihatan, gereja itu nyata hadir ke dalam dunia. Hegstad mengatakan bahwa gereja yang kelihatan menggiring umatnya

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Simbol Misional: Liturgi sebagai Respons Misi Gereja terhadap Marginalisasi” ditulis atas bimbingan Dr. Septemmy E. Lakawa dan Dr. Rasid Rachman. Juga, pernah dijadikan judul riset penulis di Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam dan Protestant Theological University Amsterdam pada tahun 2019. Riset tersebut berjudul “Eucharist as a Missional Symbol: An Inclusive and Hospitable Church to Voice about Gender Justice in Huria Kristen Batak Protestan” ditulis atas bimbingan Prof. Dr. Heleen Zorgdrager. Artikel ini telah mengalami perubahan dari bagian tesis dan riset tersebut.

29 Hegstad, *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible*, 2.

30 Russel, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, 42-43.

untuk menyadari tentang perjalanan misi gerejanya di dunia. Misi gereja mendefinisikan siapa gereja itu secara utuh.<sup>31</sup> Yang menjadi pertanyaan adalah bagaimanakah misi gereja terhadap penyandang disabilitas yang kerap kali mendapatkan peminggiran atau diskriminasi dalam kesehariannya?

Perjamuan Kudus sebagai simbol misional adalah respons iman orang percaya yang dipraktikkan dalam keseharian. Simbol misional itu berangkat dari perkataan Yesus *Do This*, Lakukanlah! Yang didasarkan pada peristiwa *anamnesis* atau mengingat Kristus. Bagi saya, peristiwa *anamnesis* menghantarkan setiap orang untuk melakukan karya keselamatan yang didasarkan pada peristiwa Kristus: kehidupan, kematian, dan kebangkitan-Nya. Oleh karena itu, Perjamuan Kudus sebagai peristiwa Kristus tidak melupakan sukacita atas karunia dari Tuhan yang sudah diterima dan ruang atau tempat untuk melakukan ucapan syukur. Mengingat peristiwa Kristus dapat menolong gereja untuk turut serta aktif membagikan dan melakukan karunia sukacita dalam kesehariannya, dalam hal ini menerima dan mengakui keberadaan penyandang disabilitas. Untuk itu, Perjamuan Kudus sebagai simbol misional membuka pagar gereja yang tertutup agar orang-orang yang sudah menerima Perjamuan Kudus keluar dari dalam gereja dan bermisi kepada yang dimarginalkan dengan membagikan karunia keselamatan kepada semua ciptaan tanpa terkecuali.

Saya menyatakan bahwa Perjamuan Kudus sebagai simbol misional adalah karena melalui simbol itu orang percaya ditolong untuk mengenal siapa yang ia percayai; dalam hal ini Kristus. Eiesland mengatakan bahwa simbol sangat penting dalam kehidupan beragama. Simbol menolong seseorang untuk memahami dan menemukan nilai-nilai yang terkandung dalam sesuatu yang disimbolkan. Tidak itu saja, simbol memiliki kekuatan dalam kehidupan bermasyarakat, atau secara individual karena dengan simbol komunitas atau seseorang dapat membangun dan mengatur rasa percaya dirinya dan nilai-nilai yang ia peroleh, serta etos budaya yang dihidupinya.<sup>32</sup> Saya sependapat dengan pernyataan Eiesland. Akan tetapi, simbol-simbol dalam masyarakat sangat banyak, termasuk simbol penindasan bagi mereka yang dimarginalkan karena standar normal masyarakat yang ada. Pemaknaan ulang dan pemberian nama baru bagi simbol-simbol dalam masyarakat

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31 Hegstad, *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible*, 13.

32 Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, 91.

sosial menghapuskan diskriminasi, marginalisasi, dan peminggiran bagi penyandang disabilitas. Eiesland mengatakan bahwa simbol menciptakan standar normatif untuk interaksi manusia yang melegitimasi struktur sosial, pengaturan politik, dan kecenderungan bersikap, membentuk perangkat budaya, dan menawarkan visi yang bisa saja terjadi. Untuk itulah simbol harus diberi nama kembali agar pikiran dan perilaku tidak kembali ke struktur yang sudah dikenal dan biasa dilakukan.<sup>33</sup> Pemberian nama kembali atas simbol sangat penting bagi kelompok yang dimarginalkan. Pemberian nama itu mentransformasi cara berpikir dan berperilaku, sehingga melahirkan definisi baru pada seseorang yang menganggap dirinya bukan disabilitas dalam melihat penyandang disabilitas. Di sini, Perjamuan Kudus diberi nama baru, bahwa ia bukan sekadar tentang pengampunan dosa melainkan simbol misional bagi yang dimarginalkan. Perjamuan Kudus merupakan tanda partisipasi aktif umat di dunia nyata.

Perjamuan Kudus sebagai simbol misional menjelaskan tentang partisipasi orang percaya dalam kehidupan keseharian. Artinya, Perjamuan Kudus tidak terkunci sebagai ritual di dalam gereja. Namun, menjadi bentuk partisipasi semua orang yang berkumpul dan aksi nyata sebagai bukti menerima Perjamuan Kudus. Tidak itu saja, semua orang yang bukan disabilitas memahami mengapa mereka melakukan Perjamuan Kudus dan juga mengapa mereka melakukan teologi. Martha L. Moore-Keish dalam bukunya *Do this in Remembrance of Me: A Ritual Approach to Reformed Eucharistic Theology* mengatakan saat orang percaya (umat Kristiani) melakukan Perjamuan Kudus, sebenarnya mereka sedang menggambarkan hubungan liturgi dan kehidupan sosialnya. Berbagi roti, menyembuhkan luka, rekonsiliasi, dan menciptakan keadilan dalam kehidupan merupakan simbol misional dalam pemaknaan Perjamuan Kudus. Jelaslah undangan melakukan Perjamuan Kudus itu menjadi undangan bagi semua orang percaya untuk bertindak melampaui batas-batas yang mereka anggap normal. Para umat diundang untuk membuka pagar-pagar gereja yang tertutup dan melakukan keadilan bagi seluruh umat manusia tanpa terkecuali. Sebab, Russel melihat kebanyakan gereja yang merayakan Perjamuan Kudus menjadi gereja yang eksklusif. Mereka tidak melakukan keadilan bagi orang-orang yang terpinggirkan dalam masyarakat. Russel ingin menghapus diskriminasi tersebut dengan memberikan makna baru

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33 Eiesland, 91.

dan nama baru Perjamuan Kudus sebagai meja Perjamuan Tuhan yang menyambut semua orang.<sup>34</sup>

Peristiwa ini menyimbolkan pagar yang terkunci telah terbuka untuk menyambut mereka yang ditolak sebelumnya oleh orang kaya dan para penguasa. Sekarang, Tuhan yang menyambut mereka. Perjamuan Kudus sebagai simbol misional mendobrak batas-batas sosial, normalitas sosial, dengan berbagi meja perjamuan bersama orang yang dimarginalkan, termasuk para penyandang disabilitas. Makan bersama menciptakan ruang dialog dan saling mendengar serta mematahkan batasan.<sup>35</sup> Akhirnya, para penyandang disabilitas pun ikut serta menikmati makanan surgawi, menjadi rekan sekerja Allah yang duduk bersama dan berbagi cerita bersama. Hubungan yang baru tercipta karena anggapan bagi penyandang disabilitas sebagai masyarakat kelas dua diruntuhkan. Stigma pada penyandang disabilitas sebagai objek rasa kasihan dan orang yang penuh dengan dosa pun dipatahkan. Wujud utamanya dapat dilihat dari gereja yang benar-benar memberikan tempat dan kesempatan berpartisipasi penuh dalam persekutuan bagi penyandang disabilitas.

Sejalan dengan pernyataan tersebut, pemberian nama baru terhadap Kristus yang sering disebut “Hamba yang Menderita”, menjadi “Yesus Kristus sebagai Allah yang Disabilitas” (*disabled God*) diberikan oleh Eiesland. Pemaknaan baru yang dilakukan Eiesland terhadap ritual Perjamuan Kudus akan diri dan tubuh Kristus yang dirayakan itu adalah dalam rangka meneguhkan martabat tubuh para penyandang disabilitas. Juga untuk memahami kembali makna dan fungsi gereja sebagai komunitas penyalur keadilan bagi para penyandang disabilitas. Makna baru ini mendorong setiap orang yang bukan disabilitas dan para penyandang disabilitas untuk bertransformasi, mampu beradaptasi, terus berjuang melawan diskriminasi yang mewabah di dalam masyarakat dan gereja.<sup>36</sup> Tidak hanya itu, pemaknaan baru ini menyingkirkan cara pandang, menghapuskan penindasan dan diskriminasi, menciptakan komunitas yang penuh empati, membangun kesetaraan, memperlihatkan rangkulan yang tulus sebagai sahabat bagi penyandang disabilitas, dan tidak menjadikan penyandang disabilitas sebagai objek gurauan dalam percakapan.

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34 Moore-Keish, *Do This in Remembrance of Me: A Ritual Approach to Reformed Eucharistic Theology*, 146–47.

35 Moore-Keish, 76–77.

36 Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, 94.

Perjamuan Kudus sebagai simbol misional bagi yang di-marginalkan akan menjadi nyata apabila setiap orang mengakui keragaman dalam masyarakat. Ia juga menyadari bahwa ada karunia lain dalam dirinya, yaitu kerapuhan dan keterbatasan, sehingga ia mampu menerima para penyandang disabilitas sebagai orang yang sama dengannya. Oleh karena itu, Perjamuan Kudus sebagai simbol misional adalah perwujudan gereja yang inklusif, berbagi meja Tuhan kepada semua orang tanpa terkecuali. Sebagai simbol solidaritas, yaitu menerima yang lain sebagai rekan sekerjanya dan bertransformasi demi perwujudan misi gereja. Karena itu, Perjamuan Kudus sebagai simbol misional mematahkan normalitas dan dosa pada orang-orang tertentu (baca: penyandang disabilitas), batas-batas eksklusivitas, dan diskriminasi bagi penyandang disabilitas sebab mereka adalah sesama yang dirindukan dengan sangat tulus di dalam gereja dan masyarakat.

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## TENTANG PENULIS



Marthalena Sinaga adalah seorang Bibelvrouw HKBP yang bekerja di Kantor Pusat HKBP di Biro Kategorial Sekolah Minggu, Remaja, dan Naposobulung sebagai staf fungsional. Ia adalah lulusan Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Theologi Jakarta pada tahun 2019. Fokus penelitian teologinya adalah pada studi misiologi dan liturgika dengan perspektif feminis.



# DISPLACEMENT AND THE OPTION FOR MIGRANTS: A THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE

*Martinus Dam Febrianto SJ<sup>1</sup>*

## ABSTRACT

The article is a response to the current displacement reality from a theological perspective. As forced migration is not only a global humanitarian concern but also intricately intertwined with the reality of God's people. Christians cannot afford to remain indifferent to this issue. Beginning with a personal story about encountering a refugee, the article delves into the global and local realities of forced migration, particularly spotlighting the recent Rohingya refugee situation in Aceh, Indonesia, and the subsequent tensions with local communities. It emphasizes the moral obligation of Christians, drawing attention to the preferential option for migrants and refugees advocated by figures like Pope Francis. In aligning with the biblical and historical perspectives of Christianity, theologians have developed a robust theology of migration, providing a foundational basis for supporting vulnerable migrants. Additionally, the article underscores the transformative power of biblical narratives, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan, which serves as a poignant reminder of the ethical imperative to extend compassion and assistance to migrants and refugees, countering any interpretations of scripture that might be used to justify exclusionary attitudes.

**Keywords:** Forced Migration, Displacement, Church, Christianity, Theology of Migration

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## AN ENCOUNTER

Ali Reza, an Afghan refugee, has called Indonesia home since 2013. As a young Hazara, a persecuted ethnic minority in Afghanistan for over a century, Reza's family, like many others, fled threats of violence and persecution, seeking refuge in neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Iran. Raised as a stateless individual in Quetta, Pakistan, Reza hoped for safety, but the specter of violence persisted due to his ethnicity and religious sect. Forced to make a difficult decision, Reza's family financed his departure from Pakistan through a people-smuggling network when he was just 23 years old, leaving behind his loved ones in pursuit of a secure future. Despite being recognized as a refugee by UNHCR in Indonesia since 2014, Reza's journey has been fraught with uncertainty. His aspirations for resettlement in Australia or another welcoming nation remain unfulfilled, leaving him stranded in Indonesia's Cisarua region, living as an indefinite transit migrant. Adding to his anguish, news of his father's disappearance at the hands of the Taliban in Quetta compounds his family's distress. With no clear path forward, Reza grapples with the daunting choice between an uncertain life in Indonesia, fraught with the risk of repatriation to Afghanistan, or returning to Pakistan, a country unable to ensure his safety.

Individuals like Reza Ali represent the countless compelling stories I encountered and supported during dedicated service with JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service) Indonesia, assisting asylum seekers and refugees.<sup>2</sup> These individuals are compelled to flee their homelands due to persecution and imminent threats to their safety, finding themselves in dire situations where their governments cannot offer protection. My journey alongside Reza began in mid-2016, when he volunteered as an English teacher at the JRS learning center, a vital hub providing psychosocial support and educational opportunities for refugees awaiting resettlement. Despite holding a bachelor's degree, Reza's pursuit of a master's in economics in Quetta was abruptly halted by his decision to flee. Engaging closely with asylum seekers and refugees left an indelible mark on me, fostering a profound understanding of the intricate realities of forced human migration. The following article is a reflection on the phenomenon

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2 "Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), founded in 1980, is an international Catholic organization with a mission to accompany, serve, and advocate on behalf of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons." Accessed from <https://jrs.net/en/about-us/>.

of forced displacement and its ethical response from Christian communities from the perspective and discourse of contemporary theology of migration.

## **MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT**

The phenomenon of forced migration or displacement stands as one of the most salient indicators of our contemporary era. Across the globe, hundreds of millions of individuals are compelled to migrate or face displacement due to various factors such as war, social upheaval, persecution, or economic hardship. The protracted conflict in Syria since 2015 has precipitated a vast exodus of people, resulting in mass displacement both within the region and reaching as far as mainland Europe.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, years of ongoing conflict and pervasive violence in Afghanistan have driven millions, particularly the Hazara ethnic minority, to seek refuge in neighboring countries such as Iran and Pakistan, as well as distant shores.<sup>4</sup> Venezuela's escalating political turmoil has precipitated a severe economic and social crisis, prompting what has been described as the largest migration wave in modern Latin American history. Economic stagnation in African nations has fueled significant migration movements towards Europe and North America, seeking better opportunities and livelihoods. Moreover, in low- and middle-income countries across Asia and the Pacific, economic motivations propel millions to migrate in pursuit of employment and improved living standards abroad.<sup>5</sup>

The era of globalization has ushered in an interconnected world, fostering seamless communication and transportation networks that have, in turn, propelled migration to unprecedented levels. Recent statistics underscore the magnitude of this phenomenon. According to a report by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, international migration surged to 272 million in 2019, a significant increase from 153 million in 1990.<sup>6</sup> Concurrently, a UNHCR report revealed that a staggering 108.4 million individuals

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3 Benedetta Berti, "The Syrian Refugee Crisis: Regional and Human Security Implications," Strategic Assessment, Vol. 17, No. 4, January 2015, 41.

4 Landinfo, Report Afghanistan: Hazaras and Afghan Insurgent Groups (Oslo: Country of Origin Information Centre, 3 October 2016), 9.

5 United Nations Economic and Social Council, Trends and Drivers of International Migration in Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok: United Nations, 2017), 9.

6 See International Migration 2019: Report (New York: United Nations, 2019), 3.

worldwide were compelled to flee their homes due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, or other factors.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the specter of climate change looms large, posing an additional threat that will necessitate mass movement. The World Bank estimates that climate change could force 216 million people to migrate within their own countries by 2050.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, migration has emerged as an inescapable reality, transcending geographical boundaries and affecting nearly every corner of the globe.

Migration, particularly irregular migration undertaken by asylum seekers, refugees, or forcibly displaced individuals, is fraught with peril and profound risks. Journeys often entail traversing treacherous and life-threatening political boundaries. The perilous passage across the Mediterranean Sea, along with areas near Morocco and off the coast of Libya, has witnessed the tragic sinking of boats carrying migrants and asylum seekers striving to reach Europe. Moreover, in Mexico, migrants originating from South American countries are vulnerable targets for extortion syndicates engaged in human abductions, exacerbating the dangers they face along their arduous journeys.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES AND IDPS IN INDONESIA**

In the context of Indonesia, discussions on forcibly displaced individuals encompass two main categories: (1) individuals like Ali Reza, who arrive from other countries and reside in Indonesia as asylum seekers or refugees, and (2) internally displaced persons (IDPs), who are citizens forced to flee their homes for various reasons but remain within Indonesian territory. As of November 2023, Indonesia has become home to 12,008 refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>9</sup> These refugees hail from a multitude of countries, primarily Afghanistan, Myanmar, Somalia, Iraq, Sudan, Sri Lanka, and others, totaling 54 origin countries for refugees/asylum seekers in Indonesia. The refugees and asylum seekers reside in Jakarta and its environs,

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7 <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/figures-glance>. For more detailed data, see UNHCR Global Trends Forced Displacement 2022 (Copenhagen: UNHCR, 2023).

8 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/09/13/climate-change-could-force-216-million-people-to-migrate-within-their-own-countries-by-2050>.

9 UNHCR Indonesia Monthly Statistical Report November 2023.

either independently or in community housing facilitated by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Meanwhile, Rohingya refugees originating from camps in Bangladesh typically arrive in Aceh and are provided shelter in various temporary accommodations. The ongoing conflict in Myanmar and dire conditions in refugee camps have prompted Rohingya individuals to seek refuge elsewhere, with Indonesia emerging as one of their destinations.

According to data from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), as of the end of 2022, Indonesia had 72,000 internally displaced people resulting from conflict and violence, and 68,000 individuals displaced due to natural disasters. Throughout 2022, there were 7,100 movements of people due to conflict and violence, and 308,000 movements caused by natural disasters. The primary drivers of forced displacement due to natural or environmental disasters include floods during the rainy season, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes. Meanwhile, violence and conflicts leading to displacement predominantly occur in Papua provinces, encompassing South Papua, Central Papua, and Mountains Papua. However, such displacement encounters resistance in Papua and West Papua, often sparking protests and violence. A portion of internally displaced persons resulting from conflict and violence are enduring prolonged displacement.<sup>10</sup>

Since 14 November 2023, 1,752 Rohingya individuals arrived in various areas of Aceh Province, as reported by the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR).<sup>11</sup> However, they encountered hostility and opposition in Indonesia, where local communities expressed frustration over the increasing number of boats carrying members of the persecuted ethnic minority to their shores. The recent rejection of Rohingya refugees by some residents in Aceh has prompted inquiries, as previous arrivals in Sabang in 2009, Idi Rayeuk in 2010, and until 2019 were not met with such resistance. Observers speculate that this shift may be attributed to misinformation about Rohingya refugees circulating on social media, exacerbated by influencers amplifying the rejection. Furthermore, media coverage often lacks context regarding the challenges faced by refugees.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Internal Displacements and Food Security 2023 (Geneva: IDMC, 2023), 51-52.

11 UNHCR Indonesia, Emergency Update: Rohingya Boat Arrivals as of 22 January 2024, downloaded from <https://reliefweb.int/report/indonesia/unhcr-indonesia-emergency-update-rohingya-boat-arrivals-22-january-2024>.

12 "Rohingya, Narrative of Rejection, and RI-ASEAN Responsibility," accessed from

## OPTION FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

For the Christian communities, migration transcends mere social, cultural, economic, or political dimensions; it is a moral, missionary, pastoral, spiritual, and theological imperative. Christians cannot afford to remain indifferent to this issue, as migration is not only a global humanitarian concern but also intricately intertwined with the reality of God's people and the nature of the Church's mission in the world. The history of Christianity underscores the intimate connection between the movement of people and the spread of the faith, dating back to the earliest migrations from Jerusalem and Palestine. From the era of the Roman Empire to the Middle Ages, the discovery of the New World, and subsequent colonization, modernization, and industrialization, migration has played a pivotal role in shaping the Church's trajectory.<sup>13</sup> Even in contemporary times, migration continues to be a significant phenomenon, with a survey from The Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life in 2012 revealing that 49% of migrants worldwide identify as Christians.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that migration retains positive value, both for nations and for Catholicism/Christianity. In countries such as the United States, where declining birth rates among white populations have led to a dwindling number of Catholics, the influx of immigrants has helped sustain the Catholic community and stabilize its numbers.<sup>15</sup> As such, the Church's engagement with the issue of migration is not only inevitable but also essential for upholding its mission and commitment to the welfare of all God's people.

In the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, born Jorge Mario Bergoglio, stands as a formidable advocate for refugees and migrants, commanding global recognition for his unwavering calls for solidarity and acceptance. Since the early days of his pontificate, he has demonstrated a deep commitment to addressing the plight

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<https://www.kompas.id/baca/english/2023/12/13/en-rohingya-narasi-penolakan-dan-tanggung-jawab-ri-asean>.

13 Peter C. Phan, "Deus Migrator—God the Migrant: Migration of Theology and Theology of Migration," *Theological Studies*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (2016), 850-853.

14 *Faith on the Move: The Religious Affiliation of International Migrants* (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2012), 11.

15 "How Immigration Affects Three Americas," accessed from <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/10/18/how-immigration-affects-three-americas>.

of refugees and migrants, marking a departure from the indifference prevalent in the world. His poignant visit to asylum seekers in Lampedusa on July 8, 2013, resonated deeply, highlighting the urgent need to confront the refugee crisis. Drawing from the parable of the Good Samaritan, Francis denounced the prevailing “globalization of indifference,” emphasizing the moral imperative to extend compassion and aid to those in need.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout his tenure, Francis has consistently championed the cause of migrants and refugees, recognizing their inherent dignity and worth. In his message for the 51st World Day of Peace in 2018, he underscored the human dimension of migration, urging a shift from statistics to a genuine understanding of the individuals affected. His advocacy is not confined to rhetoric but extends to tangible actions, such as providing housing for migrants and the homeless within the Vatican and hosting regular banquets with refugees.

Symbolic gestures, including the unveiling of statues depicting migrants and refugees in St. Peter’s Square, serve as poignant reminders of the Church’s unwavering solidarity. Moreover, Francis has spearheaded institutional initiatives, establishing the Migrants and Refugees Section within the Vatican to address migration issues comprehensively. This section, operating under his direct guidance, has collaborated with Catholic Bishops’ Conferences and NGOs to formulate practical guidelines, including the “20 Points of Pastoral Action” and “20 Points of Action for a Global Agreement on Migrants and Refugees”, advocating for the principles of welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating migrants and refugees. Francis’ steadfast defense of migrants and refugees transcends mere rhetoric, embodying the essence of compassionate leadership and unwavering commitment to social justice. Through his words, actions, and institutional reforms, he continues to inspire hope and catalyze meaningful change in the global response to the plight of migrants and refugees.

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16 “Visit to Lampedusa: Homily of Holy Father Francis,” accessed from [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130708\\_omelia\\_lampedusa.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia_lampedusa.html).



## TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF MIGRATION

The complexity of migration issues has sparked scholarly inquiry across various academic disciplines, including theology. Ilsup Ahn, a contemporary theologian who also studies the theme of migration, sees the development of contemporary migration theology activities as leading to two types of approaches.<sup>17</sup> The first is theological reflection through a biblical approach that is narrative-critical, and the second is theological reflection through a systematic-constructive theological approach.

From a biblical perspective, migration emerges as a recurring theme throughout salvation history, serving as a context for religious experiences, spiritual transformations, and the discovery of hope in God. The Old Testament recounts various migratory episodes, including the expulsion from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:23), Abraham's journey from Ur of the Chaldeans to the Promised Land (Gen. 12:1-7), Israel's migration to Egypt (Gen. 46), the Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 12:31-33), and the exile to Babylon (2 Kgs. 25). Similarly, the Gospels depict the holy family's exile to Egypt to escape persecution (Matt. 2:13-15).

Contemporary theologians have engaged in systematic theological reflection on migration, seeking to provide foundational frameworks for understanding this phenomenon. Migration theology delves beyond issues of social justice and policy to explore the religious dimensions of human migration, including encounters with the Divine and interpretations of God's will in history. Scholars like John Corrie and Daniel G. Groody view migration as a theological experience that shapes individuals' understanding of God and humanity.<sup>18</sup> Peter C. Phan explores God's role as the Primordial Migrant and Jesus as the paradigmatic migrant, framing migration as an essential aspect of God's economy of salvation. Migration theology offers a theological vision that informs believers' actions and attitudes towards migrants/strangers and underscores the

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17 Ilona Silvola, "Book Review of Theology and Migration by Ilsup Ahn (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2019)," *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 10(2), 2020, 96-98.

18 Daniel G. Groody, "Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees," *Theological Studies*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (2009). See also, John Corrie, "Migration as Theologizing Experience: The Promise of Interculturality for Transformation Mission," *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2014).

interconnectedness of migration with God's ongoing work in the world.

While migration theologies have emerged as a means of advocating for the rights of migrants and refugees and fostering discourse that accommodates human migration, it is essential to recognize the multifaceted nature of this social phenomenon. The church communities, with their unwavering commitment to upholding the human dignity of migrants as beings created in the image of God, advocate for their acceptance with responsibility and charity. However, considerations such as sovereignty, national security, and domestic economic well-being often complicate the reception of migrants and refugees. Cultural and social differences between migrants and recipient communities also pose potential challenges that cannot be ignored. For instance, while Catholic Social Teaching documents always emphasize migrants' rights, they also acknowledge the necessity for restrictions on human migration, i.e. documents like *Stranger No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope* (SNL).<sup>19</sup>

This document does recognize that all people have the right to seek opportunities in their country (SNL 34), and to migrate to support themselves and their families (SNL 35). It also affirms that refugees and asylum seekers must be protected by the international community (SNL 37) and that the dignity and fundamental rights of migrants without documentation must be protected (SNL 38). However, the document reflects both Christian and non-Christian assumptions that states have sovereign rights over their territories (SNL 36). While not necessarily "*restrictionists*", the authors of this document assumed and recognized the right of nations to impose their power by restricting migration.

## **THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS AND BIBLICAL NARRATIVES TO RESTRICT MIGRATION**

Justin Parrish Ashworth's dissertation, "Electing Citizens and Aliens: A Theology of Migration, Borders, and Belonging" (2015), delineates two primary groups of arguments that underpin restrictions on migration flows: non-theological and theological arguments. Non-

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19 *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States (2003).

theological arguments, which constitute the basis for discourse on limiting migration, typically revolve around concerns regarding security, economic well-being, and cultural integrity.<sup>20</sup> These arguments are grounded in pragmatic considerations rather than theological principles.

Theological arguments, meanwhile, justifying restrictions on migration are rooted in concepts such as state sovereignty and the prioritization of citizens over foreigners. Ashworth terms this theological perspective the “theology of migration restriction.”<sup>21</sup> This theological framework posits that the state has a divine mandate to regulate migration according to its sovereign authority and to prioritize the welfare and interests of its citizens over those of non-citizens. These theological arguments introduce a complex dimension to the discourse on migration, intersecting with broader theological debates surrounding governance, citizenship, and the moral obligations of the state. While non-theological arguments often dominate public discourse on migration policy, theological perspectives play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward migration and influencing policy decisions.

In the Western context, anti-immigrant thinkers and policymakers have selectively used biblical narratives to justify exclusionary ideas and policies toward migrants. Despite the Israelites’ own experience of being a nation of Exodus and Exile, their response to foreigners was not always one of hospitality and generosity. Susanna Snyder highlights the exclusivity observed in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, portraying a narrative of what she terms the “ecology of fear.”<sup>22</sup> In these texts, the returning Israelites exhibit a spirit of purification and the quest for a unified identity, often at the expense of excluding outsiders. The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah depict a context where the Israelites, having returned from exile, sought to reestablish their nation and religious identity. In their zeal for purity and unity, they enacted measures to separate themselves from neighboring peoples, including intermarriage restrictions and the expulsion of foreign wives and their children. This exclusivist

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20 Justin Parrish Ashworth, *Electing Citizens and Aliens: A Theology of Migration, Borders, and Belonging* (dissertation at the Divinity School of Duke University, 2015), 22-28.

21 Ashworth, *Electing Citizens and Aliens*, 63.

22 Susanna Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking, Migration and Church* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012), 139-161.

approach reflects a fear of diluting the distinctiveness of Israelite identity and a desire to maintain cultural and religious integrity.

The use of biblical texts to justify exclusionary attitudes towards migrants serves as a cautionary reminder of the potential misuse of religious resources for political ends. While biblical narratives offer insights into historical contexts and human behavior, they are subject to interpretation and can be manipulated to support diverse ideological agendas. It is essential to approach biblical texts with discernment and sensitivity, recognizing the complexities of migration and the moral imperative to extend hospitality and compassion to all, regardless of nationality or status.

## **THE GOOD SAMARITAN BORDER-CROSSING SOLIDARITY**

Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) in response to the question, “Who is my neighbor?” (*Kai tis estin mou plēsion?*). In the time of Jesus, neighbors were typically understood as those who were physically close or belonged to the same group or race. Samaritans, viewed as a distinct group by the Jewish people and considered inferior due to their mixed heritage and culture, were not usually seen as neighbors worthy of assistance. However, the Greek word “πλησίον” (*plēsion*) carries the dual meaning of “one who is close by” and “one’s fellow human being.”<sup>23</sup> [In my opinion, the Indonesian translation of “*plēsion*” provides a better understanding. Instead of translating it as “*tetangga*” (neighbor), which emphasizes physical proximity, Bahasa Indonesia translates it as “*sesama*,” meaning “one’s fellow human being.”]

The parable of the Good Samaritan affirms the imperative to love our fellow human beings regardless of borders. Firstly, love transcends boundaries; a loving person does not discriminate based on shared backgrounds such as tribe, nationality, region, country, religion, or culture. Secondly, acts of love expand the identity of the one who performs them. Love fosters connections and broadens existence by compelling individuals to engage with others beyond themselves. As humans are designed to love, within each of us lies a principle of self-transcendence: lovers extend themselves outwardly to discover a richer existence in others.

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23 John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Volume IV: Law and Love (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 591.

The Good Samaritan parable led to a civic vocation marked by border-crossing solidarity and reciprocity. Ashworth defines solidarity more as concrete, active, but also fragile, rather than a forced social sensitivity or generosity. Referring to Jon Sobrino, Ashworth defines solidarity as the initiation of an ongoing process, as a reciprocal process of giving and receiving. Perhaps there is this impression as a forced interpretation by seeing that the Samaritan's merciful actions do not indicate the reciprocal process of the person he helped. However, the fact (1) that Jesus invited the scribe to enter Jesus' narrative world (to imagine himself as a person in need of help); (2) that the Samaritan expanded the reach of fraternal relations by helping the half-dead (whoever he was); and (3) that Jesus said "Go and do likewise" to the scribes shows the mutuality aspect of this story. The listener of this parable needs to imagine himself as a person who needs help (meaning as a recipient of mercy) as well as a person who gives help (meaning as a giver of mercy).

With this aspect of crossing borders and mutuality, this parable is a call for a new citizenship of humanity in human relationality. The vision of Good Samaritan citizenship is solidarity between citizens that transcends nationality, racism, and other cultural differences. There, solidarity is not just an act of giving or doing something to those who are vulnerable. Solidarity is about "being with" those in need.<sup>24</sup> In addition, people's priorities and preferences are not based on the distinction between our people or their groups, our nation or other nations, our fellow citizens or strangers, nor even on the distinction between the near and far away, but on those who are fragile and need help. Here, such an important evangelical message, the preferential option for the poor, is purified from the rationalities of human construction that obscure the clarity of this message.

In the context of international migration or displacement, the parable of the Good Samaritan shows that above all differences, all nations are brothers and sisters in humanity, with inseparable dignity. In his encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* (2020),<sup>25</sup> Francis said that if all nations are one brother and sisters if the world is a common home and belongs to everyone, then it does not matter whether my neighbor was born in my country or came from another country (FT

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24 Ashworth, *Electing Citizens and Aliens*, 182.

25 Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), accessed from [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html).

125). There, my country shares responsibility for the development of migrants, in as many ways as possible. For example, by offering generous hospitality to migrants with urgent needs, working to improve the living conditions of home countries by refusing to exploit them, by not depleting their resources, or by not supporting corrupt systems that hinder the dignified development of their nations (FT 125). Here, Francis speaks of a new network of international relations, with a perspective that no longer proceeds from schemes of mutual assistance between individuals or small groups, but from an ethic of international relations (FT 126).

## CONCLUSION

The article underscores the imperative for Christians to actively engage with the reality of forced migration from a theological standpoint. Highlighting the global and local complexities of displacement, it emphasizes the moral obligation rooted in Christian teachings to extend compassion and support to migrants and refugees. Drawing upon the preferential option for migrants advocated by the Church and the rich theological discourse surrounding migration in Christianity, the article positions itself within a tradition that prioritizes the protection and dignity of the vulnerable. Moreover, it emphasizes the transformative potential of biblical narratives, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan, in challenging exclusionary attitudes and promoting a more inclusive and compassionate response to those in need. As such, the article calls upon Christians to actively embody their faith by standing in solidarity with displaced persons, recognizing their inherent worth, and affirming their right to seek refuge and build new lives. In doing so, it contends, Christians can contribute meaningfully to the pursuit of justice, peace, and human flourishing in a world marked by displacement and upheaval.

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# EXPLORING PRAYER FOR THE DEAD IN THE PROTESTANT CHURCH

*Hardiyan Triasmoroadi*

In the Jewish-Christian-Muslim Conference, hosted by UEM Asia in Manila, Philippine, 5–12<sup>th</sup> February 2024, I engaged in conversation and dialogue with Ahmad, one of my Muslim friends, about the ritual of *tahlilan*. My conversation with Ahmad was deep and fruitful. Throughout this short reflection paper, I will provide a brief survey of the concept of prayer for dead as a way to explore the opportunities for incorporating insightful point for the church ministerial setting. In doing so, I will ponder and compare the *pros* and *cons* of the concept of prayer for the dead in Islam and Christianity. Ultimately, I will argue and propose that prayer for the dead is possible to do in the Protestant church's ministerial setting.

What is *Tahlilan*? *Tahlil* or *Tahlilan* is a remembrance ritual, in which people mention the name of Allah (*dhikr*). Literally, the word *tahlil* comes from the formulation of *la ila-ha illa-llah* or there is no God but Allah. *Tahlilan* as an Islamic ritual is a unique and distinctive Indonesian Islam tradition brought and popularized by *Naddliyin* or adherents of the biggest socio-religious Islamic organization in Indonesia, namely Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).<sup>1</sup>

Before Islam arrived in Java, it was common for indigenous Javanese people to gather or have a kind of communion ritual after the death of their family member. Imaduddin, in his research, argued that Hinduism had been influencing Javanese people for a

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<sup>1</sup> Nahdlatul Ulama (Revival of the Ulama/Religious Scholars or NU) was founded in Surabaya on 31 January 1926 as a countermovement to the increasingly successful reformist Muhammadiyah organization. NU is a mass-based socioreligious Islamic organization under the leadership of ulama, and it is the largest in Indonesia with around thirty-five million members. See: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/nahdlatul-ulama-nu>

long time before Muslim came to Java (Imaduddin 2020, 5). The rise of Islam in Java accompanied the acculturation process in which the well-known Hindu Javanese values were adopted in the *tahlilan* (Imaduddin 2020, 6). Hinduism believes that when someone passed away, the spirit of the dead will come back to his or her house<sup>2</sup> on the first day after the death, three-day, seven days, forty days, one hundred, and one thousand days after the death (Imaduddin 2020, 6). Prianik also adds, Javanese Hindu people believe that even though the body has been dead, but the soul or *atman* still exists. Through the establishment of *slametan* ritual for three days, seven days, forty-day, 100 and 1.000 day after the dead, Javanese people have the opportunity to accompany the dead's soul until he/she reaches the perfect eternal realm or *moksa* (Prianik 2019, 34).

## **TAHLILAN: MUSLIM PROS AND CONS**

What is the aim of the *tahlilan*? Within my conversation with Ahmad, I find out that the *tahlilan*'s aim is to bring and send a prayer to family members who have been passed away, so they could receive mercy and salvation from Allah. Ulil Absar Abdalla, one of the pioneers of the Indonesian Islam liberal network and a prominent Muslim scholar stated that,

The most important element in *tahlilan* is the memory. *Tahlil* is a social ritual that has remembering as its principal foundation. This memory is oriented towards things that have happened in the past; this memory is aimed at people who have already passed away.<sup>3</sup>

In the other words, based on Abdalla's elaboration, the essence of *tahlilan* is to memorize the absent, which is done by remembering someone who no longer lives in the finite world through prayer. He adds, "There is a sense that all of us, who now live in the present, are not isolated and standing alone from the whole. We are still part

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2 Immediately after dead, the soul is not clothed in a physical body but in a vaporous thumb-sized structure (*linga śarīra*). This is immediately seized by two servants of Yama, the god of death, who carry it to their master for a preliminary identity check. Afterward, the soul is promptly returned to the abode of the deceased, where it hovers around the doorstep. <https://www.britannica.com/science/death/Hinduism>

3 <http://wahidfoundation.org/eng/index.php/news/detail/Tahlil-as-a-Prevention-Against-Fundamentalism>

of a long historical family tree and traditions that are rooted in the past time.”<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, Muhammadiyah<sup>5</sup> as another big socioreligious Islamic organization in Indonesia, is strongly rejects the tahlilan and does not allow their adherents to pray for the dead. Thus, there are two big different socio-religious Islamic organizations in Indonesia which is Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, having their own interpretation of prayer for the dead. NU believes that praying for the dead is necessary and suggests their adherents or the Nahdhliyin engage in tahlilan. On the contrary, Muhammadiyah does not allow their adherents to join tahlilan and get involved in praying for the dead.

It seems that NU justifies their interpretation of prayer for dead from al-Qur'an and Hadis, especially from Q.S Al-Hasyr 10 and Q.S Muhammad 19 (Imaduddin 2020, 7). NU argues that sending prayer for death through tahlilan is a good virtue that brings reward or pahala for the adherent. Sending prayer for dead will ease the dead's personal sin (Imaduddin 2020, 7). At the same time, Muhammadiyah's repudiation of the tahlilan's rite and practice is also justified by al-Qur'an and Hadis. Muhammadiyah roots their interpretation from the text of Q.S An-Najm: 38, 39 and Q.S Al In'am (Imaduddin 2020, 8). Muhammadiyah argues that prophet Muhammad never did and taught prayer for the dead as a virtuous act. So, people who pray for the dead will not gain any reward or pahala from Allah. Indeed, we still can pray to our parents who have been passed away, but for Muhammadiyah, sending prayer for dead as a way to ease the dead's personal sin is absolutely wrong (Imaduddin 2020, 9). However, the tahlilan ritual is not explain in the Quran. As the consequences Muhammadiyah concludes that tahlilan is futile, bid'ah, or heretic (Imaduddin 2020, 9). In a nutshell, I believe that NU representing a contextual perspective while Muhammadiyah representing a puritan perspective.

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4 Ibid.

5 Muhammadiyah is the socioreligious organization in Indonesia, established in 1912 at Yogyakarta, aimed at adapting Islam to modern Indonesian life. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Muhammadiyah>

## PRAYER FOR THE DEAD: CHRISTIAN PROS & CONS

However, the *tahlilan* ritual makes me think about the Christian tradition. Within the East Java Christian Church's context, there is currently no established church doctrine or agreement on the topic of prayer for the dead yet. However, on a practical level, I have observed congregants in Christian villages adopting the belief of praying for the dead and honoring their deceased family members. They often integrate the prayer for the dead into a thanksgiving fellowship known as *syukuran*. Interestingly, the timing of *syukuran* practice align with Hindu Javanese and *tahlilan* rituals—three day, seven-day, forty-day, and 1000 days after the dead—although the substance differs. The substance of Christian thanksgiving or *syukuran* is not dedicated to accompanying the dead's soul to walk the path into the eternal realm or delivering prayer for the dead to ease their sin, but as a way to remember or commemorate the deceased. Unfortunately, since the church has not yet cultivated a robust and certain doctrine about prayer for the dead, challenge arise when congregants critically question, "Are we as Protestants, prohibited from praying for our departed loved ones?"

Catholics, in contrast, have a well-established and robust doctrine on prayer for the dead rooted in the doctrine of purgatory. They firmly believe that purgatory serves as a purification place before the final judgment, a realm and place of punishment to purify and prepare the soul for final acceptance before God (Willborn 2008, 181). The doctrine of purgatory was established in the Council of Florence (1439) and the Council of Trent (1545–1563) drawing support from extra-biblical material, notably II Maccabees 12:46 (Casey 2009, 225–226).

Jeffrey Burton Russell observes, "Most of the earlier fathers had assumed that souls had to wait until the end time for the beatific vision" (Russell 1997, 138), Bernard of Clairvaux, an early father from the 11<sup>th</sup> century renowned for opposing and denouncing the heretics of Cologne that strongly opposed and denied the idea of purgatory. To substantiate his stance, Bernard turned to Matthew 12:32, concluding, "Why does [Jesus] say this if there is no expectation of a future cleansing remission of sins?" (Kroemer 2016, 17). In his sermon for Saint Andrews Day, Bernard of Clairvaux recommended praying for the dead who are undergoing purification in the cleansing places or *purgatoriis* (Kroemer 2016, 17).

However, Protestants, influenced by the rejection of indulgence transactions and the financial motives attributed to purgatory promotion by Catholic Rome, adamantly reject the doctrine. Johann Tetzel's infamous words, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul will out of purgatory springs," fuelled the Protestant Reformation, culminating in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Westminster Confession of Faith which categorically opposes the doctrine of purgatory (Casey 2009, 226).

The Westminster Confession Faith in chapter 32, in part of "the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead," state:

After death the bodies of human beings decompose and return to dust, but their souls, which do not die or sleep, have an immortal existence and immediately return to God who created them.

The souls of the righteous are then perfected in holiness and are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory and wait for the full redemption of their bodies.

The souls of the wicked are thrown into hell, where they remain in torment and complete darkness, set apart for the great day of judgment.

Scripture recognizes only these two places, and no other, for souls separated from their bodies (WCF Modern English 2010, 32).

The Confession strictly underlined that after the dead, all human's soul immediately goes into the presence of God, into the heaven or hell. The Confession also stated, "Scripture recognizes only these two places, and no other, for souls separated from their bodies" (WCF Modern English 2010, 32). Hence, we can see that through that way, the Confession stands strongly against the doctrine of purgatory.

## **THE MEETING PLACE: THIN-REALITY**

If we draw inspiration from Celtic tradition, there are a place called thin reality located in a thin place. The thin place is a kind of rare energetical place, where the veil between earth and the eternal world

is thin. In the thin place, earth and heaven intertwined, collapsed, fused together so both are possible to have a real connection.

In the Old Testament, the book of Daniel chapter 3:25, and in the transfiguration story, Matthew 17, we can see the existence of thin reality, especially when the disciples meet the dead Elijah and Moses together with Jesus Christ. Those two stories vividly draw the interbeing connection between human and divine at a similar place in what so called as the thin reality.

John O' Donohue connects the thin reality in the Celtic tradition with a great sense that the dead do not live far away. Donohue said, "In Ireland, there are always places, fields, and old ruins where the ghosts of people were seen. That kind of folk memory recognizes that people who have lived in a place, even when they move to an invisible form, somehow still remain attached to that place." (O' Donohue 1997, 213 of 238). For me, the thin place as a site has an opportunity to furthermore employ as a way to reconnect between the living and the dead. In my imagination, the living and the dead could meet each other in a thin place.

Actually, in the Javanese context, we also have the concept of a "*wingit*" place. *Wingit* means sacred. *Wingit* refers to a place that is considered as having a divine or sacred energetical space, which naturally attracting and inviting a pilgrim to come and engage in rituals and contemplation. It seems there is a similarity between thin reality and *wingit*.

If that is so, then, the thin place and thin reality might become a great resource for another comparison project research as well. We can incorporate the thin place or *wingit* as the site to construct a prayer for dead ritual in what is known as a remembering ritual or *ibadat pengenangan*. In doing so, arts will become an effective vehicle, because religious rituals cannot be experienced without arts. Arts is the most profound language of rituals that have a huge capacity to deliver messages in evocative and mythical ways, rather than a descriptive and discursive language. In this unfinished discourse of reconstructing the prayer for the dead's doctrine within Protestant and the East Java Christian Church's context, I think it is good to really considering arts to join the conversation as well.

## INCONCLUSIVE CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the examination of the practice and ritual of praying for the dead within the Indonesian Islamic school of thought,

particularly between NU and Muhammadiyah, as well as the contrast between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism highlight divergent perspectives. NU obviously embraces prayer for dead through *tahlilan*, akin to Roman Catholics' purgatory doctrine while Muhammadiyah and Protestants strictly reject this practice. In the context of the East Java Christian Church, the absence of a doctrinal stance on prayer for the dead poses a challenge.

Despite this, Javanese Christian congregants exhibit spiritual fluidity, incorporating prayer for dead into Christian rituals. Practically speaking, when local church receives request for a service and prayers for the dead, they accommodate such request, framing them as *syukuran*. Consequently, the East Java Christian Church faces the challenge of rethinking and constructing a doctrine on prayer for the dead.

In my view, Protestant church need to consider and constructing the doctrine of prayer for the dead. In the pandemic context, I experience that my mother-in-law suddenly passed away after being infected with the coronavirus delta variant. The COVID's protocol made the funeral improperly held, and she was buried in a hurry. So, in the deep loss, personally, I encountered the importance of reciting prayer for the deceased. This experience makes me argue that constructing a doctrine on prayer for the dead is crucial for Protestants, not merely to simply ease the dead's sin or accompany the soul to reach the eternal realm, but beyond its traditional roles, lets us view it as a means to reconnect and "memorize the absent."

However, the beauty of *tahlilan* is in their recognition that the living is not isolated and standing alone from the whole. I think it is well resonated with the Christian faith as well. Within Jesus' embracing love there is no condition that can separate us from Him. Obviously, my mother-in-law was no longer living in the world. But in the circle of love of Christ I believe she is still alive. Thus, it is good to memorize her in a prayer.

Acknowledging the unfamiliarity of the purgatory doctrine for Protestants, lets us draw attention to the Westminster Confession chapter 32 which suggests that there is the in-between state exist between death and resurrection. The Confession state, "Both body and soul are from the time of death *waiting* for the "full redemption" of their bodies and "the great day of judgment." It means the dead live in another dimension beyond our living world, awaiting in the intermediate state before the full redemption and final judgment.

Through Christ's redemptive work, the power of death as the wages of sin has been overcome. The belief in Christ's power that permeates every living and dead creature eventually enables us to memorize the absent and establish relationship with the departed through prayer in Jesus Christ. Consequently, incorporating prayer for the dead in the Protestant church can be seen as a grateful expression of faith, believing that our departed loved one is blessed by Jesus' love.

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