

**Breaking the Silence:
Towards an Understanding
of Human Disability for Family Life
in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika**

By

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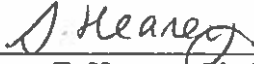
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Abstract

This thesis examines unexpressed suffering of mothers of children with disabilities in family life in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika in Tanzania. While the needs of the people with disabilities are given great consideration in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika, the understanding of disability and its possible effects are given little attention. This thesis will bring to the fore suffering generated by cultural understanding of disability to the mothers of children born with disabling conditions in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika. Under the influence of traditional views, mothers of children with disabilities are accused of inappropriate sexual relationships, triggering ancestor's anger by breaking the taboos and for not maintaining good relationships with people during pregnancy. Personal narratives will assist in highlighting the effects of cultural understanding of disability that has victimizes women. A Christian understanding of disability which is rooted in Scripture will be explored. Careful attention will be given to the contradictory tones of Scripture in the whole issue of disability. However, Jesus boldly affirms that mothers are not responsible for the disabilities of their children (John 9:3). The church in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika is called to assist its members to cross the barriers. Just as Jesus crossed different cultural barriers in order to liberate people from understandings that were building hostility among themselves, so must the church today for the purpose of eliminating the sufferings of the mothers of children with disabilities.

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Introduction

People with disabilities in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika are known and attended to by their family members, church and NGO's who provide for their basic needs, yet they still have some challenges that vary from place to place. This thesis will not discuss the success or challenges of caring for people with disabilities, but it will discuss how disabilities impact family life, more specifically the life of the mother. While the needs of the people with disabilities are given great consideration, the understanding of disability and its possible effects are given little attention. As long as people with disabilities are living a peaceful life, it is assumed that everyone in the community understands disability in a positive way.

This thesis will bring to the fore suffering generated by cultural understanding of disability to the mothers of children born with disabling conditions in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika. Despite the fact that people are Christians, there are indications that they have not abandoned their traditional beliefs completely. From time to time, consciously or unconsciously people act under their influence. This is not to say that all traditional beliefs are bad. Some traditional beliefs are acceptable to women and men in the society, for example prohibition of marriage among close relatives. This helps the society also to obey God's commandment that forbids sexual activities among to relatives; "None of you shall approach anyone near of kin to uncover nakedness: I am the Lord." (Lev. 18:6). Some traditional beliefs are unacceptable as they inflict suffering to others when implemented.

The belief that mothers of children with disabilities are responsible for the disabling conditions of their children is one of the unacceptable beliefs that remain active as a legacy

of traditional belief structures. It is unacceptable because it victimizes the mothers. Traditionally disability is perceived as a misfortune that has befallen the family because of a failure in moral conduct. Because women are the ones who conceive and give birth, they are directly accused of a moral failure which has impacted the life of their children with disabling conditions. Under the influence of these traditional views, mothers of children with disabilities are accused of inappropriate sexual relationships, triggering ancestor's anger by breaking the taboos and for not maintaining good relationships with people during pregnancy. Therefore, the disabling condition of a child is the punishment for their very wrongdoing. This severe punishment tears down the good reputation of the family. While some of the mothers of children with disabilities are forced to divorce, others are not divorced, but suffer from the pain of domestic violence, alienation from the husband and other family members.

By contrast, a Christian understanding of disability is rooted in Scripture and will be explored. Careful attention will be given to the contradictory tones of Scripture in the whole issue of disability. For the mother who is accused of being responsible for the disabilities of her child, the negative portrayals of disability in Scripture increase her suffering as it tends to support the idea that disability is the consequence of wrongs doing. However, Scripture fundamentally affirms that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Thomas E. Reynolds asserts, the fact that a person is created as a human being and not an animal or another creature, means he is already in the image of God despite physical appearance or bodily ability.¹ Further examination of Scripture will lead us to discover that the infidelity of which mothers of children with

¹ Thomas E Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2008), 186.

disabilities are accused is strongly prohibited in Scripture, and Scripture in turn is the moral foundation of Christianity. Scripture calls couples to respect marriage and indicates that God will judge fornicators and adulterers (Heb. 13:4). More study of Scripture will disclose the limited information regarding the suffering that the mother of a person with disability endures. Though limited, the information found in the Scripture about the mother of a person with disabilities is powerful as it completely exonerates her from being held responsible for the disabilities of her child. In John 9:3 Jesus boldly stated that, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.”

Despite the influence of the traditional understandings of disability at work in the community of the Diocese of Central Tanganyika and the contradictory portrayal of disabilities in Scripture, the must Church work to effect changes. The Church is advised to be a voice for the mothers of children with disabilities who are suffering by making this suffering known to all people in the community. Priests are called upon to create space of social gathering for the mothers of children with disabilities at a congregational level. The church must remember that faith is lived and practiced. Since the liturgy of baptism plainly shows us that being baptized is living a life that reflects baptismal covenant by renouncing all that is evil, pursuing righteousness and loving the neighbor², the church should focus on teaching, reminding believers of the promises and vows they made when they were made new creatures in the waters of baptism. The church must remember that it is her responsibility to help people to live out their faith, to love God and neighbor, even when the understanding of disabilities is complex both in the culture of the people and in

² *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church* (Tennessee: The Church Hymnal Corporation Kingsport Press, 1977), 304, 305

theology. Just as Jesus crossed different cultural barriers in order to liberate people from understandings that were building hostility among themselves, so must the church today for the purpose of eliminating the sufferings of the mothers of children with disabilities.

Chapter 1: Tanzanian Cultural Context

A family Narrative

Who is the father of the child? This is the question one woman named Anna (not her real name) was asked by her husband after giving him a medical diagnostic report which showed that their child John (not his real name) had a disabling condition which would limit the proper functioning of his bodily organs. This was three to four months after the birth of their child. From that day relationships in the family broke down. “We live in the same house, but not together,” Anna said.

The question the father asked might simply be taken as an indication of the frustrations the doctors report brought to him. However, it is also direct accusation of infidelity to the mother of the child. Why did the husband accuse his wife after the baby was diagnosed with a disabling condition? In a traditional Tanzanian community, the health of a child is closely related to the morality of parents. Moreover, a healthy baby ensures the continuity of the family lineage and care of the parents when they are older. The diagnosis of a newborn with a disabling condition means the death of parents’ expectations and casts doubt on the parents’ moral uprightness. Too often the moral judgements fall on the mother and she becomes an innocent victim.

Health and Wholeness in African Perspective

The highest desire of every pregnant woman is to give birth to a healthy baby. A baby brings joy to the family and community as a whole. It is an undeniable truth that every human being aspires to good health; in reality no one wants to be sick let alone be disabled. Paul Tillich, in his long discussion about health, concluded that “health is disease conquered.”³ However, Dr Natalie Tobert argues that health “is not merely absence of disease but a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing.”⁴ In other words, health is absence of disease, body flawlessness and good social welfare. This is articulated well by the African cultural understanding of health as wholeness of being.⁵

Health as Communion with Ancestors

In the African traditional understanding, good health and wholeness of being is highly determined by one’s relationships. That is to say, relationships affect one’s health positively or negatively.

Good health is understood as being in good relationship with one’s ancestors whom John S. Mbiti as called “the living-dead.”⁶ There is a belief in African communities that the person who died of a good age and had a good moral standing and left descendants, plays an important role protecting the lives of the living descendants from any possible attack of an enemy. He or she can play this role because they are in a spirit state that is not as limited as the human state. He or she can see evil plans before evil is imposed on anyone

³ Paul Tillich, and LeFevre Perry D, *The Meaning of Health: Essays in Existentialism, Psychoanalysis, and Religion* (Chicago: Exploration Press, 1984), 173.

⁴ Natalie Tobert, *Cultural Perspectives on Mental Wellbeing: Spiritual Interpretations of Symptoms in Medical Practice* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2017), 48.

⁵ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 139.

⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1970), 139.

and therefore warn his people or himself to fight the evil person. Therefore, Laurent Magesa clearly points out, “communion with ancestors is important for well-being of the living.”⁷ The person is not only required to be in good relationship with the ancestors but also with the whole community of the living.

Health as Good Relationship in a Community

African people share a worldview often known as collectivism. They define individuals in relationship to others, a person is not alone. People have a close connection with the rest of the community. Mbiti asserts that, “Whatever happens to the individual, happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group, happens to the individual. The individual can only say: I am, because we are and since we are, therefore I am.”⁸ Because of the individual ties to the community, even the health of a person is explained in a communal sense. Such a communal framework associate’s good health with good relationships, harmony and peace in the community.⁹ Magesa illustrates this when he mentioned good health as being “a sign of good connections in the web of relationships.”¹⁰ The implication is that, good relationships among members of a community guarantees/ensures good health. This understanding is influenced by a belief in community that if only one person is in bad relationship with you that can harm you. Mbiti argues that this is not the case every time, sometimes people are harmed not because they have wronged someone but because of “hate and jealousy of the immoral agents.”¹¹ This might

⁷ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1997), 78.

⁸ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. 106.

⁹ Magesa, *African Religion*, 178.

¹⁰ Magesa, *African Religion*, 81.

¹¹ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1970, 280.

imply that as long as immoral agents exist in the community, some people will be victims of their actions even without provoking them.

Health as a Good Moral Conduct

Life in community, as Mbiti puts it, is characterized by “laws, customs, set forms of behavior, regulations, rules, observances and taboos that govern conduct in a given community for the purpose of archiving harmony and peace.”¹² Conforming to customs and regulations of the community ensures wellbeing and harmony in the family as well as the community. This implies that being healthy depends to some extent on moral conduct. It is believed that failure in moral conduct is sometimes punished through misfortune or illness. Magesa rightly mentioned illness and misfortune as consequences of breaching moral values.¹³ The description of a healthy person as one with moral uprightness, affects the way wholeness is understood. C. B. Peter, in his examination of “One in Christ: Priesthood of the Disabled and the Exercising of Gifts,” argues that the community understanding of “wholeness, normalcy and perfection is characterized by absence of any disability, defect, ugliness, impairment, or blemish.”¹⁴

African Perceptions about Sickness/Illness

Magesa observes that African communities explain sickness/illness as limitations of bodily parts to function normally, and a sign of disrupted relationships among people in the community or between people and ancestors.¹⁵ Mbiti goes on to refer to sickness as one

¹² Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1970, 268, 277.

¹³ Magesa, *African Religion*, 81.

¹⁴ C. B. Peter, “One in Christ: Priesthood of the Disabled and the Exercising of Gifts” in *Disability, Society and Theology*, eds. Samuel Kabue, Ester Mombo, Joseph Galgalo and C. B. Peter (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2011), 73.

¹⁵ Magesa, *African Religion*, 178.

of life's enemies to be fought.¹⁶ In order to succeed in fighting against sickness the cause must be established. This presents a challenge, though, because of the wide range of beliefs and understanding Africans hold about the cause of sickness. Laurent Magesa pointed out that in African community; suffering, sickness and death are largely attributed to evil spirits. Evil spirits are referred to in terms of what Magesa calls witchcraft which "is [the] personification of all that is anti-life."¹⁷ Sometimes illness and misfortune are believed to be punishments from ancestors because of negligence, inappropriate burial, an offence before death or a failure to observe the ethical demands of which they are the guardians.¹⁸ Mbiti sums up that the causes of sickness or misfortune are either human or spirit agency.¹⁹ A community understanding of misfortune is often associated with a wrong doing. Mbiti provides us with an example of what a community might consider as misfortune: "a death of a child from a marriage of a forbidden person."²⁰ Likewise, the birth of a child with disability is treated as a misfortune caused by an incestuous relationship.²¹ Since Christianity was introduced in our country, you might think those beliefs disappeared long ago but that is not the case. Christians are not immune to considering disability in traditional ways.

¹⁶ John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (Oxford England: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991), 139, 165.

¹⁷ Magesa, *African Religion*, 68.

¹⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 108 and 109.

¹⁹ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. 166.

²⁰ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. 107.

²¹ Magesa, *African Religion*, 86.

How Disabled People are Viewed

In her examination of “Disability and Sexuality”, Salome Wairimu Muigai clearly pointed out that people with disability are viewed as a “source of shame for the family.”²² Robert H. Albers, explains shame as “feelings of worthlessness, helplessness and hopelessness as one feels judged by others and judges oneself as of no value, consequence, purpose, worth, or significance.”²³ This definition resonates well with Africans understanding of shame which Magesa has pointed out as “doing wrong or being wrong or worthless.”²⁴ Since the family is the one feeling shame rather than the person with the disability, then the feeling of shame for the family is based on the assumption that the value of the family is diminished since disability is often associated with a wrong doing. Samuel Kabue in “Persons with Disabilities in Church and Society: A Historical and Sociological Perspective” asserts that “a child with a disability in a family was regarded as “a punishment for sin.”²⁵ A. Wati Longchar in his exploration of “Sin, Suffering, and Disability in God’s World” concurred with Samuel Kabue on how disabled people are regarded.²⁶ This perception might be influenced by a belief in society that “contravening regulations, results in punishment either from God or spirits.”²⁷ Joseph Shiriko notices that

²² Salome Wairimu Muigai, “Disability and Sexuality” in *Disability, Society and Theology*, eds. Samuel Kabue, Ester Mombo, Joseph Galgalo and C. B. Peter (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2011), 199.

²³ Robert H. Albers, *Shame: A Faith Perspective* (New York: Haworth Press, 1995), 22.

²⁴ Laurent Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997) 170, 171.

²⁵ Samuel Kabue, “Persons with Disability in the Church and Society: A Historical and Sociological Perspective” in *Disability, Society and Theology*, eds. Samuel Kabue, Ester Mombo, Joseph Galgalo and C. B. Peter (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2011), 11.

²⁶ A. Wati Longchar, “Sin, Suffering, and Disability in God’s World”, in *Disability, Society and Theology*, eds. Samuel Kabue, Ester Mombo, Joseph Galgalo and C. B. Peter (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2011), 48.

²⁷ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 1970, 280.

people with disability are also considered as “having little faith.”²⁸ This notion is influenced by the idea that disability is a consequence of sin and that if you truly repent and believe you will be healed. Magesa argues that “the birth of a healthy baby is a sign of the defeat of bad people or malevolent spirits.”²⁹ If that is what the healthy child stands for then the birth of what Magesa called “abnormal child” will be a sign of the triumph of bad people or malevolent spirits over the family.

Moreover, persons with disability are considered as “mere consumers and useless dependants.”³⁰ This way of looking at persons with disability is perpetuated by expectations the community has for a newly born member of that community. Kaganzi Rutachwamagyo, in “A profile of Tanzanians with Disabilities,” correctly observes that “a child’s life long mission is to replace those who die and take over communal roles, duties and functions from those who are aging and contribute socially and economically to the wellbeing of the family.”³¹ The community expectations begin to fade as a child is born with disability resulting in a child being seen as useless. It is not only that they are seen as useless but also that they are seen as a hindrance for other family members, preventing them from engaging fully in economic and social activities. One woman who I pastored told me openly that her disabled child who is five years has confined her to her home so she cannot run her small business or participate in social activities with other women.

²⁸ Joseph Shiriko, “Disability: Social Challenges and Family Responses”, in *Disability, Society and Theology*, eds. Samuel Kabue, Ester Mombo, Joseph Galgalo and C. B. Peter (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2011), 172.

²⁹ Magesa, *African Religion*, 84.

³⁰ Joseph Shiriko, “Disability: Social Challenges and Family Responses,” 171.

³¹ Kaganzi Rutachwamagyo, “A Profile of Tanzanians with Disability”, in *Disability, Society and Theology*, eds. Samuel Kabue, Ester Mombo, Joseph Galgalo and C. B. Peter (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2011), 363, 364.

Causes of Disabilities

In African community, disability is understood fundamentally as a moral problem. In his exploration of “Disability: Social Challenges and Family Responses”, Joseph Shiriko insightfully observes that in African communities, disability is believed to be the result of: “incestuous relations, breaking of the taboo during pregnancy, failure to respect or appease ancestors and conception out of wedlock.”³² Laurent Magesa summarizes that “the birth of the abnormal child is quite logically attributed to incestuous adultery on the part of the wife.”³³ Kaganzi Rutachwamagyo agrees, with Magesa, that on the occasion of “the birth of a child with impairment, the blame for ‘wrong doing’ is normally put on one spouse, usually the woman.”³⁴ This is still the fact in the context of my community. The testimony of a woman I have pastored points to the proposal made by Magesa and Rutachwamagyo above. The fact that she gave birth to a disabled child allowed the husband to demand to know the father of the child, and subsequently to separate from her even though they are living in the same house.

In my community it is more common for women to be accused of adultery than men. Grace N. Wamue, in “Women and Taboo among the Kikuyu,” clearly noted that among the taboos mentioned in governing behavior of people in the Kikuyu society, are “taboos concerning women sexual relationships.”³⁵ She observes that “those taboos are aimed to control and regulate a woman’s sexual activities while man’s sexual activities are not controlled or tabooed.”³⁶ Mbiti notices that in societies where “sexual intercourse is

³² Joseph Shiriko, “Disability: Social Challenges and Family Responses,” 171.

³³ Magesa, *African Religion*, 86.

³⁴ Kaganzi Rutachwamagyo, “A Profile of Tanzanians with Disability,” 364.

³⁵ Grace N. Wamue, “Women and Taboo Among the Kikuyu People” in *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*, eds. Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro and Nyambura J. Njoroge. Nairobi (Kenya: Acton Publishers, 1996), 172.

³⁶ Wamui “Women and Taboo Among the Kikuyu People”, 173.

stopped during pregnancy and breast feeding; men are not necessarily obligated to exercise abstinence since they may have other wives.”³⁷ Since men’s sexual activities seem to be not constrained, it is easy for any misfortune associated with sexual misconduct to be blamed on women. Tragically, is what is happening to women with disabled children in the context of my community.

The Impact of Disabilities in Family Life

In a context where disability has to do with the immorality of one spouse, it is undeniable truth that the family will be facing great challenges. Joseph Shiriko in his research on “Disability: Social Challenges and Family Responses” pointed out that, “the presence of a disabled person in a family brings social discomfort as society refer to the family as one with a person with disability rather than family name.”³⁸ In other words the family name is replaced by a condition of a family member. I have seen this to be true in the context of the Diocese of Central Tanganyika in Tanzania. It happened as I was visiting the family with a disabled child in the nearby village and since I did not know the house, I had to ask for directions, using the name I was given. The people I met could not figure out the family location. I called the person who gave me information about the family, and she told me to ask for the family with a disabled daughter. Once I did that I was immediately taken to the family.

Apart from being labelled, the presence of a disabled person in the family may tear the family apart. Magesa correctly noted that stillbirth and the birth of an abnormal child may result in divorce because they are “indicative of an unidentified moral problem which

³⁷ Mbiti, *African Religions*, 1990, 108.

³⁸ Shiriko, “Disability: Social Challenges and Family Responses,” 175.

is always ascribed to women.³⁹ I find this to be true in my context. I pastored one woman who was divorced and remarried but the second husband, though not divorcing her yet, has abandoned her, claiming that he is tired of the child with a disabling condition who is now 23 years old. I also encountered a grandmother who is taking care of her granddaughter with disabilities. Her daughter was married but was divorced a few months after the delivery because of the condition of the child. The mother of the child with disability is married to another man but he does not want her to bring her daughter with her.

In a situation where divorce did not happen, things are not good either. Women are experiencing much suffering and pain namely, violence, isolation, guilt and shame. In exploring “Disability and Sexuality”, Salome Wairimu Muigai argues that “the family within which a person with disability is born experience rejection in the community.”⁴⁰ Because of the current fight against stigmatization of people with disabilities, rejection or isolation of the family in the community is not evident. What is evident is the isolation of the mother of a disabled child either by her extended family on the side of her husband or by the husband himself.

Working as the Women’s Coordinator in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika Tanzania, I came across a woman who had been isolated by her husband for more than five years because she gave birth to a disabled child. Though they are living in the same house, everyone has a private room and there is no verbal communication except writing needs on a piece of paper and putting it on the table. Another woman told me how she has been experiencing violence from her husband since their fourth child was confirmed by doctors to be disabled. They had never fought before but now the husband beats her regularly

³⁹ Magesa, *African Religion*, 86.

⁴⁰ Wairimu, “Disability and Sexuality,” 199.

calling her adulterous. This same woman was forbidden to visit the family of the husband claiming that she has brought shame into their family. These are just some of the afflictions and experiences mothers of children with disabilities are facing in my community. If more research is conducted much will be revealed. The question we have to ask ourselves is why are these traditional attitudes still operating even after Christianity has been embraced? Does Christianity seem to support traditional assumptions about disability?

Chapter 2: A Theological exploration of Imago Dei and Disability.

A Biblical Perspective on Disabilities

Christian scripture, the Bible, has extensive information concerning disabilities and instructions about right attitudes towards people with disabilities. In most cases Scripture portrays disabilities negatively, yet in some occasions it is presented positively. This makes the topic of disabilities scripturally contested and worthy of more research. While we have so much about disabilities in Scripture,⁴¹ there is very limited information regarding the family of a person with disabilities and the challenges they are facing. This chapter is going to explore some Scripture passages that seem to support a traditional negative understanding of disabilities, and others that seem to contradict that understanding. It will also examine the available scriptural information about the suffering of the family of the person with disabilities.

Disabilities and Curse

There is not much in Scripture that the mother of a person with disabilities can rely on to find consolation from the blame put on her as being responsible for her child's disability. The current view in the society of the Diocese of Central Tanganyika in Tanzania that links disabilities with the idea of curse is largely supported in Scripture. James A. Fischer defines a curse as the "invoking of some extreme evil upon a human being for the purpose of the evil to operate in human life."⁴² Adam Morton clearly observes that "people

⁴¹ John 9:1-41, Deuteronomy 28:27-29, 2Samuel 4:4, John 5:2-14, Leviticus 21:23, Mark 8:23-25, Matthew 15: 30-31.

⁴² James A. Fischer, "Curse", in *The Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. Stuhlmüller, Carroll, and Dianne Bergant (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 193, 194.

or actions are called evil when they are so bad that we cannot fit them within our normal moral and explanatory frames.”⁴³ It is widely understood in different communities that curses are invoked upon enemies. Morton rightly states, “victims of evil are thought of as themselves evil, sub-human, inferior or disgraceful or alternatively as enemies or foreigners.”⁴⁴ Deuteronomy 28 outlines curses that will befall people who fail to observe God’s law. It is clearly stated that disobedience to God’s precepts will lead to different afflictions, including disabling conditions,

The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt, with ulcers, scurvy, and itch, of which you cannot be healed. The Lord will afflict you with madness, blindness, and confusion of mind; you shall grope about at noon as blind people grope in darkness, but you shall be unable to find your way; and you shall be continually abused and robbed, without anyone to help. (Deut. 28:27-29).

Christoph Bultmann insightfully notices that, verse 28 records curses directed upon the mental and bodily state of an individual.⁴⁵ God is the one who will strike rebellious people with those disabling conditions in their mind and on their body because, by disobeying God’s law, they become God’s enemy and deserve punishment. In this context people with disability seem to be serving their deserved punishment according to the doctrine of retribution.

The doctrine of retribution is about doing right and wrong, where wrong-doing leads to punishment and good deeds leads to reward. Ronald E. Clements reminds us that the theology of retribution is complex, as Scripture also contains the account of innocent people suffering severely.⁴⁶ A good example of a person who suffered without cause in

⁴³ Adam Morton, *On Evil: Thinking in Action* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 14.

⁴⁴ Morton, *On Evil*, 14.

⁴⁵ Christoph Bultmann, “Deuteronomy”, in *The Pentateuch: Oxford Bible Commentary*, eds. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 211.

⁴⁶ Ronald E. Clements, “The Book of Deuteronomy: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections”, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the*

Scripture is Job. Job a righteous man was inflicted with sores on his whole body, he even lost all of his children and all of his possessions.⁴⁷ However, Amos Yong contends that in the context of Deuteronomy 28:28, “physical ills and their accompanying impairments and disabilities remain intertwined with the curse for disobedience delineated in this text.”⁴⁸ In other words, Yong believes that there is an undeniable curse-disability relationship in Deuteronomy.

Though Yong believes that there is curse-disability relationship in Deuteronomy, he does not describe how to determine the cause of disabilities within the complexity of the doctrine of retribution. It is hard to tell a person born with disability that he is serving his punishment because of his disobedience. This difficulty is what makes my community blame the mother of the person with disability as responsible for the wrongdoing which affected the innocent child even before being born. Even when a person experiences disability in a certain stage of his life, it is difficult to tell him that it is a curse from God because there are other causes of disabilities mentioned in the Bible which have nothing to do with curse for example the accident in 2Sam. 4:4, when a fleeing nurse drops the five-year old, Mephibosheth, and he is made lame. Sometimes a person appears to be innocent in front of others and therefore it is difficult to prove if the person is evil especially, when that evil is done in secret or in dark places. Though there might be a curse-disabilities relationship, it is hard to distinguish which experiences of disability are a curse from God.

Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books. New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 505

⁴⁷ Job1:1; 2:7-8.

⁴⁸ Yong, *The Bible, Disability and the Church*, 23.

Disabilities, Sin and Punishment

The current view in the community of the Diocese of Central Tanganyika in Tanzania which connect disabilities with wrongdoing (sin) is largely supported and contradicted. Connolly Hugh defines sin as the “deliberate transgression of a divine command”⁴⁹, while A. Wati Longchar refers to it as “missing the mark or dethroning God and enthroning oneself at the centre of one’s life.”⁵⁰ Whatever the definition of sin might be, Bernard Ramm clearly observes, “sin evokes the wrath of God”⁵¹ towards the sinner. When some persons are born with disabling conditions the whole issue of inherited sin is raised. Sammy Githuku in his exploration of “Biblical Perspective on Disability”, observes that, Scripture portray people with disabilities as “a visible divine punishment for sin.”⁵²

Strikingly, Githuku does not tell us for whom the persons with disabilities are being punished. Are they punished for their own sins or for the sins of the parents? The idea that disability is the result of a sin committed was known to the community during Jesus’ time. In the Gospel of John Jesus encounters a blind person and his disciples start to ask him questions concerning that blind person: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2). When the disciples asked whether the parents are the ones who sinned, they might have had in their mind Ex. 20:5 where it is stated, “for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generations of those who reject me.” Since they might also know that the idea of a child’s punishment for the sins of their parents was condemned in Ezek. 18:20, which

⁴⁹ Connolly Hugh, *Sin*, 45

⁵⁰ A. Wati Longchar, “Sin, Suffering, and Disability in God’s world”, in *Disability, Society and Theology*, eds. Samuel Kabue, Ester Mombo, Joseph Galgalo and C. B. Peter (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2011), 50,51.

⁵¹ Bernard L. Ramm, *Offense to Reason: A Theology of Sin* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 111.

⁵² Sammy Githuku, “Biblical Perspectives on Disability”, in *Disability, Society and Theology*, eds. Samuel Kabue, Ester Mombo, Joseph Galgalo and C. B. Peter (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2011), 87.

says, “A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent, nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child”; they asked Jesus whether the man is being punished for his own sins. The questions the disciples ask Jesus reveal their curiosity to know who was responsible for the blindness of the man. Jesus’s reply to the sin-disability question exonerates both the man and his parents from what Nancy Eiesland called the “cause and effect view of disability”⁵³, and associates it with what Yong called “purposive divine action.”⁵⁴ In this case, disability is beyond human understanding and explanation. It is God’s working way which, according to the prophet Isaiah, is higher than human ways, (Is. 55:8-9). From Jesus’s answer it seems that disability will always have a cause. Whether the source is known to people or not, it will always be there and as we have seen sometimes the cause is only known to the divine. The notion that disability always has a source makes the mother of a person with disability vulnerable to blame. Since the cause cannot be established overnight, the mother as a traditional visible source will continue to be blamed and likely suffer until different source of explanation is established. And that will only happen if the family searches for a cause of disability beyond the mother.

Though Jesus refutes the sin-disabilities relationship by saying that no one sinned in this text, Eiesland argues that in the healing of a man by the pool of Beth-zatha in Jn. 5:14, Jesus seems to agree with the idea of a sin-disabilities relationship because after healing the man, Jesus later warned him with the following words: “Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.”⁵⁵ This connotes that the man’s inability to walk was the result of sin and that is why Jesus has to warn him not to sin any more.

⁵³ Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 72.

⁵⁴ Yong, *The Bible, Disability and the Church*, 23.

⁵⁵ Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 71

Though there might be a sin-disability relationship, how do we determine that a certain person is disabled because of sin? Rather than speculating about a person's life to know whether he has committed any sin, is there any indication in the disability itself that can tell us that this is the result of sin? It is usually true that if you see a person with disabilities for the first time you cannot tell if he was born with a disabling conditions or experienced suffering later in his life that led to disability.

Imago Dei and Disabilities

The presence of conflicting ideas concerning disability in Scripture makes the theology of disabilities complicated but also worth researching. Eiesland point out that, in relation to sin, curse or punishment, physical disabilities are a “travesty of the divine image and an inherent desecration of all things holy.”⁵⁶ Thomas E. Reynolds concurs with Eiesland by specifying that “in Scripture, physical perfection is highly required of the things presented to the temple and of persons approaching it.”⁵⁷ Lev. 21:23 provides a clear prohibition against the disabled priest approaching the altar. Amos Yong perceives this prohibition as having to do with the one priestly function that requires a person to enter into a sanctuary and not to all priestly duties.⁵⁸ Therefore, according to Yong, a person with disability are not completely forbidden from priestly duties. C. B. Peter agrees with Yong and went as far as to reject the verse and name it obsolete because today there are no longer requirements for priests to enter into a sanctuary to offer sacrifices.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 72,

⁵⁷ Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2008), 66.

⁵⁸ Yong, *The Bible, Disability and the Church*, 19

⁵⁹ C. B. Peter, “One in Christ: Priesthood of the Disabled and the Exercising of God’s Gifts”, in *Disability, Society and Theology*, eds. Samuel Kabue, Ester Mombo, Joseph Galgalo and C. B. Peter (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2011), 60.

Yong maintains that, while persons with disabilities are not completely banished from priestly duties in this verse, the verse presents a clear distinction between “blemished and unblemished priests.”⁶⁰ The reason the disabled priest is forbidden to enter into the sanctuary according to this verse is because he will “profane the sanctuary.” The way he is going to profane the sanctuary is not explained, but Eiesland notifies us that in “Hebrew Scripture, there is conflation of moral impurity and physical disability.”⁶¹ Just as moral impurity was considered to defile the purity of a person and holy elements so does disability. Ramm clearly observes that “sin contravenes the perfection of God.”⁶² Taking Eiesland’s point about conflation of moral impurity and physical disability into consideration, in the light of both being capable of profaning, then what Ramm said above of sin can also be said of disability, “disability contravenes the perfection of God.”

Longchar, in his examination of “Sin, Suffering and Disability in God’s World,” argues that persons with disabilities represent “a distorted image of God.”⁶³ Joseph D. Galgalo insightfully observes, “being in the image of God’ means to conform to a certain standard of perfection with regard to both moral (or spiritual) and bodily sense.”⁶⁴ In this sense being made in the image of God has to do with moral uprightness and bodily perfection. Eiesland points out that people with disability “lack perfection and embody unwholeness”⁶⁵, because the Bible always portray God as perfect, “Be perfect, therefore, as

⁶⁰ Yong, *The Bible, Disability and the Church*, 19.

⁶¹ Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 71.

⁶² Bernard L. Ramm, *Offense to Reason: A Theology of Sin* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 94.

⁶³ A. Wati Longchar, “Sin, Suffering, and Disability in God’s world”, in *Disability, Society and Theology*, eds. Samuel Kabue, Ester Mombo, Joseph Galgalo and C. B. Peter (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2011), 53.

⁶⁴ Joseph D. Galgalo, “Perfect God and Imperfect Creation: In the Image of God and Disabled”, in *Disability, Society and Theology*, eds. Samuel Kabue, Ester Mombo, Joseph Galgalo and C. B. Peter (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery, 2011), 43.

⁶⁵ Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 72.

your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt.5:48) Joseph D. Galgalo in his exploration of “Perfect God and Imperfect Creation: In the Image of God and Disabled”, indicates,

over centuries the image of God in humanity has been interpreted in terms of physical, cognitive, spiritual, relational or functional elements that constitute what it means to be human. He continued, in these varied interpretations, the image of God has either been placed in the spiritual dimension of the personhood or the body. He further added, God in whom Image we are created is spirit, therefore the image of God in us has very little to do with our bodily existence or corporeal nature.⁶⁶

Galgalo is trying to say that, people are more than their physical appearance, more than their bodily function and more than their intellectual ability. We cannot rely on physical appearance or bodily function to tell whether a person is created in God’s image or not, or to give us a complete view of God. Gen. 1:26-27 boldly affirms that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. Reynolds asserts that, the fact that because a person is created as a human and not as an animal or another creature, means they are already in the image of God despite physical appearance and bodily ability. He continues that the image of God in a person is found in being a person not in intellectual ability or function of the body.⁶⁷

It is not only that people with disabilities lack physical perfection, but according to the holiness code in Leviticus, they are capable of profaning the holy place. The idea that a person with disability might have some kind of contamination was also raised by one woman whom I pastored when I was working as the Women’s Coordinator in my Diocese. The woman complained that though her priest visited them from time to time and shook hands with everyone in the house, he never touches their disabled child. His action was

⁶⁶ Galgalo, “Perfect God and Imperfect Creation,” 32-44.

⁶⁷ Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 186, 187.

interpreted by the woman as a stigma, a fear of being infected though no one has seen disability being transmitted to another person by any means.

The Family of the person with Disabilities and Scripture

Scripture does not have much to say about the family of a disabled person, but it has a lot to say about disabilities and gives instruction about right attitudes towards people with disability. In most cases the Bible portrays disability negatively, and only briefly mentions the family of the disabled. When it happens that the family is mentioned, sometimes that mention is used to unravel the mystery surrounding a disabling condition or the family because is involved in healing incidents, as in Mk. 8:23-25 and Mt. 15:30-31. The brief mention of the family of a disabled person in John chapter 9 does indicate one of the challenges such a family was facing due to society's dominant understanding of the sin-disabilities relationship.

It is clear that in Jesus's time society believed that disabilities were caused by sin, either sin of the parents or of the victim himself, as the disciples asked openly "who sinned, this man or his parents?" The parents are brought into the discussion concerning disability through the questions raised by the disciples who wanted to know the cause of disability. In answering their question, Jesus exempted the parents from being held responsible for the disability of the man and also exonerated the man from blame for his blindness. It is clearly specified in this narrative that neither the parents or the blind man himself are responsible for his disability. Though the parents and the man were exempted from been responsible for the disability, and God was not assumed to be punishing the blind man,

another cause was identified to explain condition: the manifestation of God's work. In fact, the parents in this healing narrative are silent until they are summoned by the Jewish authorities to prove that their son was born blind and to account for his healing. What the parents assured them of is that their son was born blind. The parents never mention the cause of the blindness of their son nor how they feel about it nor even mention their family struggles. They answered only what they were asked and nothing else. In other healing narratives, as in Mk. 8:23-25 and Mt. 15:30-31 where I believe parents were involved in seeking healing from Jesus for their son with disabilities, what we see is their healing ambition for their loved one. There is not much information about the suffering of the family of the person with disabilities in scriptures, except that by implication it is clear the burden is shared. Maybe this is one of the reasons that the women in my community suffer blame and accusation for their children's disabilities in silence. They do not see texts in Scripture to which they can hold on boldly, and through which claim their innocence in front of the church and community without being blamed. The example they have in Scripture is of families suffering silently.

Chapter 3: Principles and Practice for the Church in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika.

The reality that there are mothers of children with disabilities who are suffering under misconceptions of disabilities in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika in Tanzania while we claim to be a Christian society that cares for and honors people with disabilities, is disturbing. First, the challenges the mother of a child with disabilities is facing, apart from those of costs of care, are not discussed in the society or in the church. The reason they are not spoken about might be because sometimes the mother herself is not disabled, and so people see no reason to critically examine her life. There may also be no mother of a disabled child who has had the courage to share with the church what she goes through in the family because of the birth of her child with disability. Secondly, there is little to no teaching on disabilities and their causes. There may also be assumptions that since Christianity has existed for centuries in the country, traditional beliefs have died out and, therefore, there is no need to teach people the correct concept of disabilities. Third, the silence implies that congregational members might have forgotten their baptismal vows and commitments. Despite these factors, the Church can still work to effect positive changes and eradicate completely the suffering birth mothers of children with disabilities are going through.

This chapter is going to suggest some steps that a community of faith should take in order to take a position of responsibility in responding to the victimization of mothers of children with disabilities in my community. The steps include raising awareness of the problem, reaching out to the mothers of children with disabilities, creating networks of

support and reminding Christians of what it means to be a community of faith that lives out their baptismal vows.

Practices: Reach Out

Mothers of children with disabilities who are suffering in silence may be longing for help but they fear that they will be judged by the church, since the infidelity of which they are often accused is strongly prohibited by Scripture and Scripture is regarded as the foundation of Christian morals. Ex. 20:14 states, “You shall not commit adultery,” while Heb. 13:4 calls for the respect of marriage and indicates God’s judgment will fall on fornicators and adulterers. Therefore, it is important that the priest be committed to responding to the victims with acceptance. The fact that the mother of a child with disabilities is accused of something detestable both in cultural and Christian perspective, might reinforce shame and silence. Therefore, it can be helpful if the priest will reach out to them and initiate conversations, seeking to understand how disabilities has impacted family life. If priests do not reach out to them, mothers of children with disabilities will continue to suffer in silence, and they might give up attending church out of desperation.

Raise Awareness

Myroslaw Tataryn and Maria Truchan-Tataryn clearly stated, “it is Christian tradition to stand with the poor and marginalized.”⁶⁸ It is the church’s responsibility to

⁶⁸ Myroslaw Tataryn and Maria Truchan-Tataryn, *Discovering Trinity in Disability: A Theology for Embracing Difference* (New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 15.

stand with those who are suffering. The church cannot stand with those who are suffering if she doesn't know them, so it is the obligation of the church to identify those who are suffering among her members and the community at large. Society must learn that there are mothers who are suffering not because of any other reason than that they have given birth to a child with disabilities. Knowing the facts of the suffering of these mothers will give the church the power to address this problem with the goal of changing attitudes. Yoweri Museveni insightfully observe that, "the power of knowledge is in its ability to enrich and improve the quality of life."⁶⁹ If the church and the community are unaware of the suffering of these mothers, it is evident that they can do nothing to help them. The current silence of the church on their sufferings suggests that the church is unaware of their presence and risks reinforcing the women's shame, isolation and potential lack of confidence in God. It is also true that the given the negative cultural representation of disability which seems to be supported by Scripture, the silence of the church might perpetuate the victimization of these mothers. Pastorally, the church's silence may give the impression that the church is uncaring. By responding to the victimization of mothers of children with disabilities, the church shows that it not only understands the sufferings of believers and the society at large but also cares about those who suffer.

Create Networks

The battle is never won in isolation; it is won in collaboration. It is important that the priest seek out a way to bring mothers of children with disabilities together in the

⁶⁹ Yoweri Museveni, "Introduction," in *Knowledge Cultures: Comparative Western and African Epistemology*, ed. Berth Hamminga (Amsterdam: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005), 21.

congregation. Networking is essential for the mothers of children with disabilities. It provides an opportunity for the priest to nurture them spiritually by building community. Pat Verbal pointed out that parents of child with disabilities “feel as if God had abandoned them and sometimes they cannot figure out the essence of the person God created in their child.”⁷⁰ It is important that the priest make time to sit with them to read and reflect on Scripture as well as to pray together. Networks also can serve as the source of information and mobilization of resource. Within their networks, mothers of children with disabilities can share their experiences, information about different organizations that work with children with disabling conditions and organizations that works in fostering women wellbeing in the society. Moreover, in their network they will encourage each other and as Pat Verbal put it, share strategies to handle situations they face in the families.⁷¹ Together their voices against injustice can easily be heard and responded to. This empowerment can also be understood theologically as the mothers are being drawn back into the Body of Christ where mutuality and respect reign.

Trainings: Scientific Causes of Disabilities

If society does not know the exact cause of disabilities, we cannot avoid victimization of the mothers of the children with disabilities. Priests should make it a priority to educate parishioners about the real causes of disabilities. Parishioners should know that the deformities with which a person is born have nothing to do with evil causation or the moral life of the mother. These conditions are not a curse and they are not

⁷⁰ Pat Verbal, *Special Needs Ministry for Children: Creating a Welcoming Place for Families Whose Children Have Special Needs* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2012), 22.

⁷¹ Verbal, *Special Needs Ministry for Children*, 29

a punishment for either known or unknown sin. Allen, J. Wilcox observes that, “birth defects can be caused by genetic variants and a variety of environmental factors”⁷² for which you cannot hold a mother responsible. She does not have control over her genetics or environmental issues that can affect the fetus in a womb. No woman wants her child to be harmed in any way. Women know that and that is why during pregnancy they work hard to stay healthy and are subjected to different types of vaccinations for the wellbeing of the fetus. The willingness of the pregnant woman to take tablets and injections during pregnancy is enough proof that she highly values the wellbeing of the child to be born. What happens to the fetus in the womb is unknown and out of the control of the mother. It will be valuable if priests in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika are offered training from experts on these issues for the purposes of being well equipped to train their parishioners.

It is important that congregations develop the habit of regular teaching in order to assist people to respond to disabilities in an appropriate way. It is well known that for one reason, or another disability can be acquired in any life stage. Therefore, it is not a good idea to wait until people are confronted with disabling conditions to start teaching them about disabilities, because while you think you are helping, they might think you are publicizing their tragedy. I suggest that in marriage preparation, priests should introduce the issue of disability to the couple in an effort to combat the misconceptions associated with it. I think this will help the woman if it happens, if she has a baby with a disabling condition and is accused of being responsible, she will know it would be safe to make her way back to the priest. It could also begin to hold husbands accountable for more honest, Christian behavior.

⁷² Allen, J. Wilcox, *Fertility and Pregnancy: An Epidemiologic Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 82.

The Life of the Baptized

Congregants should know what it means to live as a baptized person. The journey of Christian life begins at Baptism. It is at the Baptism event that we acquire a new identity as members of the community of faith and the adopted children of God. Baptism is about making us new creatures in Jesus Christ. It is more than fulfilling a rite of the church. Its function is far more than a formality granting a person an identity as a member of a congregation. They are a child of God. Martha Moore-Keish rightly states that being baptized is realizing our responsibilities as new members of the church and children of God.⁷³ It is being committed to obedience in God's commandments and faithfulness to the pledge a person made during the event of baptism. The Book of Common Prayer shows us plainly that being baptized is living a life that reflects baptismal covenant by renouncing all that is evil, pursuing righteousness and loving the neighbor.⁷⁴ Being baptized is a response to a call to take action against injustices and all kinds of evil. Why do people who have responded to this call to fight evil and injustice do evil or injustice to each other? This implies that people are not being faithful to the great call to which they have responded. Therefore, congregations must prepare their members to be faithful to their baptismal promises in order that the victimization of mothers of children with disabilities will not be tolerated. People must be held accountable for their identities as children of God through baptism and participants in God's mission of reconciliation and healing.

⁷³ Martha Moore-Keish, "Baptism: *The Already and Not Yet*," in *Liturgical Missional Perspectives on a Reformed Ecclesiology*, ed. Neal D. Presa (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, an Imprint of Wipf & Stock, 2016), 99-100.

⁷⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church* (Tennessee: The Church Hymnal Corporation Kingsport Press, 1977), 304, 305.

Community of Faith Values

It is important that the congregants be reminded of the values of the community of faith. Tataryn and Truchan-Tataryn observed that, the values of the community of faith are deeply rooted in each believer being a member of the body of Christ.⁷⁵ Deirdre Good points out that Christ is the authoritative figure in the community and the believers are equal brothers and sisters who are supposed to abide in the values set by Christ.⁷⁶ The community of faith values demands that believers love each other and warn them against putting stumbling blocks before each other. Good, drawing from (Matt. 18:31), mentions the fact that every community of people whether of faith or not, is called to intervene when needed especially in circumstances where injustice is done.⁷⁷ The action of the husband to inflict suffering on the wife for any reason is against the values of a community of faith. For the rest of the members of that community to remain silent or to support the husband because of family ties is against community values and therefore, perpetuates suffering and pain to a fellow member of community. Tataryn and Truchan-Tataryn observe that, the community of faith is supposed to be “a source of strength, encouragement and support.”⁷⁸ If we live as a community of faith where individuals seek not only their own well-being but the well-being of others, at mothers of children with disabilities will not suffer because of giving birth to a child with disabling condition. A husband committed to his role in the community of faith, would not inflict pain and suffering on his wife over a matter she cannot control, and if he does, because of his own perversion, the rest of the community members would have to rebuke him and not support him. Priests must remind congregants of the values of

⁷⁵ Myroslaw Tataryn and Maria Truchan-Tataryn, *Discovering Trinity in Disability*, 51.

⁷⁶ Deirdre Good, *Jesus' Family Values* (New York: Church Publishing, 2006), 87.

⁷⁷ Good, *Jesus' Family Values*, 87.

⁷⁸ Myroslaw Tataryn and Maria Truchan-Tataryn, *Discovering Trinity in Disability*, 72.

the community of faith and congregants must examine themselves to see on which values they are operating their daily lives.

Genuine Disciples of Jesus

The presence of Christians who are mistreating their wives because of cultural assumptions presents the need to look for spiritual answers. It is crucial that Christians be reminded of what their decision to follow Jesus entails. Following Jesus is a way of life and not an event culminating in baptism or in confessing Jesus, or regular attendance of worship and other church activities. It involves learning what Julia Gatta called a “new way of thinking,” and “to unlearn old habits of mind and behavior.”⁷⁹ Lee C. Camp correctly observes that discipleship is “to leave the old way to walk in the new way of abundant life and glorious light with the Christ who is Light and Life.”⁸⁰ To be a Christian and still conform to traditional teachings that hurt others shows that those particular people are not done with unlearning old habits of mind and behavior. Since discipleship is a process rather than an event, continual teaching and learning has to be a goal of any congregation that nurtures its members to grow to maturity in Christ.

⁷⁹ Julia Gatta, *Life in Christ: Practicing Christian Spirituality* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2018), 6.

⁸⁰ Lee C Camp, *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan Brazos Press, 2003), 29.

Recommendations: Collect the Data of Families of Children with Disabilities

It is vital for priests to be very familiar with the families of children with disabilities in their care. It is important to know how many they are in the congregation and the place they reside. Here the cell group leaders will be of great help as they are responsible for a small group in which they will know each other. The priest has to know details of whether the child is cared for by both parents, one parent or another family member. If it is one parent or a family member, the priest has to ask the whereabouts of the rest of the parents. To know those details will ease his/her work of pastoral care to the family and will help in discerning what exactly is needed to be taught about disability, given the experiences of the family. It is also a way of building unique relationships with the families that will foster confidence and courage, which is vital for women to speak up.

Prioritize Disabilities and Faith Formation Teachings

It is well known that disability can be acquired in any time of life, for one reason or the other. It is essential that teachings about disabilities be part of regular church teachings in order to cut the chain of blame of women or anyone who obtains a disability as an adult. Knowing the science and having a sound theology of disability will help Christians to have right thoughts about others and about God's creation. I think this is a good point to make clear to my Diocese, because it helps us not in a position of judgement against the mother of the child born with disability. It also guards against reducing God to a judge who as the maker of all mankind is responsible for disabilities. Teaching about disability should go hand in hand with faith formation teachings because what is causing

the suffering of mothers of children born with disabilities is the presence of these misconceptions about disabilities rooted in traditional understanding. The residual traditional beliefs among Christians can be eliminated by a commitment to sustained lifelong Christian formation.

Prepare a Teaching Guide

It is the responsibility of the priest of the parish along with the Christian education committee of the parish, to prepare a solid teaching guide that will serve to lead facilitators and learners from point A to point B successfully. A teaching guide will guarantee the uniformity and standards of material disseminated to congregants on these issues, and thereby avoid inconsistency on what is taught and learned from one group to the other. I will recommend that when it happens that the child is born with disabling conditions, the family talk to the doctor who will explain them the causes of disabilities. A priest can even arrange with the doctor to visit the family at home.

Church Cell Groups as a Primary Place of Formation

A lot of formation takes place in cell groups which are led by lay people. The rules that govern the cell group make it possible for people to attend often and there is greater responsibility to attend. Worship on Sunday or other church events are much more voluntary. If the congregation aims at reaching a large number of its congregants with teachings discussed in this work, it has to think of using cell groups. In order to use cell groups effectively, leaders of the groups must be trained to acquire the required skills and knowledge to become effective facilitators. Since cell members commune in the church on

Sundays, it is important that the priest, instead of preaching from the Lectionary, use one Sunday a month to summarize the teachings the congregants have been receiving in their cell regarding this subject.

Other Possible Places for Teaching

The teachings discussed in this paper can also be inserted into existing congregational sessions or classes or forums other than cell groups and Sunday services. Teaching about disabilities might be incorporated in marriage preparation. Priests could and should introduce the issue of disability with the couple in an effort to combat misconceptions associated with it.

Faith formation teachings on discipleship, the baptismal covenant, creation in the image of God and the values of a community of faith, can be the focus of confirmation teachings. Since confirmation is the affirmation of our baptismal vows, when confirmands pledges and restate their faith in the Triune God, inserting more intentional teachings that intend to foster faith formation, growth, and flourishing Christian life will make the process richer. At times, the subject of disability and the suffering it brings to the mothers of children with disabilities could also be taught to youth groups especially choirs. If youth choirs understand the subject well, they can help disseminate the knowledge to the wider community by composing songs about this topic and singing them in youth concerts that are attended by many people even those of other religious backgrounds. Youth Choirs can also create dramas from this material and perform them in the church or at their concerts for the purpose of communicating the message to the community. By using a youth choir's

knowledge about the suffering of mothers of children with disabilities and what should be done to eliminate it, this problem will be known to the community quickly.

This study can also be taught in Christian Women Fellowship groups, especially on Tuesdays when they meet for their weekly teachings. While it raises awareness of the suffering of their sister women, the study challenges women in the implementation of two of their organizational objectives: to help those with various problems and to fight injustice against women and children. In other words, for women, this study is a call of accountability for women to their fellow women who are suffering unjustly.

We are accustomed that the work of doctors, nurses and pharmacists is in hospital buildings, but this research shows us that we need their knowledge and experience beyond the one-on-one practice of their profession. We need them to help us educate the community in the area of their expertise especially in this issue of disability. It is the responsibility of the priest to give them a chance to educate the parishioners about scientific causes of disabilities in order to eliminate misconceptions.

In my community, priests are privileged to attend and sometimes to present their arguments at local government meetings. This is the perfect place for priests to share with community leaders the suffering of the mothers of children with disabilities so that they might join him/her in educating the community and condemning men's tendency to abuse women for giving birth to a child with disabilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, mothers of children with disabilities currently suffer badly in the Diocese of Central Tanganyika because of non-Christian traditions and wrong understandings. It is the responsibility of the Church to address the problem and to free women from this unnecessary suffering. The Church should know that it has been called to stand with those who are suffering, marginalized and poor. Mothers of children with disabilities are among those who suffer in silence because the things of which they are accused of are detestable in the church and in the community. Therefore, mothers of children with disabilities are helpless and in need of compassion and care. The support which will heal the family life of pain, guilt, shame and suffering must come from the church because the church has been invested with the power to reconcile people with God and with one another. Although the narratives of disability are contradictory in scripture, and there is little information about the suffering of the mothers of children with disabilities in Scripture, still, the church can change a community's understanding of disabilities. The church can achieve that by choosing to stand with mothers of children with disabilities and claiming an incarnational theology grounded in the Imago Dei. To do so is more than to preach about disabilities or about being created in the image of God. It is to call people back to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn from him. It is calling all believers to consider the values of the community of faith. It is reminding them of the very vows and pledges they made during their baptism. It means calling believers to live out their faith in a world that is full of all kinds of complex teachings.

The church must understand that the transformation of people's minds is a process that can take a long time and it is the responsibility of the church to assist people in that

transformation process. The fact that people have become Christians does not mean that the process of transformation is completed, it has begun, and it will end when a person is capable of discerning the will of God in his life and the life of others. It is only when the church remembers that all believers are in the process of transformation, that it can better address the suffering of mothers of children with disabilities without causing suffering to those who are involved in victimizing those mothers. The church must remember that its role is not to judge but to manifest God's love, forgiveness and kindness to all people.

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