

ARTICLE REVIEW: Paul's "Thorn in Flesh" and Christian Mission to People with Disabilities  
1

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### **Article Review**

#### **What is one concept that stood out to you in this article?**

Togarasei offers a holistic theological analysis of the church's mission to people living with disabilities in his article. He points out the reality of many African churches' response to the needs of people living with disabilities has been mainly concentrated on healing (Togarasei 2019, 137). Yet, such emphasis and belief that people living with disabilities need to be healed have become problematic. Churches in Africa have lost their reputation for making false claims of healing the disabled. On the other hand, people living with disabilities are accused of being faithless sinners when they are not healed (Togarasei 2019, 138). Naturally, people living with disabilities are stigmatized by the congregation, ultimately causing them to leave the church as they feel shame and faithless. Togarasei explains how such a view promotes an incorrect theology of disability. Many believe that people living with disabilities are less than whole, not fully human and that their cure often depends on their levels of faith. This belief has created pain and embarrassment to the people living with disability and pushed people living with disability to accept an identity of inferiority, which was never God's plan and heart for His people. God wants His people to be loved, to serve each other's needs and empower one another, and to evangelize and disciple all kinds of people regardless of whether they have a disability or not.

#### **What implications does this concept have for Missions?**

The church's mission to the people living with disabilities should not necessarily be about healing but more about empowerment and integrating people living with disabilities in our society. Jesus had a healing ministry, and consequently, churches also have the mission of healing those who are ill or sick (Togarasei 2019, 140). Furthermore, the Bible includes disabilities such as blindness, deafness, dumbness among illnesses. Thus, the natural understanding and implication became that the only way people living with disabilities can be

restored to normalcy is through healing. However, Togarasei warns of overemphasizing healing as the church's mission to people living with disabilities. It could stem from humanity's preoccupation with normalcy, where people all strive for normality, such as in our body sizes or weight. Thus, the issue may not be with the person with a disability but how humanity has constructed normalcy that creates the problem for people with disabilities (Togarasei 2019, 145). In light of this insight, Togarasei suggests that what is needed is the environment and facilities that enable people living with disabilities and incorporate them into the life of the church and society so that they feel and be empowered. Such missional work would ultimately result in people living with disabilities not limiting their potential but living out to their fullest potential as God has created them to be.

### **What needs to change in your life as a result?**

Togarasei's analysis of the theology of disability was eye-opening. I have not previously pondered about what missions should look like to people living with disabilities. Unfortunately, I also never had the opportunity to minister to a person with disability that it never crossed my mind about how society, the church, and even myself could have treated or perceived them with stigma or how the church could have caused pain by overemphasizing healing. I have to admit that I think of healing first when it comes to mission to people living with disabilities. However, after reading Togarasei's article, I want to explore more about the theology of disability and what missions to these people should look like. Yet, I acknowledge that I need to begin by reflecting and examining my biased thoughts on disability and their needs. Hopefully, the Holy Spirit and the brothers and sisters around me, both at church and seminary, would guide me in learning how to minister towards people with disabilities in a way where they could not only experience God's love and find their new identity in Christ but also feel empowered and supported to do the work God has called them to do.

### References

Toragasei, Lovemore. "Paul's 'Thorn in the Flesh' and Christian Mission to People with Disabilities." *International Review of Mission* 108, no. 1 (June 2019): 136-147.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/iron.12268>.