

Inclusion as a challenge for theological ethics

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Abstract:

In view of the revolution initiated by the paradigm of inclusion at the end of the 20th century and the necessary visibility of persons with disabilities in ecclesial discourses and spaces, we seek an approximation between the Education and Theology to answer the question how theological ethics dialogues with the social model of disability. By placing persons with disabilities at the centre of epistemological and ethical discussion, we emphasize an anthropological aspect, namely the complex human condition and its vulnerability. The educational paradigm of inclusion will be the starting point for the ethical question in this interface between Education and Theology: how much do we break with exclusionary paradigms such as the mythical-charitable and clinical-therapeutic models in our Christian churches? The movement we propose concentrates, then in the [in]visibility of persons with disabilities in theological discourses and ecclesial spaces. The theologians Jürgen Moltmann, Sturla Stalsett, Hugo Assmann and Jung Mo Sung approach the inclusion paradigm when they propose categories such as recognition, vulnerability, corporeality, dignity, solidarity and subjectivity. We agree these categories are like gaps in open doors - for the visibility of persons with disabilities.

Introduction

Between 2006¹ and 2012², I conducted two surveys about inclusive practices developed at the university and in Christian churches. I employed categories such as sociology of absences, sociology of emergences, social model of disability, accessibility, and inclusion in order to answer the following investigative problem: What emerges and what has been emptied (or wasted) with the advent of persons with disabilities³ in higher education and in Christian churches. The presence/claim of persons with disabilities leads us to consider the pedagogical centrality of corporality, for the recognition of different ways of sensing the world can neutralize the

¹ Elizabete Cristina Costa-Renders, *Por falar em ausência: as pessoas com deficiência*. (Umeshp, 2006). Online at: <http://tede.metodista.br/jspui/bitstream/tede/353/1/Elizabete%20Cristina%20Costa%20Renders.pdf>. Consulted on July 03, 2018.

² Elizabete Cristina Costa-Renders, *Invisibilidade e emergência da universidade inclusiva na tessitura de uma rede de memórias*. (Unicamp, 2012). Online at: <http://repositorio.unicamp.br/jspui/handle/REPOSIP/250710>. Consulted on July 03, 2018.

³ I use this concept in conformance with the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UN, 2006).

dichotomous boundaries of capable/incapable. In this scenario, the inclusion arises as a provocation to the educational system in terms of emergence of new knowledge, temporalities and recognitions in the Christian churches and higher education. But the inclusive policies can't alone change the historical exclusion.

Ensuring access and permanence of persons with special educational needs to the regular educational system, without segregating them in special schools, is one of the goals of the Brazilian educational policy. According to the Brazilian National Policy for Special Education in Inclusive Education Perspective belong to this group person with disabilities, person with pervasive developmental disorders, and person with highly developed abilities form the group of students with special educational needs (BRAZIL, 2008). It is a significant move so that special education ceases to have a substitute character and earn transversality in regular educational system through specialized educational services.

Since Brazil's Federal Constitution of 1988, a wide legal framework, from which I emphasize, first, the Ordinance N.3284/2003, guides this inclusive perspective. Such ordinance arises as an enforceability instrument for accessibility in higher education, instructing the procedures for authorization and recognition of programs, as well as the accreditation of institutions. Secondly, I highlight the Decree N.7611/2011, which provides for the specialized educational services at different levels of education, pointing to the necessary structuring of accessibility centers in higher education institutions as well. However, as a transitional process that involves new recognitions in the educational system, there are conflicts and tensions in this enlargement of the special education space in Brazilian regular educational system.

Different scholars, among them Rosita Carvalho (2005), have indicated some contradictions in this process , from limited financial and human resources to the devaluation of teaching and inadequate training of school staff to operate in the specialized educational services. Regarding the contradictions between formal statements and the operationalization of inclusive policies, the World Declaration on Education for All (Article 2, Item 1) points out that education for all needs a "expanded vision that surpasses present resource levels, institutional structures, curricula, and conventional delivery systems while building on the best in current practices". I realize, however, that this expanded vision requires the epistemological questioning I proposed to myself in this study.

I start with a critique of any logic that creates any type of subordination between people and knowledge. To do so, I dialogue with the works of Boaventura de Sousa Santos , especially, what he has coined as sociology of absences, sociology of emergences, and the work of translation. Just like in a preliminary thinking, this author deals with dichotomies within these articulations and the power relations which keep them together. To overcome this situation, he suggests the transformation of absences in presences (sociology of absences), the recognition of the incompleteness of all knowledge (work of translation), and the emergence of differently wise knowledge (sociology of emergences).

In my practice and my researches, I have identified and problematized dichotomies that became stereotypes and objectifications that have been imposed on person with a disability, such as superior x inferior, normal x abnormal, able x unable, etc. Hence, from an epistemological perspective we have to ask for the creation of new loci of enunciation. Part of this is to recognize, necessarily, that the persons with disabilities at the university have to become visible. For example, the School Census of 2006 (Brazil / INEP, 2006) reported that between 2003 and 2005 the number of students with a disability enrolled in higher education augmented from 5,078 to 11,999 persons, an increase of 136% in two years. The Methodist University of São Paulo (UMESP) registered the same movement with a short delay. From 31 persons with disabilities in 2005, this number amounted, in 2010, to 142 individuals that had already gone through this educational space where first arrived, by insistence, the people, and then, by claim, the conditions of access and permanence.

The routes of the subjects and the management of processes (Both form with “The ecology of knowledge” the three axes of the thesis) in this university had witnessed the possibility of access, but also the various barriers - physical, communicational and attitudinal ones - imposed on this social group on a daily basis, what brings us to another perspective. In 2010, there were 142 persons with disabilities in a universe of 28,032 students enrolled in UMEP, while the national numbers for higher education pointed to 20,019 persons with disabilities in a population of 6.5 million college students. What is happening in higher education in order for these people does not exceed 0.34% of the college students? This question implies that we talk of absence rather than presence when it comes to person with a disability in Brazilian higher education.

Considering a possible border between absence and emergence, I follow an idea, which I came aware of by the works of Hugo Assmann that we should value different forms of sensing the world. The author proposes the pedagogical centrality of corporeity and advocates a conceptual reformulation of what educating means in the complex contemporary society out of itself. The most significant clue on this regard would be the existence of a close relationship between existential and cognitive processes. I then started to ask how this happens in the process of including persons with disabilities.

About de Christian churches, we have to talk about, for example, the inclusion in the Sunday Schools. I agree ours Sunday Schools doesn't have to include persons with disabilities. Why? Maybe, we, yet, repeat the older paradigm of the schools: the segregation.

Resuming the scope of the inclusive approach proposed by UNESCO, researches developed by the Laboratório de Estudos e Pesquisas em Ensino e Diferenças (LEPED, UNICAMP / Laboratory of Studies and Research in Teaching and Differences at State University of Campinas, Brazil) affirm the intention to develop and promote an inclusive education by transforming educational institutions. To this belongs that the pedagogical practices can have the ethics, the justice, and the human rights as their axes. Therefore, this study deals with inclusion by understanding it as a provocation to the current educational system in the sense of the emergence of differently wise knowledge from disabled people at university, at church and theological institutions.

In my work, numerous records and memories came together in the weaving of a network of everyday actions in which lies a movement full with conflicts, reconciliation, progress and setbacks – all of them proper to an open field as education, but worrying when they had favored the merit of some at the expense of all students' emancipation. Well, persons with disabilities were recognized and respected in their alternative paths for construction of knowledge. Well, these same people were captured by monocultures of knowledge or doing at Christian churches and at university in an over identification that made them absent. Thus, the challenge was to present the entire network of relationships and processes arising from the invisibility and emergence of persons with disabilities in this routine. I came to understand that revisiting institutional documents would not reflect the complexity of this nonlinear movement accurately.

Anyone who already wove knows that threads are not always linear, uninterrupted. Nodes are a part of the weaver's work and they are unusual – they interrupt it unannounced. Starting from the weaving metaphor it is possible to identify

some nodes that lead us to the discussion in this movement of invisibility and emergence of persons with disabilities.

□ First, if human vulnerability presents itself as an anthropological condition, would it not be a reductionism in terms of over identification, insisting on the visibility of person with a disability in terms of over identification? Is disability seen with suspect or as a possibility of becoming-other senses for vulnerability?

□ Second, if inclusion can be one more instrument of governance, would not be defending it mean to fall into a trap in the sense to be captured by the hegemonic system? Is the inclusion seen with suspect or as a possibility of becoming-other movements in higher education?

It becomes evident that in the process to build an inclusive educational space semantic and systemic problems are involved. Given these obstacles, I had to put this texture on the ground of contemporary paradigmatic transition, taking into perspective the intermediate worlds (Zwischenwelten, Husserl) and the constituent elements of dichotomous borders.

1. New paradigm and approximations between Education and Theology

The social history of the person with disabilities is marked, since antiquity, by elimination, segregation and exclusion. In ancient Rome, it was customary to leave children who were born with disabilities in baskets on the banks of the river. In ancient Greece, considered themselves the beauty and physical perfection as conditions for participation in society, consequently, when a child was born with any disabilities, this should go through a Council that would set if I should live or die. We can cite, as an example of this thinking, the words of Plato – “(medicine and jurisprudence) take care only of citizens well trained body and soul letting those who are corporately defective die. [...] both the miserable and the city in which they live”⁴, as well as the words of Aristotle - “[...] so we can know which children should be abandoned or educated, there has to exist a law that prohibits nourishment for every deformed child.”⁵ It was believed that the deficiency had a supernatural background, especially mental deficiency. Lucius Seneca (4-65 AD) testifies that in the Christian era there were drownings of children with disabilities – “(...) we smother the little monsters; we drown even children when

⁴ Platão, *La República, o de la Justicia*. (Obras completas. Madrid: Aguilar, 1972, p. 655-844), p. 716.

⁵ Aristóteles, *Política*. (Rio de Janeiro/São Paulo: Hemus, 1966), p. 150.

they are born defective and abnormal: it is not cholera but reason that invites us to separate the healthy elements from the harmful individuals".⁶

Already in the Judeo-Christian universe, deficiency could be synonymous with divine punishment for disobedience or a sign of moral and social transgression. Many people suffered visual mutilation, amputation of hands and tongues as punishment, "underlining bodily deformity as correlated to moral issues: robbery, adultery, slander [...]"⁷. In the Middle Ages, "psychotics and epileptics were considered possessed by the devil; some states of trance were accepted as divine possession, and the blind were revered as seers, prophets and diviners"⁸. Over time, Christian ethics repressed the murder or exposure of these people, but it revealed the charity-punishment or protection-segregation dilemmas, and the rituals of flogging were constant. Christian actions insinuated the superiority of persons without disabilities (charitable and preoccupied with the social order) and the inferiority of persons with disabilities (unable to take care of themselves, uncontrolled). In order to avoid greater social damages, these individuals received care (roof and food) and, at the same time, did not cause problems in social coexistence.

With the advent of the sciences, in the Modern Age, the mythical and supernatural perspective was replaced by the clinical-therapeutic perspective, but the segregationist and exclusionary view remained. The justification now was for the need to "(...) offer medical treatment and relieve the burden on the family and society, the PNEEs were sent to nursing homes and hospitals in the company of prostitutes, insane and delinquent." Fear and social discomfort remained of disability. Enlightenment itself, with the legitimizing view of science, defended social hygiene and isolated the "abnormality" for the purpose of rehabilitating or curing. The categories used at this time were normal and abnormal.

In this context, eugenic thinking is introduced, which sought to "apply biological laws looking for the perfection of the human species," since disability is considered "degeneracy in family and social heredity". Aiming at the genetic improvement of human beings, during the Modern Age, social hygiene actions were developed in order to prevent the proliferation of deficiencies. It was even suggested that persons with

⁶ Apud: Ligia Amaral, L., *Conhecendo a Deficiência: em companhia de Hércules*. (São Paulo: Robe Editorial, 1995) p. 46.

⁷ Lígia Amaral, *Conhecendo a Deficiência*, p. 48.

⁸ Vanessa Peranzoni; Sonia Freitas, *A evolução do (pré) conceito de deficiência*. (Online at: <www.ufsm.br/ce/revista/ceesp/2000/02/a2.htm>. Consulted on March 03, 2014)

disabilities would have the criminal tendency, which would justify the necessity of sterilization of the same and the prohibition of their marriage. In the words of Oliveira:

All those who are carriers of rare diseases or deformities, such as certain forms of blindness and deafness, afflictions that cause great suffering and may appear in the same family for many generations: none should be progenitors. (...) as to true idiots, after visiting an institute where many of these creatures train a vain and endless existence, everyone should wish that further measures could be taken to prevent such beings from coming into the world.⁹

Human imperfection does not fit in eugenic thought, since the condition of being incapable, limited, and vulnerable is not in keeping with the ideal of perfecting the species and with eliminating the social and biological obstacles to it. We understand that perceiving disability as an evil and an immutable condition has caused society to ignore processes that respect the uniqueness of the person with a disability. Both the supernatural or mythical view (when a person with a disability was understood as a super- or subhuman being - angel or demon) and the naturalistic view of medicine (when the person was understood as a research object - patient) did not provide space for social inclusion and educational needs of persons with disabilities.¹⁰

It was in Europe and later in the United States and Canada that, according to Mazzota, the first movements for the education of the disabled appeared. But in his view, until the nineteenth century, the pathological vision of the person with disabilities remained, as indicated by "the expressions that were used to refer to the educational service for the disabled: Pedagogy of Abnormalities, Teratological Pedagogy, Healing Pedagogy or Therapeutics, Social Assistance Pedagogy, Emendative Pedagogy".

Special Education, therefore, was based on the medical model of disability. "Procedures of evaluation and classification of the individual, of his body and of his potentialities, were carried out through comparisons, and training practices were disseminated." This model of education, therefore, represented an attempt to develop

⁹ Ivanilde Oliveira, *Saberes, Imaginários e representações na educação especial* (Petrópolis:Vozes, 2004) 151-152.

¹⁰ A very strict timeline for these paradigmatic changes need at least some regional distinction. In some cases the visual culture seems to anticipate the term or concept. See: Elizabete Cristina Costa-Renders; Helmut Renders, *The subtle presence of the issue of vulnerability in the French woodcut "The human being in different ages / The universal judgment" from 1825: an interdisciplinary perspective*.

what was lacking in the individual, in the sense of making it as close as possible to what was understood as human normality. In the case of Brazil, according to Marcos Mazzota, it was only in the late 1950s and early 1960s, that special education was inserted into educational policy, and that it emphasized the clinical-therapeutic approach and the "emphasis on segregated care in specialized private institutions, to the detriment of integrated educational services in public schools"¹¹.

In the last decades of the 20th century, however, the forms of insertion of the disabled person into the education system refer us to the paradigms of integration and inclusion, in the sense of overcoming the paradigm of the special segregating school. However, the integration proposes a partial insertion and conditioned to the possibilities of each person, proposing an action on the part of the disabled person to adapt to the environment as it is. This "[...] is a conditional form of insertion that will depend on the student, that is, on the level of his ability to adapt to the options of the school system, its integration"¹².

Towards the paradigm of inclusion, the World Program of Action on Persons with Disabilities inserts in the discussion a new concept of incapacity; it is the concept of disability as a result of the relationship between people (with and without disabilities) and the environment. Disability was then a problem for everyone. In 1990, the UN defined that "equalizing opportunities for disabled people should be the priority in formulating long-term actions towards a society for all"¹³. In this new scenario, disability becomes a society-wide problem and, therefore, the equalization of opportunities is a universal ethical requirement derived from the "social model of disability"¹⁴.

The social model of disability is the basis of the educational paradigm of inclusion, which proposes to overcome architectural, attitudinal and communication barriers, respecting the diversity and uniqueness of each human being (including persons with disabilities).

Inclusive education presupposes the potential of all, regardless of the individuality of each learner, and works with the epistemological assumptions of diversity and

¹¹ Marcos Mazzota, *Educação especial no Brasil: história e políticas públicas*, (São Paulo: Cortez, 1996) p. 17.

¹² Maria Teresa Mantoan, *Inclusão Escolar: O que é? Por quê? Como fazer?* (São Paulo: Moderna, 2009).

¹³ Cláudia Werneck, *Ninguém mais vai ser bonzinho, na sociedade inclusiva* (Rio de Janeiro: WVA Editora, 2000) 43.

¹⁴ Romeu Sasaki, *Inclusão: o paradigma do século 21*, (Inclusão: Revista da Educação Especial, v. 1, n. 1, out. 2005) 20.

complexity¹⁵. It is important to highlight the fact that inclusion is, either in the social sphere or in the educational sphere, a process of historical construction that, in the course of its implementation, faces a society built on Cartesian models from the Modern Age. We understand, therefore, that only a systemic vision enables to overcome prejudices considering both: first always considering the potential of a disabled person (as a catalyst for new practices and values); second the mean of a constructive coexistence among different persons. Diversity, then, is a constitutive aspect of the human nature and species. Therefore, ethics of inclusion require a change of focus - the focus shifts from human limitations to human potential, from disrespect to differences to valuing these differences without hierarchizing them. This movement gives visibility to the person in question and, therefore, to the social obstacles that the person faces in his daily life to put himself in society. In this perspective, Moltmann refers to person with disabilities as “disabled”¹⁶. We understand that the transition of paradigms demands this perception also in theological discourses.

2. Practices and challenges about inclusive paradigm

Among the projects in development at Methodist University of São Paulo in 2005, the movement caused by the *Life Project* involving persons with and without disabilities, being those teachers, students or family, deserves special attention. The special composition of this the movement of inclusion broke the barrier of invisibility and silence in this educational field. Let us hear the student Felipe about this issue:

I should also mention the moments when my participation in the project turned in an experience of inclusion, especially during two distinct occasions. The first one occurred when I started to participate in the dance classes. It meant the inclusion in a new type of activity in a new circle of people and relations, in a new opportunity of personal development. The second, moment occurred when I started to participate in the presentations. These occasions transformed me into a person able to contribute to society by the means of artistic activities, to bring culture to the

¹⁵ Hugo Assmann; Jung Mo Sung. *Competência e Sensibilidade Solidária: educar para a esperança*. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2000).

¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *Diakonia en el horizonte del reino de dios: hacia el diaconado de todos los creyentes*. (Guevara: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1987).

people and to contribute to the world in which we are living. Therefore, this turned out to be an inclusion into another setting, which was only possible in the consequence of the first. Inclusion seems to develop in a domino effect, one thing leads to another, and so on.¹⁷

In my opinion, Felipe is correct. The inclusion happens as domino effect. It starts in a determined location or group, but no one should it reduced to this. As a movement it challenges and is challenged, it amplifies and invades unknown territories and widens educational times and spaces.

The study of inclusion of the person with disabilities at Christian churches and at university quotidian led me to the conclusion that, in the daily confrontation of barriers, this presence is also claim and contribution. Therefore, I defend in four arguments that the presence/claim of persons with disabilities at Christian churches and the higher education contributes to epistemological revisions.

First, this presence/claim problematizes the conception of a universal subject and, in an inversion, requires consideration of differences from a hierarchical system of them. The everyday contact with persons with disabilities teaches us that there is no deaf, there is no blind, there is no disabled. Nor there is disabled person, for both the difference and vulnerability are anthropological conditions for all of us. Therefore, we need to ask who the persons with disabilities are. If human vulnerability reaches us transversally, in the very cycle of life, insisting on the visibility of a person with a disability is a reductionism in terms of vulnerability governance through the personification of the disabled.

I realize that is crucial to place the educational paradigm of inclusion on the ground of the epistemological transition, taking into perspective the constitutive elements of dichotomous borders. On the one hand, it is not possible to speak of inclusion without questioning the exclusion/inclusion dichotomy, with a view to the very movements of belonging and mutual recognition in the educational and theological areas. On the other hand, it is not possible to speak of persons with disabilities without problematizing the able/disable dichotomy, bearing in mind both our common anthropological condition - the vulnerability - and disabling social impediments.

¹⁷ Felipe Quartero, *Valiosa Vida*, (Rio de Janeiro: Livre Expressão, 2010), p. 194-195.

I quote then some situations that exemplify how the inclusion of persons with disabilities at UMESP has contributed to this movement towards the expansion of the epistemological possibility, starting from the rupture with the universal subject and the general theory that supports it. First, and in addition to the bibliographic collection in print, by providing an accessible e digital collection, everyone can read in higher education – an open space for the movement of different reading codes in this educational field. Second, and in addition to the oral and written language, by introducing a signaled language in the classroom (LIBRAS – the initials for Brazilian Language of Signals), the sub alternation of languages and subjects with hearing loss can be broken – an open space for the movement of differently wise knowledge in the classroom. Third, by providing conditions for physical accessibility, other knowledge were considered in the establishment of this educational area – an open space for assistive technologies and specialized educational services in higher education.

About this movement of becoming other subjects and knowledge in the university quotidian, we can say that the ambivalence of the movement of differences was placed abruptly in these same actions. It also enabled a visualization of the violence of some pedagogical technologies pertaining to the dominant paradigm, such as allow only one way of writing, one way of reading, one type of language, one standard for spaces and furniture. Hence, persons with disabilities put forward arguments, experiences, and testimonies that challenge us to take an ethical leap in education in its three different expressions related to the Church: secular/confessional education; theological education; and Christian education.

Second, the presence/claim of persons with disabilities indicates and visualizes the corporality as the center of inclusive pedagogical approaches. The daily movement of inclusion of persons with disabilities had pointed to the essential centrality of human corporality in the educational process, since the necessary accessibility¹⁸ conditions until the creation of alternative pedagogical paths that allow the emergence of differently wise knowledge, multitemporalities, and recognitions. It is not about a functional or utilitarian concern with specialized educational services, but the perception of the multiple ways in which human corporality affects education, requiring

¹⁸ Another important concept used in inclusive education is *universal design for learning*. For further informations, see: David Rose; Anne Meyer; Chuck Hitchcock (Eds.), *The universally designed classroom: accessible curriculum and digital technologies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, october 2005).

different pathways for being and learning in educational systems. If, on the one hand, the centrality of corporality demanded new practices in education, on the other hand, deviant corporalities enabled important overturns. Accessibility projects became unique educational spaces where people had access to new knowledge in an exciting pedagogical reversal – persons with disabilities taught the new.

My third argument focuses on the democratic and ethical principle of the right to education and includes overcoming the naturalization of strictly individual merit in the educational field, pointing to its social aspect. In a reversal of the social model of disability, what matters now is to ask how people's capacity and functionality are determined by the social conditions imposed on them. Also underlies this issue the fact that cognitive injustice rests on social injustice. Thus, there is an ethical content in this movement for the epistemological revision of the dominant educational paradigm.

Finally, my fourth argument is the utopian tone of inclusive paradigm. As a movement that lies in a collective and permanent construction of anticipatory consciousness, inclusive education creates a utopian horizon for education in its three different expressions related to the Church: secular/confessional education; theological education; and Christian education - in terms of the emergence *continuum* of different subjects and their knowledge.

3. Inclusion as a challenge for theological ethics

In view of the revolution initiated by the paradigm of inclusion at the end of the 20th century and the necessary visibility of persons with disabilities in ecclesial discourses and spaces, we seek an approximation between two areas of knowledge - Education and Theology - to answer the question how theological ethics dialogues with the social model of disability.

By placing persons with disabilities at the center of epistemological and ethical discussion, we emphasize an anthropological aspect, namely the complex human condition and its vulnerability. In this scenario, we hypothesize: the invisibility of persons with disabilities in theological discourses and in ecclesial spaces results from the reductionist perception of persons with disabilities and, therefore, contributes to the perpetuation of hierarchical dichotomies still imposed on this social group. It is important to ask: has this perspective, which roots can be traced in images and emblems with representations of persons with disabilities in the 18th and 19th centuries, surpassed in the 21st century? At the beginning of this new century, do we start to

inhabit the world and the Christian churches in conditions of equal dignity? Do we consider the equalization of opportunities for persons with and without disabilities in the ecclesial spaces?

The educational paradigm of inclusion will be the starting point for the ethical question in this interface between Education and Theology: how much do we break with exclusionary paradigms such as the mythical-charitable and clinical-therapeutic models in our Christian churches? The inclusion paradigm considers the human condition in its complexity and bets on a process of construction of knowledge enriched by certainties and uncertainties, by errors and correctness, by provisionality - in short, by the different ways of sensing the world by human corporeity.

The movement we propose concentrates, then in the [in]visibility of persons with disabilities in theological discourses and ecclesial spaces: is it possible to build a spirituality proposal that includes all people? We understand that this is an urgent move - started already by some theologians, such as Jürgen Moltmann, Sturla Stalsett, Hugo Assmann and Jung Mo Sung. These theologians (with the exception of Moltmann) do not speak of persons with disabilities, but go through the tangent, that is, they approach the inclusive paradigm when they propose categories such as: recognition, vulnerability, corporeality, dignity, solidarity and subjectivity. Such categories are like gaps in open doors - for the visibility of persons with disabilities. The challenge, however, is to open these doors fully and give visibility to persons with disabilities in Theology (or in theological discourses as we consider that there is not a single theology).

With regard to the re-signification of human dignity, we emphasize the importance of community meetings as spaces where all are recognized as persons, either as "disabled" (disabled) or as "non-disabled" (without disabilities) under Moltmann's terms¹⁹. The fact is that disability, like difference, is part of the human condition and does not diminish our condition of dignity. In this sense, the understanding of vulnerability helps us to realize our common condition: we are all human beings limited by the contingencies of life. If we are all vulnerable (we experience the fragility of life), we also all recognize ourselves as worthy people (by the very gift of life). However, human dignity is only present when people made absent scream in their subjectivity²⁰

¹⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Diacionia en el horizonte del reino de dios: hacia el diaconado de todos los creyentes*.

²⁰ Jung Mo Sung, *Sujeitos e sociedades complexas: para repensar os horizontes utópicos*. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2002), 78.

and point out that human value is not in the form that we are or live, but in our lives as a divine gift to all people.

Life is the greatest good of all people, including persons with disabilities who, in their difference, often face disrespect about their corporeality. In the process of stigmatization and objectification of persons with disabilities, their faces and life histories had to be hidden (immersed in disqualified forms of being and living), and became so absent in society (including in ecclesial spaces). It seems to me that the dignity of persons with disabilities has been questioned. However, in terms of spirituality, Christian anthropology, in its inherently inclusive proposal, is based on love and respect for human dignity as an inviolable and non-negotiable good.

If we consider that, there is no dignity that is not of the body, it is imperative to build ethical and solidarity relations in the ecclesial spaces in order to operationalize solidarity and respect for the corporeity of persons with disabilities. We can cite, for example, the communicational accessibility in our liturgies, namely: sign language, audiodescription, etc.

The concrete conditions of solidarity with regard to persons with disabilities refer us to the theme of accessibility. Accessibility, therefore, is a theme also pertinent to Theology. After all, the community meeting, whether going or coming, only happens when there are conditions of access to each other. We no longer want persons with disabilities trapped at home without being able to "be a person" on the streets and in Christian churches like everyone else. It is necessary, therefore, to build a spirituality that goes from resignation and silence to the re-signification of human dignity (as non-negotiable value) and to the operationalization of solidarity (as in terms of accessibility). We speak, therefore, of the ethics of inclusion.

We have to challenge that persons with disabilities are seen as ignorant and we should give them a leading role in the ecclesial spaces. In this way, the challenge is to consider persons with disabilities as a theological place. For this to happen, it is necessary to recognize the diversity of knowledge and to overcome the theology of a single speech - the speech of the people called "normal" and "blessed" by God in his "perfection". We are late, but it is still time to listen to what persons with disabilities have to say about life and its spirituality. The two current confessional documents indicate that a process of sensitization has begun in the ecclesial and theological spaces, but we still have to advance a lot, so that, in fact, persons with disabilities have visibility in the Christian churches and in its theological discourses. Such documents still showed

an excluding view (when deficiency can still be understood as loss or punishment) and an assistive view (when persons with disabilities still need the charitable attention of the church).

We propose, with the inclusive paradigm, to walk into a direction, where it is possible to recognize the human condition in all its dimensions, including its vulnerable aspects. We understand that the metaphor of the path can enlighten us in the sense of the perception of human existence as a constant process of humanization and, consequently, of the construction of the conditions of access for all people.

This way allows us to approach the inclusive proposal of Jesus Christ and refers us to Christian anthropology. However, the human differences led us to the question of the accessibility of this path for all pilgrims in all these different conditions. In inclusive terms, it is necessary to remove the stones from the path and re-signify it in the direction of an accessible path. This challenge brings us back to theology and its prophetic role given to it by Christianity: denunciation (pointing stones) and announcement (indicate the possibilities of building a path accessible to all people).

In the epistemological terms, we realize that speaking of God advancing on the path of accessibility requires flexibility and willingness to learn constantly from the other. And, therefore, it demands to take risks - to err and to correct in the choice of the trails that resignifies the human dignity and respect its corporeity. The path also refers to the condition of the walkers, their human complexity and vulnerability. But it is precisely in the midst of vulnerability that we discover the value of grace, grace that bears witness to the value of the dignity of all of us (with or without disabilities) and which challenges walkers to, inspired by faith, to build a new world. To start with, we have to imagine a society for all!

It is also important to point out that an inclusive spirituality demands new epistemological categories. Categories such as complexity, diversity and vulnerability contribute to the development of a sense of solidarity and respect for human dignity. In these terms, it is possible to widen human gaze and sensitivity to reality and open the door to the consideration of a diversity of knowledge not yet considered.

Knowledge, in all its multiply and distinguished forms, is still and will be always under construction. Therefore, the situation obliges and allows us at the same time to raise questions and leave them for a while unanswered in the hope that Christian communities, theology and society are able to build new ways in response to them. What do persons with disabilities know specifically about God? What is the knowledge

that persons with disabilities have about the creation? How do they relate to God from their experiences? How do we recognize the perfection of creation in the midst of the limitations and potentialities of a distinguished corporeities? We could do an exercise to grow in awareness and imagination making even more questions:

- ✓ What it is like to be and live, as blind or with low vision, in a Christian community where all talk is in sight and light ...
- ✓ What it is like to be and live, as deaf or hard of hearing, in a Christian community where one only speaks or sings, as if the world were made only of sounds ...
- ✓ What it is like to be and live, with cognitive deficit, in a Christian community that speaks of God only with rational confessions ...
- ✓ What it is like to be and live, as a person with physical disabilities, in a community that knows only one way to walk and to reach ...
 - ✓ Or, we might ask: How is it possible,
 - ✓ to be happy - even in the midst of pain?
- ✓ to want to be different - even in the face of healing proposals?
 - ✓ to be strong - even when one is weak?
- ✓ to believe in life and to dream - even not knowing what will happen tomorrow?
 - ✓ to learn to learn in a different way - even when "only" exists the pedagogy of one path?
- ✓ still to be surprise - even surrounded by concept of predestination and called to be incompetent?
- ✓ to understand oneself as part of God's perfect creation - even if all other voices confirm that this is not the case?
 - ✓ to continuously insist on coexistence - despite rejection?
 - ✓ to keep walking - despite the stones on the way?

Final considerations

On the prevalence of a general epistemology, if the corporality of student had to submit to the rigor of the only knowledge, the corporality of persons with disabilities, especially in times of inclusion, calls into question the cultural imprinting of disability previously legitimized by the monoculture of capacity. That is to say, the movement of deviant corporalities at Christian churches and at university can break monocultures, creating a void that makes ecologies possible in its three different expressions related to

the Church: secular/confessional education; theological education; and Christian education educational field.

Thus, the movement of absence and emergence of knowledge, temporalities, and recognitions acknowledges the contribution of the presence/claim of persons with disabilities by means of arguments, experiences, and testimonies that can leverage the ethical leap in the educational and theological field.