

# **Embracing Trinitarian Relationships: The Beauty of Living with Disabled Individuals**

## <sup>1</sup>Ronalius Bilung, <sup>2</sup>Emmeria Tarihoran, <sup>3</sup>Hilario Didaskus Nampar

<sup>1</sup>Program Magister Filsafat Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Teologi Widya Sasana <sup>2,3</sup>Program Doktor Teologi Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Teologi Widya Sasana <sup>1</sup>ronbilung@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>emmeriayohana@gmail.com, <sup>3</sup>hilariodidakuspr@gmail.com

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Abstract: This research primarily investigated the discriminatory attitudes faced by individuals with disabilities and the various perspectives that contribute to a negative stigma associated with them. These discriminative actions disregard the fundamental aspect of human dignity. People with disabilities are an integral part of our social fabric and deserve to be acknowledged and respected without prejudice. The study was conducted within the ALMA community using a qualitative methodology and a phenomenological approach. The study's findings shed light on the significance of Jürgen Moltmann's concept of the Trinitarian relationship as a viable means to address and overcome the issue of discrimination against disabled individuals. The experiences of the ALMA sisters, who actively care for people with disabilities, exemplify the embodiment of a Trinitarian relationship. It is a tangible representation of the Church's inclusive presence and commitment to embracing human existence's complexities. By embracing a Trinitarian relationship, society can foster an environment of acceptance and equality where individuals with disabilities are not treated differently due to societal prejudices. This transformative approach emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all individuals, regardless of their abilities. It encourages a communal understanding that values and respects the unique contributions and experiences of people with disabilities, fostering a more inclusive and compassionate society. In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of adopting a Trinitarian relationship in addressing discrimination against individuals with disabilities. By acknowledging and valuing the inherent dignity of people with disabilities, the society can embraces diversity, equality, and respect for all.

# **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of people with disabilities refers to those who cannot have the ability to participate fully in the dynamics of everyday life, which is caused by physical and mental limitations (Widinarsih, 2019). This condition explains that almost 15% of the world's population are persons with disabilities (Ndaumanu, 2020). Most experience difficulties accessing public services such as health, education, training, and employment (Ginis, 2021). In Indonesia, since 2007, data on persons with disabilities has been collected through Basic Health Research (*Riskesdas*). The Republic of Indonesia Law No. 36/2009 on Health states that efforts to maintain the health of persons with disabilities must be aimed at maintaining with dignity a healthy and productive life socially and economically. The government is

obliged to guarantee the availability of health service facilities. The government also should facilitate people with disabilities to live independently and productively. Disability is not a mere disability, but it is a combination of the limitations experienced by a person with their environment, not just physically or mentally, but is a multi-dimensional phenomenon consisting of bodily functions, activity limitations, participation barriers, and environmental factors (Pusdatin Kemenkes RI, 2014).

The existence of people with disabilities is a worrying reality because they are separate people and are seen as weak and even less accepted as part of society. Faced with the fact that people with disabilities experience injustice in their life situations, it is necessary to have a reasonable interpretation and education for the community regarding the mindset and perspective of people with disabilities as oppressed and minorities. Disabled people are also part of society and must be treated the same without any distinction, thus making them strangers to their fellow human people. The experience of alienation experienced by people with disabilities is a condition that shows that human existence is still characterized by a lack of equality of rights and dignity, which should be the primary foundation in building togetherness to live as humans in the social context of society (Berghs, 2019). Even though the law guarantees the existence of people with disabilities, many people with disabilities experience of accepted to society and matching the social context of society (Berghs, 2019).

The main thing that must be the primary concern is responding to acts of injustice and violations of the rights and obligations of people with disabilities to raise awareness about the importance of the values of human dignity. Respect for the dignity of people with disabilities must be actualized in certainty to gain access to various fundamental elements of their lives as human beings, for example, obtaining a decent life, obtaining equal rights and capacities in society, and protection legally and socially.

The problem of unequal human relations resulting in injustice and inequality of rights and dignity is caused by the negative stigma attached to people with disabilities, for example, by using the terms disabled, idiot, mentally disabled, or physically disabled. Various terms attached to the disability people want to say that physical and mental limitations cause their inability to carry out everyday activities and often need the help of other people. The term disability is often accompanied by the view that disability in disabled people is a deficiency, a disgrace, or a curse that will adversely affect other people (Siregar, 2020). Not only that, but society also often perceives that people with disabilities are less productive and unable to carry out various responsibilities, so their rights cannot be fulfilled independently (Wenno, 2020).

The experience of disabled people is the fruit of a mistake in understanding human existence as a subject of social order (Widinarsih, 2019). Society often views human equality from the point of view of the perfection of one's physical condition. Physical imperfection then becomes the reason for giving a fundamental distinction to recognizing one's presence in the social sphere. Therefore, recognition of human rights is an integral part of one's presence (Putra, 2018).

The Church, which proclaims the good news as its vocation, tries to present itself as a

"neighbour" to the weak, especially the disabled. The situations and realities of people with disabilities become a field of service to realize the face of the Church that is compassionate and humane (Adon & Firmanto, 2022). In dealing with people with disabilities, the Church cannot be passive and indifferent to the various realities around it. The Church is called to walk together and be involved in the facts and struggles of human life. The Church realizes that God works in every human being in various ways. Likewise, the Church understands that God is also involved and works through the limitations and shortcomings of disabled people (Firmanto & Aluwesia, 2021). For this reason, they should not be treated arbitrarily without seeing that there is a unique value within disabled people.

All human actions lead to himself and also to others. Therefore, the concept of human dignity must transcend differences in any form, including differences in a person's physical condition. Physical differences should not be a limit for anyone to build togetherness to live as dignified beings. With all its values, dignity must be the basis for continuing to present human relations that prioritize recognizing one's rights and obligations. This understanding that the trinitarian relationship, advocated by Jürgen Moltmann, becomes very actual and relevant in understanding discrimination against people with disabilities.

Jürgen Moltmann is known as a figure from several theological schools, one of which is the theology of the Triune God. He poured his thoughts through two of his books, which were very influential in the world of theology, namely The Crucified God and The Trinity and the Kingdom. Moltmann developed his ideas by starting from the doctrine of the Church Fathers on social Trinitarianism (Thianto, 2013). Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are related to each other. They exist together and form a holy and eternal community. The three of them are not separate from one another, bearing in mind that the essence of each person is the same, namely, divine dignity. The existence of these three persons is fullness because it contains the depth of knowledge from one person to another. St. Augustine uses the analogy of memory, the ability to think and understand. Augustine argues that there is a distinction between these three abilities. Still, the three are united and exist in a human creature. Meanwhile, the Eastern Church understands the Triune God in social analogy, which emphasizes social relations that form the presence of a community, namely the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Moltmann understands that the social relations between these three persons reveal the existence of unity. According to him, God does not only know that humans suffer, but He also feels and experiences how suffering is felt. God's experience of suffering makes him able to love. God's love gave Himself to humans.

The Triune God is an intratrinitarian personhood. Each person does not live in himself but builds relationships with others with a love movement that embraces differences (Firmanto, 2016). The embodiment of God as a community can be seen in all creation, especially in humans who were created in God's image. Besides that, the community of God present in the world is evident in the presence of the Church. The understanding of God the Trinity in the context of intratrinitarian friendship relations expressed by Moltmann can be used to interpret the discriminatory situations they experience. As a social being, everyone cannot ignore the meaning of friendship or relationship. A relationship based on similarities, such as the way of thinking, ideology, ethnicity, or people, is a closed relationship irrelevant to this plural nation. A lack of openness to accept differences can destroy human values. The ideal relationship can appreciate differences and does not make those differences a dividing wall in social relations. In understanding social reality, relationships and friendships are essential and fundamental in all the facts of human life. Humans in their humanity will never be able to build and develop their lives independently. He needs the presence and involvement of others in creating his life. With the company of others, a person can understand and know himself objectively. A self-assessment is needed from others to improve life quality (Utomo, 2020).

Biblically, many views and interpretations relate to discriminatory situations in people with disabilities. Some of them show God's solidarity with humans through His compassion. In John 9:1-40, Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth. The commotion caused by the healing of a blind man shows discrimination. They brought the blind man who was healed before the Pharisees and even summoned his parents to be questioned regarding his healing. Jesus' answer to the disciples' questions was that the reality experienced by a person who was blind from birth was God's work that had to be revealed to him.

Thus, Jesus stated that the view of the Jews, who considered the blind man's suffering as the result of the sins of his parents, was wrong. The fact is that God made the blind man a statement of His presence (Wenno, 2019). God never differentiates or gives criteria for measuring to whom He wants to reveal His work for humans. Precisely in weak people like blind people, as narrated by the evangelist John, God wants to display an unlimited and open relationship. In the context of ministry to people with disabilities, Jesus gave a real example of God's presence amid various human situations and gave his ministry to everyone who experienced oppression, injustice, exclusion, and weakness. Jesus offers a model of living a brotherly relationship that transcends human boundaries (Messakh, 2020). The idea of fraternal relations brought by Jesus is revealed in several passages, such as in Luke 7:34 and John 15:15. These two brief passages show the meaningfulness of man to Jesus' ministry. Jesus presented himself as a friend to people often seen as sinners and excluded from society, like tax collectors.

The concept of friendship promoted by Jesus is not oriented toward deeds, professions, or negative stigmas given to socially excluded people. On the other hand, the attitude and actions of Jesus to tax collectors and sinners show his appreciation and respect for human dignity. The situation of discrimination experienced by people with disabilities also needs to be understood within the framework of Christian attitudes. Jesus in the Gospel of Luke provides an ideal picture of a Christian perspective that needs to be internalized and realized as a form of Christian identity. Luke describes Jesus as a person who lives three crucial values in all of His ministry, namely compassion, social justice, and hospitality, which, if all of them are put together, will manifest in an attitude of love. Jesus' conversation with the scribes in Luke 10:25-37 is a narrative that provides a concrete picture of how love for others must be manifested. The evangelist Luke, who places great emphasis on the character of Jesus, who has

an attitude of love for the weak and helpless, defines the true meaning of "neighbour." That fellow is not measured from various situations or a person's identity, not differences in race, ethnicity, culture, or specific cultures.

Discrimination against people with disabilities is an example of how human life is coloured by actions that damage the order of living together. Does God allow any action that destroys human life? Does God allow humans to suffer? Discrimination against people with disabilities can be categorized as suffering-those who are persecuted, eliminated, marginalized, and socially forgotten experience physical and psychological suffering. Suffering must make people learn and direct them to the wisdom of life. Suffering positively contributes to understanding and interpreting the reality of life that it experiences, which is what religions understand. Suffering exists within the framework of redemption. Christ's redemption that occurred in His suffering was for the salvation of mankind. He revealed that suffering should not be understood in a very negative sense. Instead, humans need to learn to interpret suffering concerning situations of joy. Seeing human suffering is always on two sides: suffering and joy. Talking about disability requires a deeper understanding of human humanity. The humanity referred to in this paper is about the nature of humans as beings with bodies or physical bodies, five senses, organs, and so on. Experience as a being with a body is not limited to the level of the body in the usual sense but also to the experience of humanity as a human being who thinks, acts, speaks, and performs actions as a human being.

Disability in the theology of the incarnation is the reason for the Word to become human. God took the initiative and took a big step to meet humans, participate, and be actively involved in human life (Verdino, 2020). The teaching of incarnation in disability theology can be seen in the event of the cross, where God emptied Himself for others. The picture of Christ's Body expressed by Paul in the letter to the Corinthians reveals that everybody is a gift. Each body has its role, and each individual is a member of the same body, namely the Body of Christ himself. Therefore, the body's condition, whatever its form, is still a member of the same Body of Christ, which is called to present the kingdom of God in all life situations (Hutagalung, 2018).

The issues raised in this study are (1) the meaning of service to people with disabilities, (2) what is meant by those who serve them, and (3) the relevance of service to people with disabilities to the experience of God in the lives of those who serve people with disabilities. **METHODS** 

This study uses a qualitative approach. I will first use data from interview results to analyze issues of discrimination against people with disabilities. The literature study will strengthen the findings in the field to provide insight into understanding the reality experienced by people with disabilities.

This study's informants are those involved in serving disabled people in the ALMA Community, Jl. Dieng 40, Malang, Indonesia. They are four sisters from the secular union ALMA. The selection of resource persons was carried out based on their service. Interviews with the sisters were conducted via Zoom meeting on March 26, 2021, from 17.00-21.00.

Research on disabled people in the ALMA community was analyzed using Jürgen Moltmann's perspectives about the relationship of the Trinity. Moltmann's thoughts about the Trinitarian relationship will become the theoretical basis for making content analysis regarding services to disabled people in the ALMA community. This study aimed to see to what extent the concept of the Trinitarian relationship has coloured services to people with disabilities in the ALMA Community and what fruits are felt in providing services to people with disabilities.

#### **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study show that there is an urgency to resolve the issue of discrimination against people with disabilities because, according to them, the main problem is no longer their problem as the weak and marginalized. The main problem that arises due to discrimination is a humanitarian problem. Humanity, as a fellow human being, seems dead. This condition makes other people treat each other very inhumanely. Informants answered about the problem of discrimination against people with disabilities as a humanitarian problem with the background of their experience in the family. Sisters Meri ALMA and Sisters Maria Goretti ALMA revealed that the call to serve people with disabilities first started from instilling human values that were grown in their families. The human values in question are the love and affection they receive and feel from their parents and family. The human values they received grew and developed within them today.

In her experience, Sister Meri revealed that she grew up in a powerful Catholic family. Her mother, a candidate for nuns, and her father, who had an extraordinary love for his family, made Sister Meri grow in love and a spirit of togetherness and concern for others. This experience was carried over and instilled in Sister Meri, so she finally chose a way of life to serve people with disabilities. Sister Meri is devastated when witnessing that other humans are not treated as human beings. Experiences in the family are not the same as the reality that occurs in weak people, especially those with disabilities. Sister Meri felt that the problem of discrimination creates a stigma on persons with disabilities. According to Sister Meri, the size of one's humanity should not be measured by one's physical condition.

Whatever situation a person is in, he is still a human with the same dignity as others. He must be valued and treated equally, even as a weak person. God always places graces or abilities that ordinary people do not have. This condition gave Sister Meri confidence that God loves everyone in His way. Meanwhile, Sister Maria Goretti expressed more or less the same thing as Sister Meri regarding discrimination against people with disabilities. She felt how people with special needs experienced the situation. According to him, it is not easy for them to accept such a reality of life. Discrimination should not be tolerated because the human dignity of every human being is the same even though there are physical differences.

Sister Goretti said she grew up in a family that cared deeply for the weak. Her mother often paid attention to other people, especially the mentally ill. This experience made a deep impression on Sister Goretti. He tries to continue the human values that his mother carried out.

Sister Saverina saw the weak and helpless as part of her life. The founder of ALMA,

Father Paul Jannsen, CM, also influenced his call to give himself to disabled people. Father Paul once said, "There are many nuns to pastor the people, but in different places, there are many poor and destitute people who do not have shepherds." This motivated Sister Saverina to provide comprehensive services to disabled people. For her, there is no reason not to serve the weak. They are humans just like me. They need my attention and affection as others experience it.

Physical limitations create barriers that prevent social relations between people. Sister Meri admits that it is not easy to adapt to an environment with disabilities. In their limited situation, of course, there is disgust and fear of living with people with disabilities, having to take care of and wash them, feed them, and so on. The condition often makes people reluctant to build friendships with people with disabilities. But based on humanity and vocation as fellow human beings, Sister Meri dedicated herself to serving them with all her strength. She said, "They are my brothers and sisters that I must pay attention to." When she saw people with disabilities being treated humanely and experiencing growth in life, Sister Meri felt joy. There is a spiritual satisfaction that she found in her ministry. Sister Saverina also experienced the difficulty of adapting to people with disabilities.

Sister Meri faced the problem of a lack of experience and knowledge on how to build relationships with those with special needs. Sister Meri often receives treatment that is not accepted by society. However, that doesn't make her weak. Instead, she wanted to show that a form of humanity must be demonstrated by involvement and a sense of responsibility towards people with disabilities. The situation experienced by Sisters Meri and Sister Saverina is a clear illustration of the attitude and rejection made toward people with disabilities. The complicated reality of the life of disabled people is why many people distance themselves from people with disabilities, which results in discrimination against people with disabilities. However, for some people, the experience of serving and taking part in the lives of people with disabilities is a joy in itself. Services embody a sense of humanity. Treating humans as human beings is a value that needs to be grown so that it does not create a negative stigma on disabled people.

Sister Sutila, a person with disabilities, stated that the presence of the Bhakti Luhur Foundation and its dedication to the secular union ALMA proves that the Church does not close itself to the weak and suffering. The service of the ALMA sisters proves that the Church plays a significant role in overcoming situations in people with disabilities. The Church's acceptance of people with disabilities is manifested in ALMA's ministry. Sister Skolastika revealed that since childhood, she had a paraplegic disability. But thanks to the help of the Church through the ALMA secular union, she was also allowed to attend and provide her services, although under limited conditions. Sister Skolastika feels valuable because she experiences being loved and loved as a fellow person. She is grateful to be able to give herself to the Church through her ministry.

#### Friendship As The Essence Of Human Life

Discrimination is an attitude that does not show aspects of sociality in living together

as humans—the concept of humans as social beings disappears when humans ignore other people. Humans will only become humans through other humans (Susanta, 2020).

As stated by the source, the main problem faced by people with disabilities is a humanitarian problem. Humanity also means the fullness of human relationships with others and fellow human beings. The human dignity of disabled people often lacks a place in the broader community. An act of discrimination is an act that ignores a person's human values. Human actions must show their existence as human beings because actions are not only a manifestation of the sign of human presence as living beings but, at the same time, also give birth to human values.

Dardiri (2015) divides the form of human nature into six parts. The first thing is that human beings have the capacity for self-realization. This ability makes humans different from other creatures. Humans can judge themselves and others so that they can respond to every phenomenon that occurs around them. It can distance itself from the object as well as from itself. The second thing is that humans can exist. Humans can break through the barriers that limit their development in space and time. Space and time will never limit humans from moving and acting in their freedom as independent beings. The third thing is that humans can make decisions for themselves. He knows what is good and what is not suitable for him. With this ability, humans can consider every decision or action they take. The fourth thing is that humans have a sense of responsibility. This ability allows humans to accept the consequences of their actions and deeds from life's personal, societal, and religious aspects. The fifth thing is that humans have rights and obligations. Rights are often pleasurable, but responsibilities are felt and experienced as a burden. The sixth thing is that man can experience happiness. Human ability and ability to live his life will give joy for what he has done.

Humans need to be aware of their presence amid social reality. Differences must be the basic colouring in building friendship relations, whatever their forms. Humans may not deny friendship with others because, without companionship, humans will suffer. The discrimination they experience is a suffering that must be borne and experienced as something heavy. Moltmann understands suffering in an eschatological context. He saw suffering as the basis for the hope of the resurrection (Sardono & Firmanto, 2022).

Moltmann revealed that human suffering must give birth to faith in Jesus, who also suffered. The suffering of Jesus, who is truly God and truly human, manifests God's involvement in the history of human suffering. The friendship between God and man takes place to the point of total and perfect sacrifice and self-giving. Thus, suffering is the path to understanding royal values. The friendship of the ALMA sisters and persons with disabilities, as stated above, is not without suffering. The experience of fear, having no knowledge of caring for disabilities, and being ostracized from society is suffering. However, as stated by Moltmann, they try to see suffering as a way of holiness to present the friendly face of God through their ministry (Firmanto, 2020). Friendship requires struggle and total self-sacrifice. The services they provide fulfil human values and the fruits of spiritual life (Banusu & Firmanto, 2020).

### Human Friendship Sign of Friendship of Christ and the Church

The work of the ALMA sisters is also a form of the Church's presence in the world. In this sense, the Church is a model of friendship in a social community that consciously grows in the spirit of Jesus to help those suffering (Situmorang, 2020). The friendship of the Church as communion is inclusive. The Church tries to be open and accept every world reality that happens around it so that the Church can take part in it (Bala, 2020). In the context of Trinitarian friendship, Moltmann understands the Church as the communion of the Triune God, which is not based on uniformity but a Church that builds companionship in the sense of uniting, respecting, and accepting differences (Bala, 2020). To confirm this, Moltmann, through his book Theology of Hope, reveals that the presence of the Church is not for himself but also others and the world.

Disability people are part of the Church because Moltmann himself revealed that the presence of the Church as a fellowship is not based on uniformity but on friendship that unites. The ALMA sisters later actualized this in their service to disabled people. In the fraternal relations they have built with persons with disabilities, they have presented the face of the Church in communion that unites differences. Moltmann also revealed that the main characteristic of the Church, which is directed to Christ, is sincere friendship. Thus, Moltmann means the identity of the Church as a community that stands for the protection and appreciation of weak, poor, and suffering people. The Trinity of God is an ideal model for building fellowship in diversity. The success of the Church in carrying out its mission in the world cannot be separated from efforts to realize fellowship and difference in the Triune God.

#### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Moltmann's concept of Trinitarian friendship provides a framework for comprehending discriminatory attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. By emphasizing the intratrinitarian relationship within the Trinity as an ideal model, Moltmann highlights the interdependence and mutual fulfilment within these relationships. Applying this understanding to human relationships, especially those impacted by discrimination, reveals the relevance and accuracy of the image of Trinitarian friendship.

Recognizing and accepting the limitations of individuals with disabilities, rather than viewing them solely as physically or mentally impaired, is crucial in preventing their isolation and neglect. As social beings, we must awaken to our responsibility in understanding and supporting others. Creating inclusive and friendly relationships that bridge the perceived gaps between individuals of different abilities is essential in shaping a harmonious social reality.

Moltmann asserts that acceptance and openness towards one another are integral to the richness of human life. These interpersonal connections signify the presence of an inclusive communal entity, such as the Church. Thus, the Church's openness should inspire individuals to embrace and embody Trinitarian friendship by understanding, loving, and appreciating one another.

Implementing Trinitarian friendship fosters an inclusive society that values the dignity and worth of all individuals, including those with disabilities. By cultivating a spirit of acceptance and openness, we can build genuine connections that transcend differences, creating a more harmonious and compassionate world.

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