



**Developing a Holistic Educational Programme through  
Contextual Bible Study with People with Disabilities in Kinshasa,  
Democratic Republic of Congo: IMAN'ENDA as Case Study**

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**March 2013**

## **DECLARATION**

As required by University regulations, I hereby state unambiguously that this work has not been presented at any other University or any other institution of higher learning other than the University of KwaZulu-Natal, (Pietermaritzburg Campus) and that unless specifically indicated to the contrary within the text it is my original work.

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**March 2013**

As candidate supervisor I hereby approve this thesis for submission

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**March 2013**

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**March 2013**

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to two people who have impacted my life.

My late mother, Rebecca Mesu Nasha Naha, was a prophet in my life since I was ill at the age of two. Her faith made her one with my Dad, Rev. Samuel W. J. Kamba Manji. She used to say in her prayers for me, “Mabwe nela mbila” (The stones will cry out, Luke 19, 40). This meant that she was seeing ahead, regardless of the popular misconception about disabled children to the day when God would raise up my life. My dear Mother, this is one of the big accomplishments of your prophecy to me.

My mentor and friend, Rev. Philippe L. J. Emedi, who has been helping me from behind the scenes (in French *Heros dans l'ombre*) with guidance and advice since we studied for our first degree at the Universite Protestante au Congo (1991 - present). Thanks, Philippe. Here is the fruit of the seeds that you have planted in my life.

## ACRONYMS

<b>AACC</b>	All Africa Conference of Churches
<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>ABP</b>	Able-bodied people
<b>CBS</b>	Contextual Bible Study
<b>CL</b>	Church leaders
<b>CPK</b>	<i>Communauté Presbytérienne de Kinshasa</i>
<b>DPSA</b>	Disabled People of South Africa
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>DST</b>	Diploma in Social Transformation
<b>EDAN</b>	Ecumenical Disability Network
<b>EFA</b>	Education for All
<b>ESV</b>	English Standard Version
<b>ETE</b>	Ecumenical Theological Education
<b>HCSB</b>	The Holman Christian Standard Bible
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>HOD</b>	Head of Department
<b>ISV/NT</b>	International Standard Version, New Testament
<b>KJV</b>	King James Version
<b>LTS</b>	Licence en Transformation Sociale
<b>MST</b>	Master in Social Transformation
<b>NASB</b>	New American Standard Bible
<b>NIRV</b>	New International Reader's Version
<b>NIV</b>	New International Version
<b>NKV</b>	New King James Version
<b>NRSV</b>	New Revised Standard Version

<b>PCR</b>	Protestant Church Religion lecturers
<b>PWD(s)</b>	People with Disabilities
<b>TV</b>	Télévision
<b>UFPP</b>	Union des femmes Pasteurs Presbytériennes
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UPC</b>	University <i>Protestante au Congo</i>
<b>WCC</b>	World Council of Churches
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WP</b>	Women pastors

## ABSTRACT

This research uses Contextual Bible Studies as the main approach in searching for ways in which the Bible may be used as a resource to contribute to a holistic education for people with disabilities (PWDs). It explores the situation of PWDs in the DRC and demonstrates how the image of PWDs has been negatively portrayed, and how PWDs' situation has been perceived as a misfortune. Consequently, the socio-cultural concept of disability has influenced the biblical interpretation of disability making PWDs seem to be "lesser human beings". Therefore, the use of three biblical texts, which are Exodus 4, 1-17; 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10 and Acts 3, 1-11, in this study serves to re-read the Bible in a constructive way from the disability perspective. Each Bible study has its main focus related to the question of this study mentioned above: the first biblical text, Exodus 4, 1-17 is designed for IMAN'ENDA members with the aim of helping PWDs to discover their real identity in the light of Bible study. The core verse of this study is verse 10, in which I focused on, "How God views disability". The second text, 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10, is designed for PWDs as well as for able-bodied people in order to understand suffering as another way of discovering oneself. The main focus of this Bible study is on v. 9, in which I dealt with "Power through weak body". The third biblical text is Acts 3, 1-11, and is designed for church leaders from the Presbyterian Church in Kinshasa with the aim of helping church leaders to widen their understanding of healing for better integration of and support for PWDs in society. The text focuses on healing that I referred to as "Holistic Healing". The study also offers a theological reflection on disability in the Bible. This is based, on the one hand, on findings from Bible studies with PWDs and Presbyterian Church leaders and lecturers; and, on the other hand, on interviews conducted with Protestant Church leaders and religion lecturers, and Catholic high school pupils. These investigations were conducted in order to develop a holistic educational programme for PWDs in the DRC, which is proposed as a programme in Social Transformation.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ACRONYMS .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>viii</b>

### **CHAPTER ONE .....**

#### **INTRODUCTION.....**

1.0 Background and research question.....	1
1.1 Locating the research within the literature .....	5
1.1.1 Education for people with disabilities .....	5
1.1.2 Interpreting the Bible from the perspective of poor and marginalized people .....	7
1.2 Theoretical framework of the study .....	10
1.2.1 Liberation theology of disability .....	10
1.2.2 Theories of personality .....	13
1.2.3 Christian education theory.....	15
1.3 Methodology of the study (Research design and process).....	16
1.3.1 Localization .....	16
1.3.2 Research sample .....	17
1.3.3 Bible Study .....	18
1.3.4 Interviews .....	19
1.4 A summary of the structure of the study .....	20

### **CHAPTER TWO .....**

#### **EXPLORATION OF THE SITUATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, (DRC).....**

2.0 Introduction .....	23
2.1 Location and identification of people with disabilities .....	26
2.2. “Disabled” as a socio-cultural and spiritual concept in the DRC .....	29
2.2.1 Disability, family and environment .....	31

2.2.2 Disability and education .....	34
2.2.3 Disability and church.....	36
2.3 Conclusion.....	39
<b>CHAPTER THREE .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>ENCOUNTERING CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES .....</b>	<b>40</b>
3.0 Introduction .....	40
3.1 Contextual Bible Study as a methodology .....	42
3.2 Construction of Contextual Bible Study. ....	43
3.3 Components of Contextual Bible Study related to the disability perspective.....	49
3.3.1 Participants .....	49
3.3.2 Facilitation.....	52
3.3.3 “Reading with” in Contextual Bible Study.....	54
3.3.4 Socially engaged dimension .....	60
3.4. Conclusion.....	64
<b>CHAPTER FOUR.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY ON EXODUS 4, 1-17 .....</b>	<b>65</b>
4.0 Introduction .....	65
4.1 Introduction of the text of Exodus 4, 1-17 .....	66
4.1.1 Construction of Contextual Bible Study.....	67
4. 1.2 Participants .....	70
4.2 A description of Contextual Bible Study on Exodus 4, 1-17.....	71
4. 2.1 Bible study with MP group.....	71
4.2.2 Bible study with MW group .....	81
4.2.2.1 Summary.....	90
4.3 Analysis and Interpretation .....	91
4.4 Autobiographical criticism.....	102
4.4.1 Summary.....	105
4.5 People with disabilities in dialogue with scholars .....	106
4.6 Conclusion.....	112

<b>CHAPTER FIVE .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 12, 1-10 .....</b>	<b>113</b>
5.0 Introduction .....	113
5. 1. Introduction of the text 2 Corinthians 12, 1-12.....	1133
5.1.1 Construction of Contextual Bible Study questions.....	115
5.2 Participants.....	117
5.3 A description of Contextual Bible Study focusing on 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10.....	117
5.4 Analysis and Interpretation .....	1277
5.5 Autobiographical Criticism.....	135
5.5.1. Summary.....	140
5.6 People with disabilities in dialogue with scholars .....	140
5.7 Conclusion.....	148
<b>CHAPTER SIX .....</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY ON ACTS 3, 1-11.....</b>	<b>149</b>
6.0 Introduction .....	149
6.1 Introduction of the text of Acts 3, 1-11 .....	149
6.1.1 Construction of Contextual Bible Study.....	151
6. 2 Participants.....	153
6.3 A description of Contextual Bible Study on Acts 3, 1-11.....	153
6.4 Analysis and Interpretation .....	163
6.5 Autobiographical Criticism.....	172
6.5.1 Summary.....	176
6.6 People with disabilities in dialogue with scholars .....	177
6.7 Conclusion.....	181
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN.....</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>INTERVIEWS.....</b>	<b>182</b>
7.0 Introduction .....	182
7.1 Description of the population.....	182
7.2 Methodology for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires .....	183
7.2 .1 Interview with Protestant Church leaders and religion lecturers .....	183

7.2.2 Interviews with Catholic high school pupils .....	188
7.2.2.1 Blind pupils' responses.....	189
7.3 Conclusion.....	192
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT .....</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON DISABILITY IN THE BIBLE: THE PROVISION OF A HOLISTIC EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES .....</b>	<b>193</b>
8.0 Introduction .....	193
8.1 Assessment of the findings.....	193
8.1.1 Bible studies .....	193
8. 2 Intersection of findings.....	197
8. 3. Theological reflection on the four themes (body, suffering, acceptance and healing) in the Bible .....	201
8.3.1 Theology of the weak body .....	202
8.3.2 Theology of Suffering .....	207
8. 3.3 Theology of Acceptance.....	211
8. 3.4. Theology of Healing.....	216
8.4 Conclusion.....	220
<b>CHAPTER NINE .....</b>	<b>221</b>
<b>HOLISTIC EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: A CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.....</b>	<b>221</b>
9.0 Introduction .....	221
9.1 Recommendations and suggestions.....	222
9.1.1 Recommendations and suggestions regarding people with disabilities.....	223
9.1.2 Recommendations and suggestions regarding church leaders .....	223
9.1.3 Recommendations and suggestions addressed to religion lecturers .....	224
9.2 Educational Programme (DST curriculum) .....	224
9.2.1 Governance and Administration.....	225
9.2.2 Length and Weight of the programme.....	225
9.2.3 Programme Integration & Balance .....	225
9.2.4 Academic Requirements for Admission.....	225
9.2.5. Programme Objective .....	226

9.2.6 Guided Practical Experience .....	226
9.2.7 Methodology.....	226
9.3 Conclusion.....	226
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>Annexure 1.....</b>	<b>242</b>
<b>Annexure 2.....</b>	<b>248</b>
<b>Annexure 3.....</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>Annexure 4.....</b>	<b>252</b>
<b>Annexure 5.....</b>	<b>253</b>
<b>Annexure 6.....</b>	<b>254</b>
<b>Annexure 7.....</b>	<b>256</b>

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background and research question

Whether disabled or not, all human beings have the right to a holistic education. This assumption challenges the misconception that “people with disabilities are able only to learn manual skills”.<sup>1</sup> Holistic education occurs in different ways and in different contexts. Peter Jarvis and Stella Parker, in *Human Learning: An holistic approach*, hold that holistic education for everyone starts with self-acknowledgment or finding an identity. This then leads individuals to connect with the community because of the “harmony between the inner life and outer life”.<sup>2</sup> Karen B. Tye, goes further and explains how holistic education “is concerned with the development of every person’s intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, creative and spiritual potentials”.<sup>3</sup> This means that it can help students to reconstruct an experience of being transformed and of being able to interact with the other.<sup>4</sup>

Holistic education in this study is understood as concerning cognitive, emotional and physical aspects (head, heart and hand). The study focuses on the emotional aspect (**heart**), which is the spiritual and psychological dimension, as a core of holistic education.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This misconception that shapes beliefs about and attitudes towards disability is “individually experienced but socially constituted”, so that people with disabilities are seen as unfortunate and disability is perceived as abnormal. This is a reflection of the social classification system, which underlies education (James I. Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment* (University of California Press, 1998), 25, 53). Therefore, children with disabilities are placed in special schools; moreover, people with disabilities do not access further education at colleges and institutions. (Janet A. Lees, ‘Interpreting the Bible with People with Communication Difficulties’ (MA Thesis, UKZN, 1997), 29; Brian J. Doyle, *Disability Discrimination: Law and practice*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (Bristol: Jordan, 2005), 213. Thus, in the DRC most people with physical disabilities are placed in training centers to learn manual skills; and those who have auditory, visual and mental disabilities are taught in special schools.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Jarvis and Stella Parker, *Human Learning: An holistic approach* (London: Routledge, 2005), 1; Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 47; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 44-45.

<sup>3</sup> Karen B. Tye, *Basics of Christian Education* (Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000), 12; Jarvis and Parker, *Human Learning*, 2005, 14.

<sup>4</sup> Jarvis and Parker, *Human Learning*, 2005, 14.

<sup>5</sup> “Holistic Education is based on the premises that each person finds identity, meaning and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to spiritual values such as compassion and peace” Ron Miller, <<http://www.infed.org/biblio/holisticeducation.htm>> [5/04/12]. The philosophy of holism advocates a transformative approach to learning. In this study, I argue that the emotional aspect is a core aspect of holistic education, together with the cognitive and physical aspects. This means spiritual and psychological aspects are seen as a foundation of holistic education in the sense that PWDs have been alienated in their minds by mainstream beliefs. As a consequence, most feel cursed and unwanted by God and by their community.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the educational programmes for people with disabilities (PWDs), both teaching and training, lag behind similar programmes in other countries and this perpetuates discrimination against people with disabilities.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, most people with disabilities are found among the illiterate groups in society, probably because their families still believe that to educate a person with a disability is to waste energy, time and money.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, many centres for people with disabilities in Kinshasa focus on imparting manual skills developing only the physical aspect (**hand**), as if all people with disabilities require no more than manual skills to enable them to survive. While it is true that many people with disabilities have developed extraordinary artistic skills in tailoring, ceramic art and painting, their intellectual capabilities (**head**) have not been catered for sufficiently in formal education. In other words, the existing programmes for people with disabilities at the training centres in the DRC focus too much on the physical aspect and ignore other aspects (head and heart), which indicates that the education they provide is not holistic.

Therefore, people with disabilities are still suffering from a sense of inferiority, which can lead to frustration, rejection and rebellion (against self, family, society and God). In their behaviour, this may be manifested in aggressiveness and isolation. It is important to note that this situation is largely due to the perception in society, which is often emotionally based, that people with disabilities are “lesser human beings”. “*Handicape*” (the disabled)<sup>8</sup> as they are pejoratively and commonly called in Kinshasa are viewed as subjected to a curse and needing deliverance. In this context a popular novelist in the DRC, ZamengaBatukezanga has denounced the spread of such misconceptions by titling one of his novels: *Homme comme toi* (as human as you are).<sup>9</sup>

From my educational and ministerial experience as a woman with a disability, I have realized that these misconceptions are perpetuated by (among other reasons) a lack of good biblical

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Therefore, in this study, the re-reading of the Bible will bring about a transformation within the self and toward others.

<sup>6</sup> ZamengaBatukezanga, *L'Enseignement pour handicapés au service des valides* (Kinshasa: Press Kikese, 1981), 57-58; Discours du président Joseph Kabila, Congo avenir, 2008. <[http://www.congoavenir.com/capitalisme\\_social.php](http://www.congoavenir.com/capitalisme_social.php)> [22/06/2010]

<sup>7</sup> Micheline Kamba, ‘Integration sociale des personnes avec handicap: une approche psycho-pastorale’, inedit Travail de Memoire de Licence (UPC, 1996), 3.

<sup>8</sup> This term “handicape” (disabled) is internalized in DRC as implying that a person who has any disability is a sick or abnormal person. The term disabled is expressed in DRC’s ethnic languages as “koka”, “kilema”, “thibombu”, “mwela”. These terms express that a person who has a disability is not fully human and that he/she has nothing.

<sup>9</sup> ZamengaBatukezanga, *Homme comme toi* (Kinshasa: Press Kikese, 1978), 38.

teaching: in the DRC the Bible is taken seriously by the majority of people. Hence, a reinterpretation of biblical teachings concerning disability should contribute to a more conducive environment for people with disabilities. The creation of IMAN'ENDA Ministries was a response to this need.

IMAN'ENDA is a pastoral ministry for people with disabilities,<sup>10</sup> founded in 1997 in Kinshasa, DRC, by the researcher, Micheline Kamba. The name IMAN'ENDA comes from Acts 3,6, and means, in one of the DRC's ethnic languages, "stand up and walk". The objectives of IMAN'ENDA are to deal with the psychosocial and spiritual needs of people with disabilities. The basis of IMAN'ENDA is the Bible, which is used to develop self-understanding and a sense of responsibility to take action to improve the lives of people with disabilities. IMAN'ENDA is engaged in helping the families of people with disabilities to show affection and care for them. The main sites where IMAN'ENDA is active are families, churches and training centres for people with disabilities. IMAN'ENDA has organized exhibition days in various places to display the art made by people with disabilities; and the organization also runs special sessions of awareness about disability in different churches and training centres.

There are two categories of members in this organization: people with disabilities (all categories of disability) and the apparently able-bodied (in French *apparemment valides*). The apparently able-bodied are volunteers who have been taught by IMAN'ENDA and who accept that a person with a disability is a "normal person"; that, furthermore, everybody has a disability whether apparent or not; and that suffering can become dignified by finding meaning in it (2 Corinthians 12, 8-12 and Acts 3, 1-7 are the basic texts of this theory). In this study I link Contextual Bible Study<sup>11</sup> with the practice of IMAN'ENDA because the

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<sup>10</sup> Rather than a "disabled person", a "person with a disability" is the term preferred by the disability-rights movement to correct the language as a "sign of paying respect". Using this term means that the researcher takes part in "ongoing discourse" around disability (Bonnie G. Smith and Beth Hutchison, *Gendering Disability* (Rutgers University, 2004), 94-95; Arne Fritzson and Samuel Kabue, *Interpreting Disability: A Church of All and for All* (Geneva: WCC Publication, 2004), viii; Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2008), 45; James Charlton, *Nothing About Us*, 1998, 8, 65; Patricia Bruce, 'A Daughter of Abraham: Luke 13, 10-17 and the Inclusion of People with Disabilities', *Journal of Constructive Theology*. Vol. 11, No. 1, 2005, 3-27). For my purpose in this study I use "*Personne avec handicap*" (person with a disability) in a psycho-spiritual framework, meaning that a person who has a disability, has to recognize that above all, he/she is God's creation and has been created to connect to all life in perfect harmony. (Jean Marie Aubert, *Droit de l'Homme et Liberation Evangelique* (Paris: Du Centron, 1987), in Kamba, 'Integration sociale des personnes avec handicap', 1996, 9).

<sup>11</sup> Contextual Bible Study is a particular method for interpreting the Bible in the South African context, conceived by the Ujamaa Center. The structured organizations of poor and marginalized people are the venues



process of Contextual Bible Study shapes the praxis of IMAN'ENDA. While IMAN'ENDA has used traditional training, including testimonies and preaching, it has rather focused on encouraging the participants to “learn by listening to others, and learn by sharing their own contributions”.<sup>12</sup>

This study will examine the particular educational paradigm that is practiced in the IMAN'ENDA Ministries. I intend to respond to the question: how can the Bible be used as a resource to contribute to a holistic education of people with disabilities? The value of this study lies in the spiritual and psychological components that will contribute to a holistic education.

In recent years various aspects of disability studies have been developed, also as part of biblical studies scholarship in Europe and North America.<sup>13</sup> The approach to the issue of disability has changed significantly in Western society, and has started to do so in African society as well. However, this study is limited to serve a specific aim: how Bible studies from a disability perspective can be integrated into a Christian educational programme. Therefore, this study seeks a Christian educational programme that will serve to nurture the abilities of people with disabilities so that they become effective in the community for the purpose of social transformation. Such a programme could be used to educate, firstly, people with disabilities and their families and, secondly, leaders/teachers of the specialized training centres in Kinshasa and of other organizations and churches. This research aims to examine whether, and how, programmes like IMAN'ENDA, can be further developed and can contribute to the above goal of transformation in all sphere of the society for the sake of people with disabilities. As one outcome of my research I will propose an academic programme, a “Diploma in Social Transformation,” that draws on the findings contained in this dissertation.

Therefore, the integration of a marginalized person in society needs to be well prepared. First and foremost this requires that he/she has self-esteem. Before a person with a disability associates with non-disabled people, he or she has to ask the question, “Who am I?”<sup>14</sup> A lack of self-confidence may lead to a sense of inferiority, which in the case of people with

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of the Ujamaa Centre for doing Bible studies (Gerald O West, ‘Contextual Bible Reading: a South African Case Study’ in *Analecta Bruxellensia* (Brussels, F.U.T.P, 2006), 23).

<sup>12</sup> Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study* (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 1993), 73.

<sup>13</sup> Hector Avalos, S.J. Melcher and J. Schipper, *This Able Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*. (Atlanta, SBL, 2007), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Kamba, ‘Integration sociale’, 1996, 2.

disabilities means that they compare themselves unfavourably with apparently able-bodied people. In this comparison they ignore their capacities and deplore their disabilities. They do not perceive their potential but focus on their ignorance. They do not accept what they have, but despise themselves for what they lack.<sup>15</sup> This may well be one of the main reasons why people with disabilities need a holistic educational programme, addressing first of all the psychological and spiritual aspects, using the Bible as a resource to empower them so that they can develop a more positive identity.

## **1.1 Locating the research within the literature**

Several scholars have broadly analysed the education of people with disabilities from different viewpoints, but biblical educational literature has rarely been written from a disability perspective.

This section will explore, firstly, literature on the general education of people with disabilities, looking at how some scholars have examined the issue of a holistic education using different approaches and, secondly, literature on how, through Contextual Bible Study, scholars have developed a new way of interpreting the Bible from the perspective of poor and marginalized people for the sake of social transformation. This approach provides a model for the application of Contextual Bible Study to the educational situation of people with disabilities.

### **1.1.1 Education for people with disabilities**

The 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education reaffirms the right to education of every individual, as preserved in the 1948 United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and renews the pledge made by the world community at the World Conference on Education for All to ensure rights for all regardless of individual differences.<sup>16</sup> The statement also mentions the 1993 UN standard rules on the

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<sup>15</sup> Alfred Adler, *Connaissance de l'homme, etude de caracteriologie individuelle* (Paris Mayot, 1966) in Micheline Kamba, 'Integrationsociale'. (UPC, 1996), 5.

<sup>16</sup> The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. (UNESCO 1994) <<http://www.gov.za/reports/2002>> [28/08/2008]; Doyle, *Disabilty Discrimination*, 2005, 208.

equalization of opportunities that states that the education of the disabled child should be an integral part of the education system.<sup>17</sup>

In 2000 at Dakar, UNESCO launched a campaign “Education for All” (EFA).<sup>18</sup> This embraced the idea of inclusive education, which is a fundamental right for everybody regardless of his or her physical condition or individual difficulties. However, this inclusive education has remained a contentious issue among scholars. Maurice Reucain and Zamenga Batukezanga argue that special schools or specialized centres should be used to empower people with disabilities before they enter mainstream schools.<sup>19</sup> Batukezanga argues that a special school is convenient for people who have a sensory disability, for example deaf and blind people and people with mental disabilities; such a special school is used to technically skill people so that they can be integrated into society. As Reucain demonstrates, in the French tradition, deaf and blind people are trained separately in sign language and Braille; thereafter they are able to learn together with other people.

Other scholars hold the opinion that the mainstream education system, which separates the disabled from the non-disabled, causes discrimination between children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. According to Janet Lees, quoting Barnes, “segregated or special schools are a fundamental part of the discriminatory process”.<sup>20</sup> Lees shows how “segregated education” contributes deeply to marginalizing people with disabilities in society. Lees supports Barnes’ position that outlines how “segregated education” contributes to the medical or welfare model of disability.<sup>21</sup> It is true, as Lees claims, that special schools have not provided many opportunities for children with disabilities and non-disabled children to mingle freely and openly with each other, as a result of which the concept of disability will remain, linked with “special” in the minds of non-disabled children. However, many children with disabilities, who have never been loved by their families and who have often been hidden or kept separate from society, may be unable to cope with sharing a classroom with their non-disabled peers. Regarding this issue, Susie Miles states that children with

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<sup>17</sup>Susie Miles, ‘Enabling Inclusive Education: Challenge and Dilemma’, 2000. [http://www.eenet.org.uk/theory\\_practice/bonn\\_2shtml](http://www.eenet.org.uk/theory_practice/bonn_2shtml) [28/08/2008]

<sup>18</sup>Dossier ouvert sur l’éducation intégratrice, Matériels de soutien pour les administrateurs et les planificateurs (UNESCO 2003), 3; Doyle, *Disability Discrimination*, 2005, 209.

<sup>19</sup> Maurice Reuchlin, *Traite de psychologie appliquée T7. La Psychologie appliquée au diagnostic des handicapés et à la rééducation* (Paris : PUF, 1973), 74; Zamenga Batukezanga, *L’Enseignement pour handicapés au service des valides* (Kinshasa : PressKikesa, 1981), 56.

<sup>20</sup> Barnes in Janet A. Lees, ‘Interpreting the Bible with people with communication difficulties’. (MA Thesis 1997), 29.

<sup>21</sup> Lees, ‘Interpreting the Bible’, 1997, 30; The ‘Medical and Social Model of Disability’ is explained in detail by Paul Chappell in his courses in Disabilities Studies (CREATE 2006).

disabilities, especially those with severe learning difficulties may need long-term “self-help skills”, together with the assistance of family and society.<sup>22</sup> Pam McLaren and Sue Philpott argue, “...Disabled people should be involved in shaping an inclusive society”.<sup>23</sup> The present study will follow the logic that people with disabilities have to be well prepared to meet non-disabled people, while non-disabled people should be equipped with appropriate skills and knowledge to ensure that they understand the needs of people with disabilities. With regard to the need for holistic education, this study will focus on the psycho-spiritual aspects using Bible study as a method, in order to enable people with disabilities to view themselves on a level equal with others.

### **1.1.2 Interpreting the Bible from the perspective of poor and marginalized people**

The main question posed by Walter Brueggemann in his article, “Passion and Perspective: Two Dimensions of Education in the Bible”, is how the Bible can be a tool in education.<sup>24</sup> Brueggemann’s view is that the Bible can function as an educational instrument of empowerment and capacity building among people without “social value”. Brueggemann in his book, *The Bible Makes Sense*, demonstrates how the Bible offers treasures to those who “lack expertise” but want to understand the meaning of life. Thus, Brueggemann argues, the Bible offers an opportunity to explore the real identity of people and the realities of life.<sup>25</sup> This poses a challenge to people with disabilities who are regarded as helpless and who are treated without consideration in society. So, the Bible “serves to make people aware of God’s promises of a better future in the world”<sup>26</sup> for all people, regardless of their situation. Brueggemann states, “Serious scripture study calls one to repentance and invites one to a changed conceptual world”.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly the Ujamaa Centre, under the leadership of Gerald West, finds a new way to interpret the Bible for the purpose of social transformation in the context of oppression in

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<sup>22</sup> Miles, ‘Enabling Inclusive Education’, 2000.<[http://www.eenet.org.uk/theory\\_practice/bonn\\_2shtml](http://www.eenet.org.uk/theory_practice/bonn_2shtml)> [25/09/2007]

<sup>23</sup> Pam MacLaren & Sue Philpott, ‘Principles of Inclusivity’, concept paper (Howick: DART, 2007), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Walter Brueggemann, ‘Passion and Perspective: Two Dimensions of Education in the Bible’. *Theology Today*, Vol42, No. 2, July 1985.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense*. Rev. ed. (Louisville-London: John Knox Press, 2001), 1, 10.

<sup>26</sup> A quotation from Brueggemann in Raymond Simangaliso Kumalo, ‘Theology and Education: the role of the churches in education for social transformation: a Methodist transformation’, unpublished PhD thesis (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal, 2005), 13.

<sup>27</sup> Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense*, 2001, 85.

South Africa.<sup>28</sup> West states that liberation hermeneutics begins with the needs and concerns of poor and marginalized communities, such as “non-persons, the poor, the exploited classes, the marginalized races, and all the despised cultures”.<sup>29</sup> West argues that Contextual Bible Study contributes by “creating sacred (and safe) space for social transformation”. In this process the poor and marginalized people have much to contribute to Bible Studies by presenting and making their own interpretations of biblical text.<sup>30</sup> West terms this category of people “ordinary readers”, some of whom are illiterate, and all of whom can read the Bible without being trained.<sup>31</sup> West indicates that there are four steps for “socially engaged biblical scholars”<sup>32</sup> who are committed to Contextual Bible Study. The first is to read the Bible from the perspective of the marginalized. The second is to allow a collaborative interpretation or “sharing skills”: from this comes the term “read with” as opposed to “read for”. The third way is to read the Bible critically using the available resources and structured methods of Biblical scholars. The fourth is to use the Bible for social transformation.

This process helps the “ordinary readers” to “articulate” and “own” their “embodied theologies”,<sup>33</sup> which are theologies that exist through their lived experience. West shows how the contribution of Contextual Bible Study with the participation of biblical scholars and the experience of “community-based activists”, offers resources for the “articulation and owning of embodied theologies”.<sup>34</sup>

From a disability perspective, most people with disabilities have a “sense of ultimate presence” in their pain and their context. Thus this study looks, firstly, at how the Bible could be used as a resource for the “articulation” and “owning” of an “embodied disability theology”. Secondly, it looks at how to train able-bodied people (church leaders and training center teachers) through the Bible to also embrace their own “embodied disability theologies”.<sup>35</sup> This leads to the empowerment of both the people with disabilities and able-

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<sup>28</sup> Gerald O. West, *Contextual Bible Study*. (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 1993), 86-87.

<sup>29</sup> West, ‘Contextual Bible Reading: a South African Case Study’, *Analecta Bruxellensia*, 2006 7; West, *The Academy of the Poor: towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*. (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 2003), 5.

<sup>30</sup> West, ‘Contextual Bible Study: Creating Sacred (and Safe) space for Social Transformation’, *Grace & Truth Journal of Catholic Reflection*. Vol 16, No 2, 1999, 51.

<sup>31</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 1993, 9.

<sup>32</sup> “Socially engaged biblical scholars” are those who have been trained and have structured methods for reading the Bible critically.

<sup>33</sup> West, ‘Articulating, Owning and Mainstreaming Local Theologies: The Contribution of Contextual Bible Study’, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. Vol 122, 2005, 23-35.

<sup>34</sup> West, ‘Articulating, Owning and Mainstreaming’, 2005, 33.

<sup>35</sup> Regarding “embodied disability theologies”, as person with a disability, I have experienced that everyone who has a disability has a certain understanding of God, because suffering, pain and fear of life lead someone who is

bodied people as they interact during the Bible study. Janet Lees, who has focused on people with communication difficulties in her study, argues that interpreting the Bible from a disability perspective presents a challenge to people with disabilities and to non-disabled people to interpret the Bible together for the sake of their individual and social transformation.<sup>36</sup> Lees' study offers methods for learning how to "read with" and interpret the Bible from the perspective of people with communication difficulties. For example, Lees outlines an interpretation of the liberation text (Isaiah 35, 6) that mentions "the day of the Lord", when "the Messiah's coming as God lifts the curse from His creation".<sup>37</sup> Lees interprets "the day of the Lord" as a time when people with disabilities, including those with communication disorders are no longer marginalized.<sup>38</sup> This kind of interpretation would be significant and valuable for people with disabilities while interacting in Bible study. Such interpretations can create bridges between biblical scholars (who are non-disabled) and people with disabilities.

Sarojini Nadar, in her PhD dissertation, "Ideology and Interpretation: Womanist and Literary Perspectives on the book of Esther as Resources for Gender-Social Transformation" interprets the Bible in a faith community based on a womanist perspective. Her study is also grounded in the contextual method as defined by West but with certain differences. Nadar does not "read with" the women in the community. She feels that she is "flesh and blood", being part of this community; but she also has knowledge about how the Bible is interpreted to oppress women. Nadar is thus committed to "read to" the women in the community and to offer them resources for interpreting the Bible that will enable them to face those who misinterpret it for the purpose of oppression. In other words, what Nadar highlights is that Contextual Bible Study is a place to conscientize women, to make them aware of the oppressive scriptures and cultural and social systems, and to assist them to work for social

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struggling with these things to think about God. Recent Anglo-Saxon approaches within disability and theology, have been distinguished as the "liberation theology of disability"; the "theology of access"; the "theology of community"; and the "theology of being human" according to the aims and concerns of each protagonist. (Reinders, *Receiving the Gift*, 2008, 164). This shows that how PWDs think about disability from God's perspective depends on their lived experiences. In view of this, I agree with West that it is necessary to look at how Contextual Bible Study can help people with disabilities to "in/corporate" their understanding of God, and how the Bible can be used as a fresh resource for training able-bodied people to "own" and "articulate" their embodied disability theologies.

<sup>36</sup> Lees, 'Interpreting the Bible', 1997, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Commentary from Ilumina, The World's First Digitally Animated Bible and Encyclopedia SUITE, <<http://www.tyndale.com>> [03/05/2010]

<sup>38</sup> Lees, 'Interpreting the Bible', 1997, 10.

transformation.<sup>39</sup> The current study however, employs the method of “reading with” in Bible study.<sup>40</sup> The implication of “reading with” from a disability perspective is to consider the “subjectivity” of two groups of people, the non-disabled people and people with disabilities. This will enable them to accept their differences and will allow them to enrich each other with their experiences.<sup>41</sup> Despite this, there is a similarity between Nadar’s research and this study: both focus on using Contextual Bible Study as a method to further, with the concerns and needs of marginalized people in mind, the purpose of social transformation.

## 1.2 Theoretical framework of the study

### 1.2.1 Liberation theology of disability

A liberation theology of disability defined by Nancy L. Eiesland in her book, *The Disabled God*, constitutes the main theory in the theoretical framework of this study.

Eiesland draws up a liberation theology of disability as a part of an embodiment (a lived experience) of disability which requires a “commitment”<sup>42</sup> to people with disabilities for their liberation. Eiesland explains as follows:

-A liberation theology of disability expresses the lifelong struggle that people with disabilities have to face against widespread discrimination within church and society.

-A liberation theology of disability maintains that the condition of people with disabilities belongs to normal life; it also “empowers” and “collaborates” with people with disabilities who are struggling for “justice in concrete situations”.<sup>43</sup> This liberation can create self-confidence among people with disabilities to reclaim their real identity as being made in

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<sup>39</sup> After reading many articles written by Sarojini Nadar, I have understood that she differentiates between “reading to” and “teaching with” using “Contextual Theology”. I will discuss this later in chapter 3. However, what is interesting for the purpose of this study is to explore another comparison, namely that between “reading to” and “reading with” (Sarojini Nadar, ‘Power, Ideology and Interpretation/s: Womanist and Literary on the Book of Esther as resources for Gender-Social Transformation’. Unpublished PhD Thesis (University of Natal, 2003), 187.

<sup>40</sup> West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently – Giving Shape to the Discourse of Domination’, *Semeia*. (Atlanta: Society Biblical Literature, SBL, 1996), 26, 21-38; Musa Dube, ‘Reading of Semoya: Botswana Women’s Interpretation of Matt. 18, 21-28, *Semeia*. (SBL, 1996), Vol 73, 111-129; R.J Weems, ‘Response to “Reading with”’, *Semeia*. (SBL, 1996), 258, 257-262.

<sup>41</sup> West, ‘Reading the Bible differently’, 1996, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberation Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 86.

<sup>43</sup> Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 1994, p86.

God's image, rather than meekly suffering under oppression, which excludes and denigrates them.

Eiesland's work and her "liberation theology of disability" arouse critical discussion among scholars of theology and disability. The discussion focuses on the formal level of the method and strategy that Eiesland puts forward. For example, Hans S. Reinders in his book, *Receiving the Gift*, outlines in a critical way the different approaches to theology and disability, especially in Anglo-Saxon literature. Reinders, whose work deals with people with intellectual disabilities, probes theology and disability from an anthropological perspective, in order to examine what a "theological voice might contribute in the struggle for inclusion" that does not reproduce the "hierarchy of disability". Reinders thus argues against the disability-rights approach in which each disability is categorized. The key issue of the disability movement for liberation, similar to Eiesland's focus, is rather self-representation, a task in which it is difficult for people with an intellectual disability to be incorporated.<sup>44</sup>

Scot Danforth, in his article 'Liberation Theology of Disability and the option for the poor' argues along the same lines as Reinders that though Eiesland's "political goals are focused mainly on social change within the Christian Church itself", the broader society of disabled people, especially those from the (majority) developing world (the poor) and "the implication of an emancipatory Christianity [in view of] multiple prejudices and oppressive circumstances" that PWDs experience, are not amply addressed in Eiesland's work.<sup>45</sup>

However, Pauline A. Otieno explains how Eiesland's liberatory theology of disability is grounded in the fight against all socio-cultural and theological barriers which have excluded people with disabilities from being fully involved in society. Hence, Eiesland rejects definitions which portray disability negatively and provides a strong argument that "the disablement experienced by people with disabilities is socially constructed and therefore opens the possibilities of transformation".<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, 2008, 160-161, 164; see also Sharon V. Betcher, "Rehabilitating Religious Discourse: Bringing Disability Studies to the Theological Venue", *Religious Studies Review* (Valparaiso University, 2001), Vol 27, no 4, 341-348

<sup>45</sup> Scot Danforth, 'Liberation Theology of Disability and the option for the poor in *Disability Studies Quarterly* (University of Missouri, 2005), Vol. 25, No 3 <<http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/572/749>> [22/10/2008]

<sup>46</sup> Pauline A. Otieno, 'Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Disability: Implications on the Rights of Persons with Disability in Kenya' in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 2009, Vol. 29, No 4.



In this regard, I argue that liberation theorists have underplayed the significance of the personal dimension of disability and the resources that spirituality provides. This study will however not attempt to analyze the virtues of Eiesland's theory of the liberation theology of disability. Rather, the liberation theology of disability in this study involves the recognition and acceptance of the body's limits and the transcendence of these by means of interpersonal relations to effect social transformation. As Deborah Creamer states, "The recognition of limits opens up the new understandings of creativity, community, and interdependence".<sup>47</sup>

Against a background of a liberation theology of disability, in this study, I adopt a form of biblical interpretation referred to as, "autobiographical criticism". In using this approach I draw on the resources of my own disability experience, and on my experience of working with PWDs. Tim Long, in his article, 'A Real Reader Reading Revelation', states, "...It follows from this that for each [reading] the reader is a maker of meaning in the act of reading".<sup>48</sup> He adds, "to be in a conversation [interpretation] means to be beyond oneself, to think with the other and to come back to oneself as if to another".<sup>49</sup> This clarifies what Laura Marcus states in *Auto/biographical Discourses*, namely that the approach might be described as dialectical relationship between self and the world, inside and outside, and self and others. In other words, my disability perspective, reading as an academic and as a person with disability and working with PWDs, will enlighten others to understand my reading differently.<sup>50</sup> Marcus explains this as follows: "If the autobiographer is "sincere" in the attempt to understand the self and to explain that self to others, then the "autobiographical intention" becomes accepted as serious one".<sup>51</sup>

Thus, my reading will be located within the literary and narrative approaches, using a psycho-spiritual perspective. In my re-reading of the biblical texts selected in this study (Exodus 4, 1-17; 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10 and Acts 3, 1-11) I will first read and interpret those texts with the participants of Bible study, and then I will interpret them on the basis of my own experience of disability and, finally, I will engage with material from other biblical scholars, bringing my own interpretation and that of the participants in the CBSs into dialogue with the work of

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<sup>47</sup> Deborah Beth Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 119-20.

<sup>48</sup> Tim Long, 'A Real Reader Reading Revelation', *Semeia*. Vol. 73, 1996, 79-106.

<sup>49</sup> Long, 'A Real Reader Reading', 1996, 88.

<sup>50</sup> Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Marcus, *Auto/biographical discourses*, 1994, 3.

other scholars.<sup>52</sup> Eiesland's framework, though its focus is sociological and ecclesial, is helpful in providing a theological interpretation of disability through the "emancipatory praxis of self-naming", in other words, identifying the self, a theory which encompasses spiritual and psychological perspectives.<sup>53</sup>

### 1.2.2 Theories of personality

The two theories of personality outlined by Victor Frankl and David N. Elkins<sup>54</sup> are adopted in this study. Victor Frankl's theory of personality focuses on the "research of meaning". He wrote first *The Doctor of Soul* and then *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl quotes Friedrich Nietzsche: "He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how".<sup>55</sup> Frankl argues that when dealing with any kind of emotional pain "...people who had great faith, tended to have better chances than those who had lost all hope".<sup>56</sup> He calls his form of therapy "logotherapy": the healing of soul. As opposed to other psychiatrists like Freud and Adler, Frankl's theory postulates "a will to meaning". He states, "Meaning must be found and cannot be given"<sup>57</sup> and hence being conscious and responsible as well as being active are the outcomes of having "meaning" in life.

Elkins' theory, like Frankl's, focuses on the meaning of soul. Elkins argues that those who abandon "soul" commit a major mistake.<sup>58</sup> Elkins notes, "Carl Jung was the first psychologist to emphasize the importance of the soul and to make it a major psychological construct".<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> This will be discussed later in chapter 3 in conclusion.

<sup>53</sup> Eiesland's praxis for the liberation of people with disabilities echoes the lesson which my late mother had taught me: "your problem is yours, you have to defend yourself and then the others can support you". (In my mother tongue, Ciluba: *bualubueba, baamba bikola badi hanshi bakukwambuluja*). This is similar to the Disability Civil Rights Movement's slogan in the US, "When others speak for you, you lose." (Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, 1998, 2). I argue that the liberation theology of disability, viewed through the psycho-spiritual lens, starts with self-acknowledgement and with the recognition that God stands beside those who are weak of body (2 Corinthians 12, 10; Betcher, "Rehabilitating Religious", 2001, 346; Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 1994, 83).

<sup>54</sup> Jean Massamba-ma Mpolo, 'La Logotherapie', de Victor Frankl, cours dispense en 1ere Annee de Licence en theologie, Kinshasa, inedit, (1993-1994), 29. (Logotherapy: the course dispensed by Prof. Jean Massamba-ma-Mpolo in Postgraduate at the Protestant University of Zaire, unpublished, UPZ, 1993-1994); David N. Elkins, 'Psychotherapy and spirituality: toward a theory of the Soul', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol 35.No 2. Spring, 1995, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche quoted in 1963, 121 in Personality Theories, 'Logotherapy' <<http://www.VictorFrankl.mht>> [03/09/2007].

<sup>56</sup> C. George Boeree, 'Personality theories: logotherapy' (Shippensburg University 2006). <<http://www.VictorFrankl.mht>> [03/09/2007].

<sup>57</sup> Victor E. Frankl, *The Will to Meaning* (Great Britain: Souvenir Press, 1971), 62.

<sup>58</sup> Elkins, 'Psychotherapy and spirituality', 1995, 77.

<sup>59</sup> Man in Search of Soul, 1993 in Elkins, 'Psychotherapy and spirituality' 1995, 78.

He adds that according to Jung, out of “all his patients over the age of 35, not one was healed who did not develop a spiritual orientation to life”.<sup>60</sup> Regarding Jung’s statement, Elkins argues that the soul and spirit form spirituality and are at the same “vertical” space or level, but the spirit is higher (at the level of intellect) and soul is very deep.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, in the field of spirituality, there are many questions related to how to overcome problems, how to deal with them, how to transcend them; these belong to spirit. It is thus important to engage in deep reflection to find the meaning of a problem. Elkins points out a new way for “searching the meaning” in spirituality. He states, “so much of our spirituality is about quoting, overcoming, growing...these all are animus functions, things of the spirit”<sup>62</sup>. He defines spirituality as a balance of soul and spirit. He adds, “Soul enters when our spirit has been crushed and our ego has fallen apart”.<sup>63</sup> This indicates the impact of the spiritual dimension on therapeutic practice. The common point between Frankl and Elkins is in the “search of soul”: the understanding of human nature to find deeper meaning. Although Frankl attempts to identify different broad approaches for finding meaning, he argues that there is “something much more fundamental” which he terms “supra-meaning” or “transcendence” and which involves looking for the highest and noblest. It “surpasses the infinite intellectual capacities of man”<sup>64</sup>; in its spiritual aspect this is related to God.

The implication of these theories of personality from a disability perspective is that people with disabilities need to find the meaning of their physical condition and discover it for themselves. As one psychologist says, “Disability is a frame of mind”. This means that people have a prejudice toward disability, while people with disabilities are prejudiced against themselves. Hence, psychotherapy, the healing of soul, is a starting-point for people with disabilities to be conscious of their responsibility to understand and find answers to questions such as “Who am I? What is disability? What is the theological significance of disability? How does the image of the disabled people reflect on non-disabled people? How can one interpret the weakness of people with disabilities in society?” They may then be able to deal with the spiritual dimension of how to restore their broken relationship with God.

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<sup>60</sup> Man in Search of Soul 1993 in Elkins, ‘Psychotherapy and spirituality’ 1995, 78-79.

<sup>61</sup> Man in Search of Soul 1993 in Elkins, ‘Psychotherapy and spirituality’ 1995, 78.

<sup>62</sup> Elkins, ‘Psychotherapy and spirituality’, 1995, 35.

<sup>63</sup> Elkins, ‘Psychotherapy and spirituality’, 1995, 86.

<sup>64</sup> Ann V. Graber, *Victor E. Frankl’s Logotherapy: Method of Choice in Ecumenical Pastoral Psychology* (USA: Wyndham Hall Press, 2004), 56.

In short, the spiritual dimension in therapeutic praxis helps people with disabilities to find meaning and wholeness, which can lead them to a positive identity. As regards able-bodied people, such theories of personality can help them to examine their own views and to correct their practices and attitudes toward people with disabilities.

### 1.2.3 Christian education theory

Christian education, according to Brueggemann, is part of mission and aims to bring about awareness of Christian matters through the church; he underlines that the real resource of Christian education is the Bible.<sup>65</sup> As Raymond S. Kumalo comments, “Education in the Bible serves to make people aware of God’s promises of a better future or world”.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile Paulo Freire states “the content of education is conscientization”.<sup>67</sup> By conscientization, Freire means a “search for self-affirmation”<sup>68</sup> which expresses liberation as a process in Christian education.<sup>69</sup> Freire adds that “freedom” (liberation) has to start with a “new *raison d’être* of the oppressed”.<sup>70</sup> Thus, oppressed people have to come to know who they are and what they have by encountering others, both in the Bible and in lived experience.

The implication of Contextual Bible Study as an instrument for enabling local Christians to “articulate” and “own” their understanding of God, mirrors one of the purposes of Christian Education.<sup>71</sup> West argues, “the dialogue between text and context enables participants to find and forge lines of connection between their embodied theologies and the Bible...establishing such lines of connection can be enormously empowering, particularly when the resources of biblical scholars enable unfamiliar texts...to be read, and familiar texts to be read in unfamiliar ways”.<sup>72</sup> This in turn implies that a holistic educational programme in Christian education from a disability perspective will be framed through the Bible study by encountering and interacting with others for full integration in society.

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<sup>65</sup> Brueggemann, ‘Passion and perspective’, 1985, 34.

<sup>66</sup> Kumalo, ‘Theology and Education’, 2005, 13.

<sup>67</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (New York , Continuum Press, 2000), 47.

<sup>68</sup> Freire, “*Pedagogy of the oppressed*”, 2000,47.

<sup>69</sup> Karen B. Tye, *Basics of Christian Education*. (Missouri, Chalice Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>70</sup> Freire, ‘*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*’, 2000, 66.

<sup>71</sup> West, ‘Articulating, Owning and Mainstreaming’, 2005, 23.

<sup>72</sup> West, ‘Articulating, Owning and Mainstreaming’, 2005, 28.

As noted above, people with disabilities have been affected by negative attitudes and feel excluded from the Church and society due in part to a lack of appropriate biblical interpretation. Therefore, this study uses three texts (Exodus 4, 1-17; 2 Corinthians 12, 8-10, Act 3, 1-8) as fresh resources to contribute to the provision of a holistic education for people with disabilities.

Thus the theory of Christian education from a disability perspective serves as a tool of liberation, using the Bible as a resource to empower people with disabilities as well as able-bodied people to be aware of the potentiality, uniqueness and particularity of each other with the aim of creating a safe place of mutual respect for all persons.

### **1.3 Methodology of the study (design and process)**

In disability studies, the methods are varied and “depend on the particular background and specialization of the researcher”<sup>73</sup> and the relevance of these to the process of the research. The method used in this study is that of Contextual Bible Study in the context of IMAN’ENDA’s teaching programme.

#### **1.3.1 Localization**

The research is situated in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is the main area of activity of the IMAN’ENDA Ministries, and also focuses on the church of the Presbyterian Community of Kinshasa (CPK).<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Avalos et al, *This Abled Body*, 2007, 4.

<sup>74</sup> “Communaute Presbyterienne de Kinshasa”, CPK (in English, Presbyterian Church of Kinshasa), is the 32nd church to become a member of the Church of Christ in Congo (CCC), a Protestant federation in DRC. The CPK was formed by Christians from central DRC, in the Kasai region. The founder of the CPK was the American Presbyterian Congo Mission (APM), which started its missionary work in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The distance and difficulties of communication made it necessary to establish an autonomous Church in Kinshasa, the capital of the country. In 1954, the APM established the CPK in Leopoldville as the Presbyterian Mission of Leopoldville (PML). After the country gained independence, the name of the PML was changed to the Communaute Presbyterienne de Kinshasa (CPK). The CPK belongs to reformed Churches with a membership of 67 436, 143 pastors and 186 congregations. The ecclesial structure of the CPK is Presbyterian, with consistories, presbyteries, synods and assemblies. In all of these, the decision-making bodies of the clergy (men and women) and the elders (men and women) are represented. The laity is organized in three federations: women, men and youth.

### 1.3.2 Research sample

The participants of the study include firstly the members of IMAN'ENDA. There are two categories of IMAN'ENDA members: people with disabilities and the apparently able-bodied and their relatives, included women pastors from the CPK.<sup>75</sup> Secondly, the participants include the Protestant Church<sup>76</sup> leaders and lecturers of religion while thirdly; they incorporate the Presbyterian Church leaders and lecturers of religion from the CPK, through IMAN'ENDA's monthly activities promoting disability awareness in various meetings or consultations. Lastly, the Catholic high school pupils from the Third Level<sup>77</sup> are among the participants in this study.

These participants comprise the main groups of my research samples, which fell into two categories: the “focus group” and “discussion group”. The focus group is a structured group and the participants of this group are regular and committed, making it an ideal study group.<sup>78</sup> The “discussion group” is an unstructured group and the participants are not constant; they are selected according to the requirements of the research.<sup>79</sup>

In this study, the first group consists of IMAN'ENDA members, forming the “focus group”, because it serves as the case study. It is an organized and formal group in which the members are regular and committed. The second group is composed of Protestant church leaders and religion lecturers, Presbyterian Church leaders and religion lectures and Catholic high school pupils from the third level, forming the “discussion group”. These groups are not formal or organized. The participants were selected occasionally as the need arose, depending on the circumstances and requirements of the research.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>A group of women pastors from the Presbyterian Church of Kinshasa (CPK), form part of the membership of IMAN'ENDA (see chapter 4).

<sup>76</sup>The Protestant Church is a union of 62 Church denominations, called *Eglise du Christ au Congo*, or ECC (Congo Church of Christ, CCC). ECC is known as the Protestant federation in DRC, because most denominations are from the Protestant mission. For more details see [www.ecc-sn.org](http://www.ecc-sn.org). This is all to clarify that the Presbyterian Church was representative in that meeting (2 delegates), because its belongs to ECC..

<sup>77</sup> Third Level, in Belgium system in DRC, is a third year in secondary school, called in French, *3ieme annee des humanites*. Normally children of 14 to 15 are expected to complete this level. But, in this group, I had children of 14, 15 and 16 years old.

<sup>76</sup>E. Lyons & Coyle, *Analyzing Qualitative Data in Psychology*. (Los Angeles, Sage, 2007) , 4

<sup>77</sup>Lyons & Coyle, *Analyzing Qualitative*, 2007, 4.

<sup>80</sup>The Protestant churches have not yet established groups for people with disabilities like Catholic churches have done. Yet they are receptive to any innovation for empowering poor and marginalized people.

I worked with these groups in two ways: on the one hand I conducted Bible studies with IMAN'ENDA members and Presbyterian Church leaders and religion lecturers; on the other hand, I held collective interviews with Protestant church leaders and religion lecturers and individual interviews with Catholic high school pupils. I used open-ended questions in my interviews with these groups through distributing questionnaires which participants answered in writing.

### **1.3.3 Bible Study**

In Contextual Bible Study (CBS), the Bible is used as a tool of transformation to empower people, equipping them with resources and enabling them to make a difference in society.<sup>81</sup> In this study, however, I used the CBS methodology for two purposes: firstly, CBS is used as an instrument for getting information on how people will react to this methodology. Secondly, the CBS is used as an educational resource for empowering people with disabilities, as well as church leaders and religion lecturers. The Bible study questionnaires that I used were the outcomes of a workshop conducted by Gerald West, Patricia Bruce and the researcher. The construction of CBS questions was based on our different experiences and expertise. Bruce has experience as a mother of a child with a disability and as a researcher of disability in ancient world; West has contributed his experience of working with marginalized people (people living with HIV and women) in Contextual Bible Study, and I contributed my own experience of disability and that of the members of IMAN'ENDA. That workshop was held on November 2008. This workshop was entitled, “The construction of Bible study questionnaires in the context of disability”, and followed the Ujamaa Centre’s guidelines for designing a CBS.

The process of Bible study took place with two groups designed for this study. Firstly, IMAN'ENDA members in which there are PWDs, apparently able-bodied people and women pastors from the Presbyterian Church; and secondly, Presbyterian Church leaders and religion lecturers.

The members of the IMAN'ENDA group had already been informed through a letter sent to them in October 2008 (see Annexure 2) that I would come to conduct my research with them.

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<sup>81</sup> West, ‘Articulating, Owning and Mainstreaming’, 2005, 27.

In meeting with them in January 2009, I explained in my introduction to them why I link IMAN'ENDA's working method to CBS, rather than teaching or preaching. They agreed to take part and were all excited to learn something new, especially with regard to the Bible. I conducted Bible studies with the IMAN'ENDA members on Exodus 4, 1-17 and on 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10.

In the category of Presbyterian Church leaders and religion lecturers, I wrote a letter in advance to the Church president, (see Annexure2) to request his permission to conduct a Bible study with all the Church leaders during their annual meeting. In January 2009 I received confirmation from the Church president, giving me the go-ahead. With this group, it was not necessary to introduce myself, because I was known to most of them as we served in the same Church. Yet, the Church president felt it necessary to introduce me formally.<sup>82</sup> The participants were all happy and willingly signed the consent paper for the research (see Annexure 6). I conducted the Bible study with this category of participants on Acts 3, 1-10.

### **1.3.4 Interviews**

I conducted group interviews with the Protestant church leaders and religion lecturers; and individual interviews with the Catholic high school pupils.

Interview questionnaires to these two groups cited above, were planned initially to begin before each Bible study as “awareness questions”, in order to gain information from apparently able-bodied people about their perceptions of disability.

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<sup>82</sup> Rev. Dr. JosueTshimungu, introduced me to Church leaders with these words: “We are pleased to welcome our daughter, today our colleague, Rev. Micheline Kamba. For those who do not know (the new comers in the Church), most of us knew her late father, Rev. Samuel Jobson Kamba Manji, who is one of the pillars of this Church, among those who were called the American Presbyterian Mission (APM) to come and establish the Communaute Presbyterienne de Kinshasa, CPK. Rev. Micheline Kamba was a sick child. At that time when she was born, many children died and there was not hope at that time in our country, for children who got poliomyelitis to survive. But by the grace of God, her parents (who were so committed to serve God, you knew also her mama, who led the Women’s Department in the CPK for 32 years) committed their daughter into God's hands so that God would help her to survive and even made a vow to God that if she survived then she would serve God. Today, we experience answers to the prayers of Rev. M. Kamba’s parents. Rev. M. Kamba is doing her doctorate studies in South Africa and she represents the Protestant churches of the DRC in the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, WCC. So, we are happy to welcome her in our annual meeting in the beginning of year 2009, to do Bible study with us, which is part of her research”.



For Protestant church leaders and religion lecturers, I conducted the interview collectively, using the opportunity of their annual meeting which was held in “Centre Shaumba” (a Protestant conference center). Having their input into this research was important for the future Christian Education in the Protestant Church, because they represent a significant body in the Church of Christ in the DRC. I discussed the procedure of the interview with them, after which I distributed the questionnaires, and they then wrote down their responses, which was followed by a discussion of the responses.

With the Catholic high school pupils from the third level, I conducted individual interviews in their school, the “Institut National pour Aveugles, INAV”. The school belongs to the Catholic Church in the DRC. The Catholic Church promotes inclusive education for all categories of disability. Thus the questionnaires were formulated in order to gain information on how young people understand disability and their experience of with living with people who are non-disabled. The process involved posing questions and receiving responses, which were written down.<sup>83</sup>

At the end of my analysis and interpretation of the Bible studies and the data collected from interviews, I will intersect all these responses and this will help me to answer the research question, which is “How can CBS methodology contribute to a holistic education of PWDs?” I will then also attempt to design a model for holistic education as part of a Christian education programme. The CBS is thus used as an educational resource for empowering people with disabilities, as well as church leaders and religion lecturers.

#### **1.4 A summary of the structure of the study**

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. All chapters are focused on the aim of the study which is to answer the question, “*How can the Bible be used as a resource to contribute to a holistic education of people with disabilities?*”

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<sup>83</sup>To ensure the consistently accurate recording of the sessions, I used a tape recorder for all interviews whether conducted collectively or individually. I was assisted by one person, who transcribed the responses.

Chapter one, “Introduction and Methodology”, forms the introduction and outlines the methodology used. It includes a discussion of the background of the study, the theoretical framework and localization of the study population

Chapter two, “Exploration of the situation of people with disabilities in DRC”, provides an overview of the situation of people with disabilities in the DRC in general and in particular in Kinshasa. It explores the socio-cultural dimension of the disability issue, which in turn impacts on the spiritual aspects to negatively reinforce the disability concept. This then challenges biblical interpretation to constructively address the issue of people with disabilities.

Chapter three, “Encountering Contextual Bible Study from the perspective of people with disabilities”, provides an analysis of CBS and identifies its key components as defined by Gerald West and his work with the Ujamaa Centre. The chapter then applies this method to the perspectives and the context of people with disabilities. It also presents the theoretical justification of the praxis of this study.

Chapter four, “Contextual Bible Study on Exodus 4, 1-17”, explores and analyzes two Bible studies on the same text. It presents the introduction of the text and the relevance of re-reading this text from the disability perspective. It then describes the process of each of the two Bible studies, and an analysis and interpretation of each is also presented. The chapter ends with a consideration by participants in the Bible study of scholars’ comments on the text.

Chapter five, “Contextual Bible Study on 2 Corinthians 12, 1-12”, presents the introduction of the text in general and, in particular, the section of 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10. It outlines the nature of the text and its relevance. It then describes the process of the Bible study, as well, after which the analysis and interpretation are presented. The chapter concludes with my commentary and with the presentation of a debate based on scholars’ comments on the text.

Chapter six, “Contextual Bible Study on Acts 3, 1-11”, presents the introduction of the text in general and in particular the section of Acts 3, 1-11. It outlines the nature of the text and its relevance to the study. Next, it describes the process of the Bible study, followed by the analysis and interpretation thereof. The chapter ends with my commentary, followed by a

discussion with the participants of the Bible study in dialogue with scholars' comments on this text.

Chapter seven, "Interviews", presents interviews that were conducted with Protestant Church Leaders and Catholic high school pupils on the issue of disability. These materials serve to provide information that supplements the results of Contextual Bible Study concerning the attitudes and beliefs on disability in DRC.

Chapter eight, "Theological reflection on disability in the Bible: The provision of a holistic education for people with disabilities", presents a summary of the results of the Bible studies and the process of CBS from a disability perspective, and also draws on the findings of the interviews that I conducted. It provides a theological reflection on the results of these findings. All this contributes to the design of a holistic educational programme for PWDs.

Chapter nine, "Holistic Education for people with disabilities: A challenge to Christian Education", is the concluding chapter of the thesis. It provides suggestions and recommendations that might be useful to church leaders, teachers and scholars engaged in work with people with disabilities. Finally, it proposes guidelines for a holistic educational programme.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXPLORATION OF THE SITUATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, (DRC)

#### 2.0 Introduction

From a biblical perspective a human being is presented as an image of God and is called upon to live in relationship with other human beings. The presence of God in and with man and woman, and their fellowship with others gives them a sense of life.<sup>84</sup> This means that a person with a disability is a human being like others; his or her disability – like any affliction – should not affect this understanding. I would like to reword Jean Marie Aubert’s statement and argue that in a liberation theology of disability, a person who has a disability needs to be recognized as God’s creation, as a person created to connect to all life in perfect harmony.<sup>85</sup>

Despite this, people with disabilities around the world still feel set apart, marginalized in relation to others (apparently able-bodied people). This means that, despite the efforts of the rights movement for people with disabilities, spearheaded by the United Nations’ Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the life of the PWD continues to be marked by the experience of discrimination, prejudice and inequality.<sup>86</sup>

Arne Fritzson, in *Interpreting Disability: A Church of All and for All*, interprets the meaning of life for PWDs in general and specifically in Western society as follows:

Traditionally, disability has been interpreted as a loss, as something that has demonstrated the inherent tragedy of human life. In some cultures we find other ways of interpreting disabilities, where, for example, persons with disabilities are seen as carriers of special gifts, but that has not been the case in most of Western

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<sup>84</sup>Mushila Nyamankank, ‘La Maison de l’Eglise’, *Revue Zairoise de Theologie Protestante*. 1 annee (UPZ, 1986), 25-40.

<sup>85</sup>Jean Marie Aubert, *Droit de l’Homme et Liberation Evangelique*, in Micheline Kamba K, ‘Integration Social’, 1996, 9.

<sup>86</sup>See United Nation Convention of People with Disabilities (2006) in Sue Philpott’s article, “La Pertinence et les defis des objectifs du Millenaire pour le Developpement pour les femmes (avec handicap) en Afrique” in, *Network of African Women With Disabilities (NAWWD) Journal* Vol. 1, No 1, (2009), 3-9.

culture. Disabilities have been interpreted as a divine punishment for sins committed by earlier generations. They also have sometimes been understood as the consequence of demonic activity. A northern European superstition held that human infants might be stolen from their cribs by evil spirits, and replaced with “changelings”. Some parents concluded that children with disabilities must have been the result of such a substitution...In Western societies persons with disabilities were seen as “rightly poor”, which meant that they themselves were not responsible for their poverty, as opposed to the wrongly poor. This view was based on an understanding that disability is something that falls short of fully human life...it did mean that their conditions of life were interpreted as tragic as and less fulfilling than others.<sup>87</sup>

Samuel Kabue, an African disability scholar, argues in the same vein, from an African perspective:

For a long time and as is still the case in many parts of the world, disability...[has been] something that people are ashamed of. It is seen as a condition that should be kept out of sight, something that many people do not want to hear of. Disabilities are stigmatized in different respects...<sup>88</sup>

In Africa, disability is regarded as a tragedy requiring sympathy and charity, but also sometimes condemnation. Cultural beliefs portray disability as a curse, as bad luck brought by the devil as a consequence of sin. In some countries, a woman who delivers a baby with cerebral palsy will be judged to have committed an offence toward an ancestor, toward God, or to have been unfaithful to her husband.<sup>89</sup>

Research of the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates facts about the situation faced by people with disabilities in Africa which causes them to experience oppression. These include the following:

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<sup>87</sup> Arne Fritzon and Samuel Kabue, *Interpreting Disability: A Church of All and for All*. WCC Publication, Geneva 2004, 7-8.

<sup>88</sup> Samuel Kabue, “People with Disabilities and Theological Education: Disability Discourse, Theological Education and the Journey of EDAN”, *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*, eds. D Werner, N Kang, R Raja (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010), 230-241.

<sup>89</sup> Statement made by Bongizuma, during the workshop on “Disability and Theology” at African Enterprise on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2010.

1. According to the WHO, there are 650 million disabled persons worldwide and 80% live in developing countries. Only a small percentage of these people have access to basic healthcare and basic schooling.<sup>90</sup>
2. 90% of all children with disabilities do not attend school.<sup>91</sup>
3. People with disabilities are more likely to contract HIV and AIDS as they have no access to information and treatment.<sup>92</sup>
4. People with disabilities are vulnerable to abuse (during the war/genocide in DRC, Burundi and Rwanda, women with disabilities were the target of rape).<sup>93</sup>

Unfortunately, most churches are complicit in this oppression. Thus, “the World Council of Churches (WCC) [and] the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) ...contend that most of their member churches have yet to fully integrate persons with disabilities into their church and community life. Many churches have socio-economic development programmes, such as schools and medical facilities; though very few churches have specific programmes for people with disabilities”.<sup>94</sup> It is also noted by most of the scholars that “...Churches have participated in discriminating against people with disabilities and not fully integrated them into the mainstream of the church and society at large”.<sup>95</sup>

This oppression has negatively portrayed the image of people with disabilities, and disability has been perceived as a misfortune and has strongly influenced the mind-set of people in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the DRC as a Christian country, people have much faith in the Bible. However, certain cultural beliefs seemed to be difficult to separate from the biblical positions. For example, having an accident, disease, disability or dying is seen as a consequence of sin or of the sin of parents (John 9); indicating a mistaken understanding of

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<sup>90</sup> Sue Philpot, “La Pertinence et les defis”, 3-9; All.Africa.com “Tanzania Crafts Business Disproves Myths and Disability” <<http://allafrica.com/stories/200903240806.html>> [02/02/2011]

<sup>91</sup> All. Africa.com, ‘Crafts Business Disproves Myths’, 2009.

<sup>92</sup> Bruce Patricia F, “‘A Daughter of Abraham’: Luke 13, 10 – 17 and the Inclusion of People with Disabilities’, *Journal of Constructive Theology*, vol. 11, No 1 (2005): 3 – 27; Micheline Kamba, “Women with Disabilities living with HIV and Aids in Eastern DRC, Bukavu: A Re-reading of Luke 13, 10-17” (unpublished paper 2007).

<sup>93</sup> Micheline Kamba, ‘Women with Disabilities in Violent Situations: In seeking Peace and Reconciliation (Africa/DRC’s case)’ a workshop paper presented at the Ecumenical International Peace Convocation (Kingston/Jamaica, May 2011): 3.

<sup>94</sup> World Council of Churches, ‘Humanity and Wholeness of Persons with Disabilities: Biblical and Theological Perspective on Disability’, *Disability Quarterly* Vol. 29, No 4 (2009), 22-30.

<sup>95</sup> Samuel Kabue, ‘Persons with Handicaps in Church and Society’, Address to Church Leaders at Limuru Conference and Training Centre (NCCCK, Nairobi: 26<sup>th</sup> March 1993).

the biblical perspective of suffering. In other words, there are trajectories in the Bible that lend themselves to such use. Similarly, in African thinking, as I have stated above, disease or disability are considered as being associated with “disobedience to the ancestors” or “bad luck sent by the devil”.<sup>96</sup>

The socio-cultural concept of disability in the DRC has influenced the biblical interpretation of disability in the sense that people with disabilities are seen as “lesser human beings”. Thus, terms such as “koka” and “muela” that I mentioned above, have come into being which label people with disabilities.

This chapter will explore, firstly, the situation of people with disabilities in the DRC with some emphasis on Kinshasa and with special mention of violence committed against women with disabilities in Eastern DRC and other parts of the country. Secondly, I will focus on socio-cultural and spiritual aspects of disability and their effects on PWDs themselves, their families and environment. Thirdly, the issue of accessibility to “education for all” as a human right will be discussed and finally, this chapter will look at the relationship between PWDs and the Church. To this end, I will challenge the biblical interpretation of disability from the perspective of PWDs.

The aim of this chapter is to raise several facts that will make clear how necessary it is to read the Bible in a constructive manner and from the perspective of disability in order to develop a holistic educational programme for people with disabilities in the DRC.

## **2.1 Location and identification of people with disabilities**

According to the WHO, people with disabilities in the DRC comprise 10% of the total population of the country. The entire DRC’s population is 66 200 000.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> As an African Christian, I do not say this fact is totally false. I am aware of the presence of the devil to torment God’s children. Yet, my view is that such cases would be exceptional, and so we cannot make general statements referring to all cases. I intend therefore to reconstruct the image of PWDs, who have been negatively portrayed.

<sup>97</sup> See Stephane Flandrin, *Journee Mondiale de la personne avec handicap a Kinshasa*, *Digitalcongo.net*, <<http://www.digitalcongo.net/article/7216.html>> [10/10/2011]; Michael Nest, Francois Grignon and Emizet F. Kisangani, *The Democratic Republic of Congo: Economic Dimensions of War and Peace* (International Peace Academy, 2006), 7.

<sup>97</sup> Sagaren Naidoo, IGD Occasional

Stephane Flandrin, the Programme Director of DRC Handicap International, in his interview with “Digital Congo” (one the DRC TV channels) said that, “The situation of PWDs is alarming, [given] the fact that 6 millions of people experience disability. Indeed the situation is alarming because the issue of PWDs is not on the agenda of the State Government; PWDs are suffering daily a shortage of healthcare, psycho-social care and food care”.<sup>98</sup>

I agree with Flandrin that the situation of PWDs is worrying because there is no social security or income maintenance support of PWDs, nor any policy for their rights. The situation of PWDs has worsened since the start of the war (1998 – 2008) in the DRC. The report of independent UN Human Rights Investigator, Robert Garreton, says, “The war has destroyed the country...” He continues, “However, international media failed to direct the world’s attention to this human catastrophe...”<sup>99</sup> The reality is that in such a situation, when a country is at war or caught up in violence, the media or so called “peacemakers’ organizations” do not tell the world the whole truth. Their statistics are limited to the numbers of dead and injured. They do not inform the world of the consequences of the catastrophe and how many people have been affected by it.

As regards the situation of violence committed against women in the Eastern Congo; women have been handicapped in one way or another because of the war. The WCC statement about violence against women in the DRC reads:

The situation of increasing sexual violence against women is most acute in South Kivu, where non-governmental armed groups, particularly militia from neighboring countries, commit sexual atrocities that are of an unimaginable brutality, which go beyond rape and aim at the complete physical and psychological destruction of women as sexual slaves with implications for the entire society. Women are brutally gang raped, often in front of their families and communities. In numerous cases, male relatives are forced at gunpoint to rape their own daughters, mothers or sisters. Such women often end up [disabled], being infected by HIV and stigmatized by their families and, if married, they are often deserted by their husbands. A concern was also expressed that security and the justice system fall short of addressing the

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<sup>98</sup> Flandrin, ‘Journée Mondiale de la personne avec handicap’, 2-3.

<sup>99</sup> Sagaren Naidoo, IGD Occasional paper No 37, *The War Economy in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, (Braamfontein SA, Institute for Global Dialogue, 2009), 60.



problems of sexual violence and that women survivors of rape lack sufficient care and protection...<sup>100</sup>

This statement reveals how women who have been abused have become disabled. “For some it is hidden in the genital parts (due to severe rapes and abuse). Others have lost their sexual feeling and desire...”<sup>101</sup> In other words, the number of people with disabilities (especially women) is increasing; unfortunately no-one has thus made the effort to compile statistics of people with disabilities.

On the basis of my experience and solidarity with women in the Eastern DRC, my assumption, in regard to the situation described above, is that in ten years, we will find that many people, especially women, are suffering from mental impairment or psychological problems, and these will have to be added to the total number of people with disabilities whose rights have been violated.

#### *Identification of people with disabilities*

It is estimated that in the DRC a small percentage of people with disabilities were born with their particular deficiency. Most people incur disabilities after birth. This is the consequence of an unhealthy environment, providing the conditions for disease, in particular poliomyelitis. There are also problems of ignorance and lack of information (especially in poor families).

I conducted research in 1995 in the DRC on “Social Integration of People with Disabilities: Psycho-Pastoral Approach”. My first task was to define the persons with disabilities and the causes of these disabilities. I found that among people born between 1949 and 1975 disabilities were mostly due to the contraction of polio, with physical handicaps as a result (people walking with sticks or in wheelchairs). This category is predominantly found in western DRC. However, there is another physical impairment category in the Eastern Province and in the Northeast of which the causes are “anti-personnel mines” and “war” and most people with disabilities in these areas have had limbs amputated.<sup>102</sup> People can become paralyzed due to psychological reasons such as depression, fear of the future and stress; or due to physical ones such as malnutrition and the destruction of their environment.

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<sup>100</sup> WCC statement on Violence against women in the Eastern DRC, 2009

<sup>101</sup> Kamba, 'Women with Disabilities in Violent situation: In seeking Peace and Reconciliation (Africa/DRC case)', Disability and Violence workshop paper presented in Kingston, Jamaica (May 2011), 2.

<sup>102</sup> Kamba, 'Integration Sociale', 1996, 16.

On the basis of these facts, I would argue that people in the DRC have become disabled largely because of the political and economic circumstances of their country, which perpetuate an unjust system. This system means that they are not given opportunities to exploit their capacities and talents in order to realize independence based on their particular abilities. Hans Reinders argues that, “persons with disabilities are not simply the victims of nature, but are also often victims of a lack of opportunities”.<sup>103</sup> Hence, understanding the “political economy is crucial in the construction of a theory of disability oppression, because poverty and powerlessness [due to the politico-economic structures] are cornerstones of the dependence people with disabilities experience”.<sup>104</sup>

However, before politics and the economy (the social structures) can be harnessed to cooperate in the struggle for liberation by PWDs, it would be necessary to challenge the views and attitudes that the society has toward disability, since these views and attitudes underpin every aspect of the disability experience.

## **2.2 “Disabled” as a socio-cultural and spiritual concept in the DRC**

Mark Sherry says that, “...disability is always experienced in contexts that are racialized, gendered, classed, ethnicized, aged, and so on”. Sherry’ statement implies that “The problem of disability is not the ‘bodies’ or ‘minds of disabled people’, the problem is that the society does not accommodate everyone”.<sup>105</sup> This explains the phenomenon of difference in a Western context, but traditionally, in an African context, people have also not been accepting of difference and change. Whenever something out of the ordinary occurs, they tend to think that it will destabilize their lives in a negative way. Hence, cultural belief systems such as these oppress PWDs by making them feel they are “less” in society. As James Charlton states,

Culture is sustained through customs, rituals, mythology, signs and symbols, and institutions such as religion and the mass media. Each of these informs the beliefs and attitudes that contribute to disability oppression. These attitudes are almost universally pejorative. They hold that people with disabilities are pitiful and that disability itself is

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<sup>103</sup> Hans S. Reinders, *The Future of the Disabled in Liberal Society: An Ethical Analysis* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>104</sup> Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, 1998, 9.

<sup>105</sup> Sherry, *Disability and Diversity*, 2008, 11.

abnormal. This is one of the social norms used to separate people with disabilities through classification systems that encompass education, housing, transportation, healthcare, and family life.<sup>106</sup>

In the interview that I conducted with church leaders of the Protestant Church Leaders, (PCR) in Kinshasa one of the questions I asked was, “*How do you refer to a person with a disability in your mother tongue?*” The responses given to this question revealed a number of concepts of disability in different African cultures and ethnicities within the DRC. These are the responses collected from the various DRC regions:<sup>107</sup>

- From Western DRC (‘Kikongo’ speakers) came the terms “*nkiadi*”, used in relation to all kinds of disability (equivalent to the English “Shame!”); and “*bandoki*” which means wizards and which characterizes a disability as problem or a curse;
- From the capital, Kinshasa (‘Lingala’ speakers ) I collected the terms, “*kizengi*”, “*zoba*”, meaning a mad person and referring to a person with an intellectual disability; “*baba*”, linked to a person who is deaf and meaning a person who is unable to speak or a person who does not exist; and finally “*koka*”, a person who is crawling on the ground and who is defined as being without value;
- Among the Swahili people in the Eastern and Southern DRC, the phrase, “*muntu ya kitshwa*”, is used to indicate a person with a mental disability and means an irrational person, and “*muntu ya kilema*”, is employed for a person who is nothing: the term is used for all kinds of disabilities;
- In the northern DRC (‘Lingala ya makanza’ speakers), the term “*moleme*”, means someone who is incomplete;
- In the central DRC (‘Ciluba’ speakers), the term “*tshilemenda*” means someone who has a problem spot in his body, indicating that he was created bad or destroyed by the devil; while “*muntu udine tshitupa thia mubidi*”, refers to a person with disability as half a person or a person with an incomplete body.

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<sup>106</sup> Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, 1998, 25.

<sup>107</sup> Here I would like to note that these responses are not what church leaders think about disability, but how disability is referred to in their mother tongue. I am grateful that church leaders were so open with me and that together we were able to recognize that some of our customs and languages have contributed to disability oppression. The full interview with the church leaders is in Annexure 1.

These responses make clear how the languages reflect the reality of the social context in which people with disabilities live. I rely here on what the Disabled People of South Africa (DPSA) state in their pocket guide on disability:

Language reflects the social context in which it is developed and used. It therefore reflects the values and attitudes of that context, and plays an important role in reinforcing values and attitudes that lead to discrimination and segregation of particular groups in society. Language can therefore be used as a powerful tool to facilitate change and bring about new values, attitudes and social integration.<sup>108</sup>

People with disabilities are affected and feel uncomfortable with the terminology used in relation to them. The use of language in this respect sets them apart from other people. They are labelled and discriminated against by the pejorative language; which as a consequence, creates a “culture of non-acceptance of diversity in society”.

### **2.2.1 Disability, family and environment**

The notions of family and environment play an important role in the life of an individual. He or she is partly identified by his or her family and environment. The concept of family in Africa encompasses not only the father, mother and children (as is the case in Western society). An African family is a clan whose members belong together. When somebody is born or becomes disabled, he/she automatically loses his/her clan name so that people do not know where he/she belongs. It is a source of shame to have a disabled child in a family. That person will be called by his physical condition and not, as with able-bodied persons, by a name that makes it possible for others to identify his family, clan and environment.

Zamenga Batukezanga, in his book, *Maladie et l'infirmité en Afrique Noire*, (Illness and Infirmary in Black Africa), addresses many aspects of perceptions of disability in “black Africa”, especially in the Western DRC.<sup>109</sup> In this section, I will outline two factors raised by Batukezanga and I will compare and contrast these with other cultural beliefs, such as

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<sup>108</sup> Disabled People South Africa (DPSA), *An Empowerment tool. Pocket Guide on Disability Equity. Africa Decade of Disabled Persons* (DPSA Parliamentary Office, 1999 – 2009), 15.

<sup>109</sup> Zamenga Batukezanga, *Maladie et l'infirmité en Afrique Noire* (Kinshasa: Press Kikesa, 1981), 45.

those of the Kasai culture (central DRC). These factors are: congenital infirmity and infirmity that occurs in old age.

### *Congenital infirmity*

Generally, it is recognized that a baby has an innocent and pure spirit, and that if something bad happens to him/her, this is the fault of the parents. In Africa, the woman or mother is blamed and condemned. She may be accused of having sexual relations with other men or she might have mocked a disabled person.

If the parents (or the mother) are cleared of responsibility, the family will consult a person who can pinpoint a “witch”. If a “witch” is now found, the disability is declared a religious case and people say, “Maybe God allowed this to happen so that we will be more devoted to him”. In some cases a mother will point the finger at her sister-in-law, as is the case in Kasai culture where the “aunties” on the husband’s side are seen as the most dangerous “witches” in the family, because they have no mercy.<sup>110</sup>

In some cases, disability would be interpreted as a “choc en retour” (payback). They might say that a disabled person is “revenant” (a ghost), meaning that he/she had died but was chased back to earthly life by the ancestors or by God to come and “payback” for the faults he/she had committed in his/her life. In order to do so, he/she was born or had become disabled.

The above attitudes explain the phenomenon of street children in the DRC, most of who, especially in Kinshasa, are disabled.<sup>111</sup> Their parents reject or abandon them because the family or clan has declared that they are “witches”. Other parents hide their children at home, because their physical condition is not accepted in the social environment.

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<sup>110</sup> I also was told that my physical condition was caused by one of my paternal aunts. To respond to this challenge, I always say as a liberated African that I wish that aunt were still alive so that I could thank her, because God turned her curse into a “benediction” in my life. Today, my “disability” can transform many other lives so that other disabled people will “stand and walk”, and thus my “problem” is now a sign of hope and responsibility.

<sup>111</sup> The testimony of a group of Congolese street musicians called, “Benda bilili” confirms the situation of disabled children being rejected and abandoned by their families. After growing up on the streets, they had an idea to form a music group. They were rehearsing on the street when a group of Western tourists heard them and agreed to sponsor them. Today, they are becoming famous not only as musicians, but their life stories have also been turned into a film (See Paul Morley, Benda Bilili Movie <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/jul/23/paul-morley-showing-off-staff-benda-bilili.html>> [2011/07/03])

### *Infirmity in old age*

Infirmity in old age is considered as a “choc en retours” (payback), a punishment, a consequence of sin. When an adult becomes disabled, people distance themselves from and abandon him/her.

There was a time up to the 1970s in the DRC, especially in Kinshasa, at a location called the “Pont Kasa-Vubu”, that a criminal or a thief could be punished by having an arm or leg cut off or sometimes by being killed in public. Since that time, people who have had a limb amputated of are considered as criminals. People say to them: “People like you do not deserve life”. As a result these people are abandoned by society.

This is why even though a person with a disability is admitted in society, for example to work or study; his/her condition remains a challenge and raises questions. For example, people with disabilities are stopped on the market, in shops or public places, and asked “What happened to your leg?” Or “what happened to your life?” And when you do not give a complete response, they will say: “Pray God to forgive you” or “Behave properly and nature will heal you”. This shows that the concept of disability is in the African socio-cultural environment defined by myths and legends of wrongdoing and punishment.

In addition, in some cases, disabled persons were considered as “sacred persons”, as a “protector of the family” or a “prophet”. This is the case of “*muana mayi*” and “*bisimbi*”, (referring to people with deformed bodies or faces), in French called, “*ancephalopathe*”.<sup>112</sup> These people are considered as supporters or protectors of the family and society. Hence the name of the national soccer team “Simba”, which derived from the verb “*simbi*”. The legend goes that, as most “*bisimbi*” have difficulty in walking properly, they will lend their legs to the soccer players so that they will perform at their best. At one time “Simba” was counted among of the better teams in Central Africa.

In the southern DRC, the blind were considered to be “sacred persons” and “prophets”. In that area, even today, people fear and respect blind people.

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<sup>112</sup> Batukezanga, *Maladie et infirmite*, 1981, 18.

According to DRC mythology, sensory infirmities (namely, blindness, deafness, dumbness) were caused by touching or discovering a “sacred object” that was not supposed to be seen or touched.

### **2.2.2 Disability and education**

Many people with disabilities in the DRC are illiterate. Schools (both primary and secondary) have no integrated educational system. Most people with physical disabilities are placed in training centers to learn manual skills. Those with a sensory impairment (who are blind or deaf) or those who have an intellectual disability are accommodated in specialized schools.

Batukezanga in his book, “L’Enseignement pour Handicapes au service des valides”<sup>113</sup> presents four factors which prevent the introduction of an inclusive education system in the DRC. These factors are:

1. Long periods of medical treatment. This explains the fact that most children with disabilities, especially those with mental impairment, start school late due to the lengthy medical care that they require;
2. Lack of finance to support their schooling;
3. Lack of adequate accessibility of schools and institutions. In other words, the lack of architectural adaptations in schools makes them difficult for children with physical problems to access, while communication devices for deaf people are also lacking<sup>114</sup>;
4. Lack of adequate mobility or no easy flow from one space in the school to another. Here, I would like to note that there is “lack of mobility” (with regard to pupils with physical, visual and mental impairment) in two ways: firstly, there are few “assistive devices” such as wheelchairs, walking frames, crutches, orthotics, white canes, and little personal assistance (some people use dogs to guide them). Secondly, public transport poses problems. People with disabilities are considered the most undesirable

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<sup>113</sup> Batukezanga, *L’Enseignement pour Handicapes*, 1981, 88-89.

<sup>114</sup> I would like to acknowledge the work done by the Catholic Church in the DRC in making most of their schools, institutions and libraries accessible for people with disabilities.

passengers by those engaged in the provision of public transport. Before the 1990s, the economy of the state “Zaire” (old name of the DRC) seemed fairly balanced, and there were various subsidies for transport: civil officers, civil servants and people with disabilities were exempt from paying for public transport. Since the 1990s, with the collapse of the economy, there have been no bus services run by the state. Most cars and buses providing public transport belong to private individuals. As a consequence, those engaged in working in the private transport sector have started to avoid people who traditionally do not have to pay for this service. Hence the term “faux tête”<sup>115</sup> (literally meaning, “bad head”) indicates an “unwanted customer”, and is a code used by drivers and ushers to identify people who do not pay, and they then avoid stopping where these “unwanted customers” are waiting for transport. Often, people with disabilities are pushed out of the way when they try to get on the bus.

5. Psychological attitudes towards people with disabilities by parents or family. Certain parents think that to send a child with a disability to school is to waste money. Other parents hide children with disabilities in their homes.

Therefore, Batukezanga concludes that child education, in particular the education of a disabled child, will depend firstly on the determination of child him/herself, secondly on the parents and thirdly on the educators. He goes on to say that a specialized school would not just be a venue in which PWDs are able to learn, but rather, it would serve to prove to society what PWDs are capable of.<sup>116</sup>

Batukezanga’s statement has a point in that training and learning received from that school should not be limited to theory, but it should include bringing that knowledge into practice, and revealing to society that PWDs have valuable contributions to make to that

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<sup>115</sup> Grammatically in good French, the term is “fausse tête” (because, ‘tete’ is a feminine noun and thus the adjective should also be feminine), but as most of the conductors are not literate, they use the term “faux tete” instead.

<sup>116</sup> Batukezanga had founded a specialized school in Kinshasa for people with disabilities, called “Centre Kikesa”. Many students graduating from this school have made a difference in society in terms of their abilities and manual skills. The motto of the school is “School for life, learn to be useful, and work to gain money”, reflecting its objective: to prepare students for fully participating in life and society (Batukezanga, *Enseignement pour Handicapes*, 1981, 89)



society. However, my concerns are: Does society recognize the value of such training? How many people with disabilities would find employment on the basis of the qualifications obtained from this training? Can people with disabilities, after attending such schools, address specific challenges posed by society to them? Referring back to the generally negative socio-cultural perception of disability, this would affect a disabled child's mind and he/she would think that he/she is different from other children. As a consequence, the child develops a sense of being rejected and of mistrusting other people. This is manifest in their behaviour which may be defensive and tend to be stand-offish as a means of self-protection.<sup>117</sup>

In this regard, I would argue effective training and education are possible only if liberative mechanisms are implemented in the programmes offered. Therefore, the holistic educational programme that is proposed in this study will focus on the psychological and spiritual aspects as a starting point for self-liberation. In order to be liberative in this way, the broader society needs to be transformed as much as the PWDs themselves, and so the methodology of this programme will not be limited to PWDs, but will include others, apparently able-bodied people as well as church leaders.

Before unfolding the methodology designed for this study, which is CBS, the next section will explore how the notion of disability is understood in the church.

### **2.2.3 Disability and church**

Christianity is part of the everyday life of the people in the DRC, even though it is a secular state: 90% of the population are Christians of whom 40% are Catholic; 25% Protestant; 15% Kimbanguist (African Independent Church); while 10% belong to Charismatic and Evangelical churches. Of the remaining 10% ,7% follow Islam and 3% indigenous religion.

Nowadays the independent churches as well as many of the mainline churches let themselves be guided by the repetitive crusades of the so called “great world evangelists”.

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<sup>117</sup> In Kinshasa, people with disabilities are portrayed as “trouble-makers”. This is because, when they are begging for money in the shops in town, if people do not give money to them, they begin to plunder and steal from these shops.

They focus on “miracles”, “healing” and “abundant life” and this approach has brought many people to their side. They use “wheelchairs”, “crutches” and “white canes” as tools for advertising their power. However, many people with disabilities have kept to themselves and avoided the church after experiencing failed healing sessions. Kabue states,

Many have felt it embarrassing to attend worship or crusades by the so-called great world evangelists because, when they do so, the ushers in such events cannot conceive the idea of one going to such an event purely for spiritual blessings and nourishment. They always assume that you have gone there for physical healing and will often coerce you to go to the front for divine healing prayers. If no healing takes place, one is presumed to have no faith and is told no less than that.<sup>118</sup>

The question is “Why do people with disabilities stay away from the church?” There are two major factors: accessibility and psycho-spiritual attitudes.

#### *Accessibility of the church*

The accessibility that this section refers to concerns the physical aspect. Churches in the DRC have not provided ramps, accessible restrooms, pulpits and chairs for people with disabilities.<sup>119</sup> There is also the question of accessibility in terms of communication devices for people who have hearing and visual impairment: data projectors, sign language, good lighting and assistance during worship are non-existent in most churches in the DRC.

#### *Psycho-spiritual attitudes*

In mainstream churches (all the churches whose origins are found in Western mission work), people with disabilities are characterized as “poor people”, called “*babola*” (in Lingala, one of the DRC local languages); this word means “people who have nothing”. Each church - especially Protestant churches - has a “*diaconie*” department. This department deals with orphans, widows, the sick, people living with HIV and people with disabilities. Their objective is to provide food, clothes, and other needs for these people.

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<sup>118</sup> Kabue, *Interpreting Disability*, 2003, 39.

<sup>119</sup> I have noticed that in most churches, including Catholic churches, the pulpit and chairs are not easily accessible. The seating area and pulpit are raised and are usually reached via steps. I would interpret this as a lack of recognition that people with disabilities could become ministers or church leaders.

Every month, on one Sunday a month, church members bring clothes, shoes, and food to support these people.

This “caste” of “poor people” creates, firstly in its own mind, an image of people with disabilities as being merely “consumers” and not “producers”. In other words, they could begin to see themselves as having nothing to offer in exchange for what the able-bodied people provide. Secondly, church leaders and congregations, as well as disabled people themselves, will associate disability with a sense of inequality and inferiority. As one DRC proverb states “*loboko oyo epesaka eza oyo nde emataka*”, meaning, “a hand which gives is the one that is higher”, in other words, as long as people carry on receiving offerings and gifts from other people, they will still continue to feel inferior.

In addition, as I have stated above, socio-cultural beliefs about disability have alienated many people in the DRC and the negative image of disability is further emphasized by the “great world evangelists” who, using the Bible, support the view that disability indicates the presence of the devil. Kabue states,

We have been marginalized by patronising and paternalistic attitudes, made the objects of ridicule and fear, or just ignored and left out. The negative view society has and the stigmas associated with disability make people with disabilities vulnerable to the manipulation of those who promote easy commercial cures or the religious zealots who offer miraculous healing in an atmosphere of superficial friendship.<sup>120</sup>

This implies that the presence of a person with a disability would seem to be merely a “show”, and not a meaningful participation of that PWD in the community of the church. The disabled member of the congregation only assists the minister in demonstrating his/her healing power. But, as Theo Schmidt says, “Too many people have been hurt in the healing ministry and not healed”.<sup>121</sup>

I personally experienced the hurt of participating in such a “healing prayer” with a well-known Western evangelist and the failure to be healed has deeply disturbed me. I attempted to commit suicide because the situation made me think that God did not love

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<sup>120</sup> Kabue, *Interpreting Disability*, 2003, 25.

<sup>121</sup>Theo Schmidt, *Yes, You are Healed: A journey of Healing* (South Africa: The Christ Healing Fellowship, 2007), 8.

me. I revolted and I concluded that God was not real and the Holy Scriptures were not true. By God's grace, God placed people on my path to help me to reconstruct myself. They showed me that I am of value to God and in society. In that same context I have understood my vocation as that of encouraging others with disabilities, using the Bible as a tool for personal transformation.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

In concluding this chapter, I would argue that, rather than disability being seen as a consequence of individual circumstances, it should be understood as the result of socio-culturally determined perceptions and beliefs which imply that PWDs differ from apparently able-bodied people. Unfortunately, these socio-culturally determined attitudes have had an impact within the church, and the result has been to reinforce a negative conception of disability, supported by the way in which the Bible has been interpreted.

The result is that PWDs and their families have internalized this perception and have developed feelings such as self-hate, shame and denial of the self as God's image. Therefore, a re-reading of the Bible from a disability perspective, taking into account the context that characterizes PWDs, could be liberating for PWDs and for apparently able-bodied people alike, opening the possibility of building a community of peace, love and diversity.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ENCOUNTERING CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

#### 3.0 Introduction

Contextual Bible Study is a particular method for interpreting the Bible in the South African context, conceived by the Ujamaa Centre.<sup>122</sup> For more than twenty years the Ujamaa Centre has conducted Bible studies in South Africa and other countries. The important point is that this approach to Bible interpretation is not bound by geographical barriers.<sup>123</sup> It can be applied to any context in any community that is voiceless. The particularity of this approach is thus its focus on reading the Bible with the poor and marginalized, wherever and whoever they are. West states, “We have made this choice because we believe that God is particularly concerned for the poor and the oppressed”.<sup>124</sup> West’s statement starts with “we” meaning himself included as an academic, while the phrase “have made the choice” shows that the approach is that of a deliberate encounter between academic and ordinary readers of the Bible in order to help the latter to “develop critical awareness and identity” and to use their “local critics’ resources” for Bible interpretation.<sup>125</sup>

Along the same lines, Carlos Mesters<sup>126</sup> in his paper, ‘The use of the Bible in Christian communities of the common people’, describes the experience of Brazilian Catholic church members who meet around the Bible and use the concrete reality of their own situation for

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<sup>122</sup> The Ujamaa Centre is the Institute for the Study of the Bible. It is described as “an organization that locates itself in the interface between biblical studies in academic institutions and ordinary ‘readers’ (whether literate or not) of the Bible in local communities of faith”. West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study: A Resource Manual’. Draft (Pietermaritzburg, Ujamaa Center, 2007), 1.

<sup>123</sup> Gerald West, ‘Reading with’, *Semeia*, 73 (1996), 7-20; Gerald West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 3.

<sup>124</sup> Gerald West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 1993, 14; Gerald West and Musa Dube, *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*. (Brill: Leiden, 2000), 23.

<sup>125</sup> Justin S. Ukpong, ‘Development in Biblical Interpretation in Africa’ in West and Dube (eds), *The Bible in Africa*, 2000, 23.

<sup>126</sup> Carlos Mesters was born in Holland, where he became a Carmelite. He went to Brazil in 1949, and was then sent to Rome and Jerusalem to study Scripture, returning to Brazil in 1963. Mesters presents an interpretation of the Bible from the perspective of the poor.

interpreting biblical texts. Mesters argues that despite the many obstacles to reading the Bible from the grassroots level, the essential aim is to bring the people at the grassroots into the process of reading the Bible from the perspective of their concerns. He argues,

The word of God is within reality and it can be discovered there with the help of the Bible. When one of the three elements is missing, however, interpretation of the Bible makes no progress and enters into crisis...I realized that when the three elements are integrated - Bible, community, real-life-situation – then the word of God becomes reinforcement, a stimulus for hope and courage. Bit by bit it helps people to overcome their fears.

Mesters emphasizes that the Bible cannot be read without the local community and their realities. Otherwise, the Bible “loses its function”.

Following this, interesting observations can be made by looking at Mesters’ liberating Bible reading and West’s Contextual Bible Study: do they reflect different points of view or are there common aspects? There is a commonality between both scholars in their approach of liberating Bible reading. Both Mesters and West argue that the Bible is read within the context of the ordinary reader. They frame their approach in liberation hermeneutics. As Justin S. Ukpong argues, “Liberation hermeneutics in general uses the Bible as a resource for struggle against oppression of any kind based on the biblical witness that God does not sanction oppression but rather always stands on the side of the oppressed to liberate them”.<sup>127</sup> Therefore, the formation of Contextual Bible Study took shape within biblical scholarship that “openly acknowledged and advocated interpreting the Bible from and for a particular context”.<sup>128</sup>

However, CBS differs from Mesters' liberating reading of the Bible as regards the starting point from which the reading takes place. Mesters thinks that “it is not so important to establish from which of the three stages the process of interpretation begins. This depends on the situation, history, culture and interests of the community or group. What is important is

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<sup>127</sup> Justin S. Ukpong, ‘Developments in Biblical interpretation in Africa’, 2000, 19.

<sup>128</sup> West, ‘Contextual Bible Reading’, 2006, 133: here West mentions that liberation theologies including those of Latin America, Black theology and Feminist theology, have influenced the concept of CBS; G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*. (Maryknoll N.Y: Orbis, 1973); J. H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970); E. SchusslerFiorenza, ‘Towards a Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics: Biblical Interpretation and Liberation Theology’ in B. Mahan and L.D. Richesin (eds), *The Challenge of Liberation Theology: A First World Response* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1981); Jonathan Draper, ‘Old Scores and New Notes: Where and What Is Contextual Exegesis In the New South Africa’ in McGlory T. Speckman and Larry T. Kaufmann, *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), 148-168.

the understanding that one stage will always remain incomplete without the other two”.<sup>129</sup> Although many institutions dealing with the study of the Bible reproduced this revolutionary approach to liberating Bible reading in Latin America, especially among the Catholics, in Mesters' theory no methodology for reading the Bible is in fact presented.<sup>130</sup>

West, to the contrary, shows that CBS is a structured and systematic process. West's reading of the Bible follows three steps - community consciousness, critical consciousness and community consciousness. This means that the re-reading of the Bible starts with the reality, experience and resources of the community; thereafter the reading focuses on the Bible text itself, using the resources of biblical scholarship; the reading ends with focusing again on the reality, experience and resources of the community.<sup>131</sup> The latter is of particular interest to this study.

This chapter will analyze CBS as method and its construction. I will attempt to identify and examine some components of CBS; after which each of these components will be related to the disabilities perspective in general and will then be specifically adapted to this study.

### **3.1 Contextual Bible Study as a methodology**

“Contextual Bible Study is not a method in a strong sense, but it is a carefully reflected process...”<sup>132</sup> West's statement entails that CBS is not an inflexible method with principles that are too rigid to be adapted. Yet, CBS involves a particular way of, and a certain approach to, reading the Bible differently, according to the context of poor and marginalized people.

In this study, I chose CBS as the main methodology for doing Bible study differently, framing it in a disability perspective. Firstly, I used CBS as an educational resource for empowering PWDs as well as church leaders and religious lecturers. Secondly, I used CBS as an instrument for gaining information about issues related to disability in the DRC.

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<sup>129</sup> Mesters, “A liberating reading of the Bible Catholic Biblical Federation.<<http://www.c-b-f.org>> [2012/06/04];Ujamaa,“Contextual Bible Study/History”, UKZN<<http://ujamaa-ukzn.ac.za/history>> [2012/06/08]

<sup>130</sup> Mesters, A liberating reading, 2012/06/04.

<sup>131</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 1993, 28; G West's , *Contextual Bible Study*, lecture series delivered for second-year Theology students at UKZN February – March 2009.

<sup>132</sup> West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 3.

The next section will deal with different steps which comprise the construction of Contextual Bible Study. I will interact with the experience gained from Bible studies conducted with PWDs and church leaders.

### **3.2 Construction of Contextual Bible Study.**

Contextual Bible Study, as mentioned above, embraces three interconnected forms of consciousness, firstly “community consciousness,” followed by “critical consciousness” and finally “community consciousness”. West explains this connectivity using the method of “See-Judge-Act”. West argues,

Contextual Bible Study works within the framework of the “See-Judge-Act” approach to social transformation, a process that was developed by Father Joseph Cardijn in the 1930s in Belgium, where he was working as a chaplain among factory workers. The See-Judge-Act method has been “one of the basic genres of contextual theology propagated in South Africa”. This method “meant starting with a social analysis, then proceeding to the reading of the [biblical] text and then to action”. “See” involves careful social analysis of a particular context “from below” by organized groups of the marginalized. This “reality” is then “judged” by the biblical and theological tradition of ‘God’s project’. “The shape” of God’s will for the world, on earth as it is in heaven, as reflected in the Bible when re-read from the margins, is used to interrogate “lived” reality. The discrepancies between the shape of God’s project and the shape of lived reality for the marginalized give both the energy for and a shape to the “action that must be taken to transform lived reality so that it conforms more closely to God’s project”.<sup>133</sup>

Hence, regarding West's argument, the focus point of the constructed questions in CBS is “in front of the text”. This is because the Bible study starts and ends with the “voice of the ordinary people”, which includes the “lived experience of and the embodied theology of the participants themselves”.<sup>134</sup> CBS ends with the “Action-plan” question which engages participants to change and transform their society. I will unfold this process later in this section.

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<sup>133</sup> Gerald West, ‘Do Two Walk Together? Walking with the Other through Contextual Bible Study’, *Anglican Theological Review*, Vol. 3, no 93 (2011), 431-449.

<sup>134</sup> West, ‘Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 8.



The aim of Contextual Bible Study is to use the Bible as a tool for transformation in terms of empowering people, equipping them with resources and enabling them to make a difference in or impact on their environment and conditions of life.

Taking into consideration the prejudice of society concerning the disability issue,<sup>135</sup> the offense and pain that some churches have caused to people with disabilities through and during the healing prayers,<sup>136</sup> and the “self-annihilation”<sup>137</sup> of people with disabilities who underestimate their value as God’s creation, I have found that the CBS is a useful instrument to empower people with disabilities in the DRC and to train church leaders and lecturers of religion courses to become involved in the social transformation of people with disabilities and those around them in society.

Contextual Bible Study from a disability perspective starts with the experience of the “organized poor and marginalized”<sup>138</sup> which includes the members of IMAN’ENDA, the people with disabilities who are organized in training centers and church groups.

There are five steps in CBS’ construction which I apply in the context of this study from a disability perspective:

The first step is to “choose a theme”. CBS begins with the contextual concerns of the community; hence it always follows “the issue or theme” that the community deals with. In this study, the focus or concern of IMAN’ENDA, as I mentioned above, is to change the image of PWDs through re-reading the Bible for social transformation.

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<sup>135</sup> Paul Lindoewood, ‘Were There Disabled people in the Garden of Eden?’ Unpublished paper (UK, 2007), 3-4.

<sup>136</sup> Sam Kabue, Chairperson of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network, EDAN, conducted a survey to discover why people with disabilities are seldom in church. Three-quarters of the group interviewed admitted that they do not often go to church because they felt that most sermons, especially those based on the Gospels, condemn them as the “poor wretched and cursed that cannot receive God’s mercy, because they have no faith”. (EDAN Newsletter July-September 2005), 2-5.

<sup>137</sup> Karl Marx’s terminology is quoted by James I. Charlton when he develops the third component of his definition of disability oppression, stating that it is “psychological internalization” which creates “false consciousness and alienation”, making people with disabilities feel like they are “less normal, less capable than others, ...[leading to] self-pity, self-hate, shame...” (J. I. Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, 1998, 28).

<sup>138</sup> One of the Ujamaa Centre’s principles when conducting Bible studies is to work with organized groups because they “have a stronger sense of identity than unorganized groups”. Organized groups have also a “clear idea of what they want from a particular project” and they may bring their resources to it (West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 5; West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 2003, 94; West, ‘Do Two Walk Together?’ 2011, 444).

The second step is “finding a biblical text”. According to the Ujamaa Centre, the biblical text has to relate to the context of the participants and involves two approaches: reading the familiar text in unfamiliar ways and reading unfamiliar texts. West says, “While we can and do read the texts that the group chooses, we also bring to them texts and resources with which they are less familiar. In other words, we read familiar texts in unfamiliar ways (by approaching them differently), and we read unfamiliar texts (those texts that are neglected or forgotten)”.<sup>139</sup> In this study, I selected the biblical texts according to my own disability experience and the concerns of the wider community of people with disabilities.<sup>140</sup> Of the biblical texts selected in this study, the first two texts were “unfamiliar texts” (Exodus 4, 1-17; and 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10). By “unfamiliar texts”, I mean texts that are not familiar in relation to the issue of disability. These texts were not well known to the participants, especially IMAN’ENDA members, because most preachers have not given deep thought to the concept of disability. The third text I selected was a “familiar text”, but read in an “unfamiliar way” (Acts 3, 1-10). The text was well known especially as it deals with “healing” and “miracles”. The common interpretation of the text focuses on the spectacular nature of the event described. The approach of connecting the context of community with the context of text was a new discovery for the participants.

The third step is “questioning and reading”. There are two kinds of questions that are used in CBS: “Contextual questions” (linked to community consciousness) and “textual questions” (linked to critical consciousness). “Contextual questions” constitute the framework of the Bible study as described above, in the sense that the Bible study starts and ends with community concerns. “Textual questions” are further aspects of CBS. These involve participants in looking at the text itself.

There are many and diverse approaches to reading the text in a liberation hermeneutic.<sup>141</sup> There are, among others, the “three modes of reading and their respective relationships with

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<sup>139</sup> West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 7.

<sup>140</sup> As I stated in chapter 1 of this study, the last two biblical texts - 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10 and Acts 3, 1-11 - are the basic teaching texts of IMAN’ENDA as they deal with themes such as “acceptance”, “self-awareness” and “community responsibility”.

<sup>141</sup> Many scholars of liberation hermeneutics based their reading on the struggle for liberation of the poor and marginalized. “Liberation hermeneutic in general uses the Bible as a resource for the struggle against oppression of kind based on the biblical witness that God does not sanction oppression but rather always stands on the side of the oppressed to liberate them”. (West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1995), 148; Ukpong,

the situation of struggle: reading the text, reading behind the text, and reading in front of the text. Each of these modes of reading is used within contexts of liberation”.<sup>142</sup>

The mode of reading, labeled “in front of the text”, “became particularly relevant in liberation theology. The point of departure of liberation theology was the actual experience of discrimination, oppression and exploitation. The aim was liberation, equal dignity, social justice and human rights”.<sup>143</sup> It is a “contextual approach”, as Ukpong states,

which focuses on the context of the reader in relation to the text. It uses the reader's context in various ways as a factor in making the meaning of the text. All the approaches to biblical interpretations in Africa discussed above (and indeed all Third World approaches to biblical interpretation) belong to the last approach. Their point of departure is the context of the readers, and they are all concerned with linking the biblical text to the reader's context.<sup>144</sup>

This mode of reading is the one around which Contextual Bible Study is constructed in the sense that, in the Ujamaa Centre questionnaires on Bible study, the first and last questions are focused *in front of the text*. This entails that the first question asks participants to give their impression on “what is the text about?” Such questions allow participants to connect their realities and concerns to the text. The last question turns back to the same aspect by asking participants to examine what the text now projects for them.<sup>145</sup> The question would be “how does this text challenge us?”

In the middle section of the Bible study, between first and last questions, there are textual questions which bring the participants closer to the text through literary analysis and, sometimes, “probe the world *behind the text*”, in both cases by using the resources of biblical scholarship.

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'Development in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions' in West and Dube (eds), *The Bible in Africa*, 2000, 19.

<sup>142</sup> West, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 1995, 131; Klaus Nurnberger, *Biblical Theology in Outline: The Vitality of the Word of God*. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2004), 32.

<sup>143</sup> Nurnberger, *Biblical Theology in Outline*, 2004, 32.

<sup>144</sup> Ukpong, 'Developments in Biblical Interpretation', 2009, 19.

<sup>145</sup> West, 'Doing Bible Study', 2007, 8.

My Bible studies begin (and end) in front of the text. This involved participants in looking at the text itself: “It [focuses] on the text and its underlying structure, and sees the meaning of the text as attained by decoding the text, and which also focuses on the reader in interaction with the text, and sees the meaning of the text as emerging in the encounter between the reader and the text”.<sup>146</sup>

However, some questions were designed on the basis of the socio-historical and cultural background of the text and to provide a means to offer input about this. Patricia Bruce says, “A great deal has been written about the miracles, but the focus has not been on disability or reconstructing the lives of people with disabilities in the New Testament period...Knowledge of disability in the first century will be helpful in understanding the text...”<sup>147</sup> However, in composing my questionnaire for Bible studies and in analyzing and interpreting data, I also took into account the psycho-spiritual perspective adopted by Wayne G. Rollins in his article, “The Bible in Psycho-Spiritual Perspective: News from the World of Biblical Scholarship” where he states:

Psychological biblical criticism sees the Bible in part as a history book that tells us about the past, but even more as a book about the perennial nature and experience of the human soul or psyche, its trials, troubles, successes, and victories, employing a vast array of literary genres, from myth and legend, to psalm, parable, and sermon to discern and describe the soul’s nature, origin, habits, powers, and destiny. It is a text that informs us about histories and societies of the past, but it is also a text that from time to time transforms its readers and catalyzes new insights and powers.<sup>148</sup>

In other words, the mode of reading I used when conducting Bible studies was the literary approach from a psycho-spiritual perspective, as the value of this study lies in its development of holistic education for people with disabilities, focusing on the emotional side which includes spiritual and psychological aspects.

The fourth step is “Articulating and owning”. “The Power of the Contextual Bible Study process is that it allows participants to articulate and own a theological understanding of their

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<sup>146</sup> Ukpong, ‘Developments in Biblical Interpretation’, 2000, 25.

<sup>147</sup> Patricia Bruce, ‘A Daughter of Abraham’, 2005, 17

<sup>148</sup> Wayne G. Rollins, ‘The Bible in Psycho-Spiritual Perspective: News from the World of Biblical Scholarship’, *Pastoral Psychology*, Vol. 51, No 2(2002), 101-118.

context”.<sup>149</sup> This means that CBS enables participants to own their Bible understanding and to address issues which have earlier alienated them from the church and led to their isolation and exploitation. West, quoting Gutierrez, states: “...We must realize that there will be no qualitative leap forward to a different theological outlook until the alienated and exploited become the artisans of their own liberation and make their voices heard directly”.<sup>150</sup> Referring to liberation theology for disability Lees argues: “Its purpose would be that disabled people would be sparking themselves, doing theology from their own experiences, teaching church and society what life is like from their perspective and working towards its transformation for justice for all people”.<sup>151</sup> Contextual Bible Study helps people with disabilities to understand some issues in the Bible related to disability such as, healing, acceptance, questions of body and suffering, and provides sufficient resources for a determined pursuit of their transformation.

The fifth step is “Developing a plan of action”. “Contextual Bible Study ends with action. Each small group, and the larger group which they make up, is required to develop an action plan. Contextual Bible Study is not merely about interpreting the Bible; it is about allowing the Bible to equip us to change our world so that the kingdom of God may come on earth, as it is in heaven!”.<sup>152</sup> Referring to the previous point - that CBS empowers “participants” to “articulate” and “own local contextual theologies” and makes them ready to act - I concluded my Bible study sessions by asking for an action plan, following on and resulting from what had been learned during the CBS. The question was, in other words, related to transformation. I found that this step helped me to observe participants’ reactions whereby I noticed that they were not only interested in Bible studies as such, but that they showed commitment to personal transformation and a desire to engage the church in practical action.

The last two questions of each Bible study session referred to these last two constructive steps of CBS. Reactions helped me to analyze and assess the findings in order to respond to the main question of the research, “How can the Bible be used as resource to contribute to a holistic education for people with disabilities?”

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<sup>149</sup> West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 10.

<sup>150</sup> See West, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 1995, 214.

<sup>151</sup> Lees, ‘Interpreting the Bible’, 1997, 14.

<sup>152</sup> West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 10.

### 3.3 Components of Contextual Bible Study related to the disability perspective

#### 3.3.1 Participants

Contextual Bible Study begins with the reality of the ordinary readers. Before arguing further on the basis of this statement, I will explain how, in my context, I understand the term “ordinary readers”.

As an academic working with people in the outside world, encountering the method of CBS has permitted me to understand the context in which, where and why West uses the term “ordinary readers”, a term which is essential for his approach.<sup>153</sup> While I am aware of the criticism that the term has raised among biblical scholars who have asked “how, which and why people are ordinary”<sup>154</sup>, my own stance is based on Mesters’ point about the “exegete” and “common people”. He says: “In many cases the exegete is like the person who had studied salt and knows all its chemical properties but doesn’t know how to cook with it. The common people don’t know the properties of salt well, but they do know how to season a meal”.<sup>155</sup> Thus the exegete is an academic, a trainer who is trained in the use of the tools and resources of biblical scholarship and who knows how to read the Bible critically. Yet, they usually have no experience of the reality of the poor and marginalized communities and as a result they remain somewhat superficial and may even be misled in their interpretations. The common people, as mentioned above, are not trained in how to read the Bible critically and closely, but they can discuss and read the Bible on the basis of their own resources and experiences. Therefore, as West states, “...I have found that the critical resources of biblical scholarship have something to offer to poor and marginalized readers of the Bible and much to learn from them”.<sup>156</sup> This approach celebrates exchange, the sharing of experience and resources in a “truly human sense” between ordinary readers and biblical scholars.

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<sup>153</sup> The experience of West as a middle-class white male who, during the Apartheid era, identified with the struggle of black people, responding to the challenge directed by Steve Biko to whites, and who sat together with blacks around one table to discover a “truly *human* consciousness” going beyond the constructions of race, gender and class, means that he is well qualified to understand the real meaning of the term “ordinary readers”.

<sup>154</sup> Nadar, ‘Power, Ideologies and Interpretation’, 2003, p93; West and Dube, ‘Introduction’ to “Reading with”, 1996, 9, 12.

<sup>155</sup> Mesters, ‘The Use of the Bible’, 1981, 16.

<sup>156</sup> West and Dube, “Reading with”, 1996, 9.

Referring back to the main concern of CBS, namely the reality of the ordinary reader, West sees poor and marginalized people as excluded from society, as voiceless people. He states, “This is true of a whole range of readers, including largely illiterate ‘readers’ from African Independent Churches in townships and informal shack settlements ...the disabled [or people with disabilities] and unemployable who live on the margins of poor and marginalized communities, and many others. The Bible matters to them”.<sup>157</sup> These people have experienced oppression in different ways; and have been socially, politically, economically, or culturally marginalized and exploited.

Usually the Bible is read in the community, using the dominant interpretations of those who oppress the poor and marginalized, and it “continues to be used by some to maintain wealth and power...”.<sup>158</sup> Mostly the people in the community receiving such interpretations are powerless and lack the resources to halt the process. However, the CBS offers a safe place where ordinary people are empowered and given resources to help them resist such oppressive Bible interpretations.

Scholars of disability studies argue that people with disabilities are being oppressed but that no one is viewing this as a serious situation.<sup>159</sup> The oppression of people with disabilities is experienced in various ways. Weiss states, “Oppression occurs at both the institutional and cultural levels”.<sup>160</sup> She explains that institutional oppression of people with disabilities is apparent in “housing, employment, education...and the media”. Cultural oppression, Weiss continues, “is encountered in language, standards of behavior, logic systems, within the arts and societal expressions, and particularly in the development and expression of values and norms”.<sup>161</sup> The latter is of interest to this study in the sense that this form of oppression creates much self-hate in people with disabilities. Deborah Creamer says, “Society does not value our bodies, which makes it difficult for us to value ourselves”.<sup>162</sup> It means that society does not accept difference and diversity of life. Oppression affects people with disabilities to such a degree as to easily lead to despair. Weiss quotes Charles Gourney, in an article entitled “Faith, Despair and Disability”: “Having a disability can be socially isolating, creating a

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<sup>157</sup> West, *The Academy of Poor*, 2003, 2.

<sup>158</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 1993, 13; West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently: Giving shape to the Discourse of the Dominated’ in *Reading With Semeia* (1996), 21-41.

<sup>159</sup> Lees, ‘Interpreting the Bible’, 1997, 13; Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 1994, 9; Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2007, 43.

<sup>160</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2007, 43.

<sup>161</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2007, 44.

<sup>162</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2007, 43.

sense of rejection and fears of abandonment even by God. The social consequences of physical disability can leave one with a sense that one's life has lost its meaning".<sup>163</sup>

This experience of isolation extends into the common interpretations of the Bible. For example, using CBS Lees tries to demonstrate how even the "business to which hermeneutics refers [interpreting the Bible] has not been seen to be the everyday business of ordinary people".<sup>164</sup> She goes on to say that "experiences and questions of life and biblical texts [of and concerning people with disabilities] have not attracted much attention. No one has listened to them".<sup>165</sup> Thus "hermeneutics" seems to be the domain of biblical scholars rather than of ordinary people. The tension involved in this situation is known as the "hermeneutical dilemma". However, CBS deals with this tension by taking an approach that "opens the process of biblical interpretation to ordinary people with their concerns and experiences". Thus, by using the experiences and questions of ordinary people, confronted with biblical texts, interaction with biblical scholars is created. Using CBS, the biblical texts can become tools of inclusion, empowerment and wholeness for PWDs. Therefore, this study supports the view that the recognition of ordinary and marginalized people, including those with disabilities, as participants in CBS will build their self-esteem.

In this study the participants included members of IMAN'ENDA, among them people with disabilities and apparently able-bodied people, and the church leaders and religion lecturers of the Presbyterian Church in Kinshasa.<sup>166</sup>

The participation of ordinary readers (people with disabilities) is relevant not only because the Bible is read from their particular viewpoint and reality and for their concerns, but also because CBS creates the space for ordinary people to contribute and offer their insights regarding biblical texts. The next component will describe how, through the process of facilitation, people can be empowered to discover themselves through Bible study.

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<sup>163</sup> Charles Gourney, 'Faith, Despair and Disability' in Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2007, 45.

<sup>164</sup> Lees, 'Interpreting the Bible', 1997, 13.

<sup>165</sup> Lees, 'Interpreting the Bible', 1997, 13.

<sup>166</sup> Church leaders from the Presbyterian Church are included as participants because they participated and read the Bible together with IMAN'ENDA members.



### 3.3.2 Facilitation

The second component of Contextual Bible Study is facilitation. According to West, facilitation is the key to all forms of CBS. He states, “Bible study which strives to be collaborative depends on a leadership style that facilitates”.<sup>167</sup> In other words, a facilitator should be communally orientated rather than dictatorial.

The facilitator has to play a leadership role in the sense that he must ensure that the group works in a spirit of “group collaboration”, freely sharing their resources without taking account of individual level or social class.<sup>168</sup>

As a frequent facilitator of Contextual Bible Study programs, West is well placed to outline the requirements for this position. In West’s view anyone who is willing to learn the necessary skills and who is able to apply these can become a facilitator.<sup>169</sup> However, Nadar contests this and states that a facilitator should fulfill three requirements: he or she has to be trained with the tools of critical scholarship, engaged for social transformation and originate from, or relate to, the community.<sup>170</sup> This study will employ criteria for successful facilitation, different from West’s, but similar to those suggested by Nadar. The latter’s requirements for facilitators will be highlighted from a disability perspective as follows:

1. The facilitator should be trained with the “tools of critical scholarship” as regards Bible study and well informed concerning disability issues
2. The facilitator has to be engaged in the struggle for the liberation of the community of people with disabilities
3. The facilitator is not necessarily a person with a disability. The integration of people with disabilities into society may actually be promoted by nominating an apparently able-bodied person as a facilitator, as long as he or she originates from, relates to, and is concerned with the community of people with disabilities. In other words a facilitator should have “heart”

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<sup>167</sup> West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 12.

<sup>168</sup> West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 12.

<sup>169</sup> West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 1993, 24; West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 12.

<sup>170</sup> Nadar, ‘Power, Ideology’, 2003, 194.

and “head” for this kind of commitment: he or she should be emotionally and intellectually connected with the community of people with disabilities

I will develop the above outline of criteria for facilitators further by emphasizing certain points. Being a facilitator of, or leading, a Bible study is in my opinion a challenge and a responsibility, particularly in a context as sensitive as that of disability. Over time, the approach to the issue of disability in Western society has changed significantly and a similar process has started in African society.<sup>171</sup> From the perspective of disability studies within biblical studies it appears that “Although disability scholarship routinely makes passing and often generalized references to the role of the Bible and Near Eastern literature in the cultural production and reception of disability, biblical scholars are just beginning to contribute to this growing body of scholarship”.<sup>172</sup> This implies a recent paradigm shift regarding the scholarly interpretation of disability as viewed in Near Eastern texts, in particular the biblical texts. This shift involves a move to embrace a liberation hermeneutics of disability, through which the biblical texts are read and reflected upon in terms of the present oppressed context of people with disabilities. As regards the facilitation aspect of CBS, a facilitator should be trained in the use of “tools of critical scholarship” in order to bring to the dialogue an informed approach and understanding of both the texts and the current context.

In addition to the requirements for facilitators, Nadar raises the problem of “unmasking identity” as crucial to the process of facilitation. For Nadar, the fact of a facilitator being “flesh and blood” in his or her own community will assist in avoiding the problem of mistrust and it will strengthen the relationship in a way that would not be possible for an outsider.<sup>173</sup>

From a disability perspective, a facilitator being or not being disabled does not matter. The former are concerned with being treated as human beings no different from the latter. Yet, “unmasking identity” is crucial because, following the dialectical method; both sides (trainers or facilitators and participants) need to develop trust to one another. For that reason a facilitator needs a “heart” and “head” in order to be able to fulfill his or her task in the sense of being, on the one hand, a person who is committed to the struggle against the

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<sup>171</sup> Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, 2008, 4; Hans S. Reinders, *The Future of the Disabled in Liberal Society: An Ethical Analysis* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 2; Charlton, *Nothing without Us*, 1998, 13.

<sup>172</sup> Avalos et al, *This Abled Body*, 2007, 26.

<sup>173</sup> Nadar, ‘Power, Ideologies and Interpretation’, 2003,198.

discrimination of people with disabilities and willing to “empower and collaborate with individuals and groups of people with disabilities who struggle for justice in concrete situations”.<sup>174</sup> This person then “creates new ways of resisting the theological symbols that exclude and devalue us [people with disabilities]”.<sup>175</sup> On the other hand, this person should have leadership skills, such as the ability to guide and enable the group process to take place, to manage conflict should it arise in a Bible study session, and to provide information when requested to do so (among other skills).<sup>176</sup>

In my position as a facilitator in the Bible study conducted for the purpose of this research, I am a “real reader”, a “flesh and blood reader” in Nadar’s words, as I come from the community concerned. As a person with a disability and as an ordained woman, I have been empowered and trained as a critical reader. However, my academic and ecclesial position could have made my peers uncomfortable. They might have kept a certain distance and labeled me as “other”. To avoid this, I have used in my research a third key element of Contextual Bible Study, namely “reading with” from a disability perspective.

### 3.3.3 “Reading with” in Contextual Bible Study

The third component of Contextual Bible Study is to “read with” participants in collaborative interpretation.<sup>177</sup> West states, “Contextual Bible Study is essentially a communal process in which local community resources for interpreting the Bible and the specialized interpretative tools of biblical scholars are used together to “read” the Bible”.<sup>178</sup> Following this, as West notes, in the field of biblical studies a space opens up for a serious dialogue, even collaboration between ordinary readers and biblical scholars using their own respective resources for mutual interchange.

Klaus Nürnberger in his book entitled *Biblical Theology in Outline: The Vitality of the Word of God* states: “...The Word of God is the living address of the living God to living people through a living community of believers. Living communication is versatile, not rigid. It is

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<sup>174</sup> Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 1994, 96.

<sup>175</sup> Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 1994, 96.

<sup>176</sup> West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 13.

<sup>177</sup> West, ‘Contextual Bible Study’, 1999, 57; West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 2003, 6.

<sup>178</sup> Gerald West, ‘Contextual Bible Study: Creating Sacred (and safe) space for Social Transformation’, *Grace and Truth: A Journal of Catholic Reflection*. Vol. 16, no 2, 1999, 51-63.

interactive, not abstract. The Word of God is an encounter with God which engages you, not a monument you can look at and leave like a tourist...<sup>179</sup> This statement reveals how the “dialectical method”, the dialogue between biblical scholars and the community, is the root of biblical theology. Ukpong argues along the same lines: “The procedure involves interaction between academic and ordinary readers of the Bible such that the ordinary readers are helped to develop critical awareness and identify and use local critical resources in their reading of the Bible. In developing the hermeneutic for this approach to Bible reading, the resources of the people’s culture and historical life experience are used as complementary to conventional critical tools of biblical exegesis”.<sup>180</sup> This confirms West’s statement that “reading with” lies at the heart of liberation hermeneutics.<sup>181</sup>

However, “reading with” has been a contentious issue among biblical scholars.<sup>182</sup> The experiences of South Africa and Brazil in this regard have revealed two “potential problems” that arise quite regularly when biblical scholars read the Bible with local communities of the poor and marginalized. These problems are, firstly, “listening to” that “romanticizes and idealizes the interpretation of the poor and marginalized”<sup>183</sup> and, secondly “speaking for” that “denies the subject status of the poor and oppressed altogether”.<sup>184</sup>

Nadar committed herself to “read to” the women in the community and to offer the resources for interpreting the Bible that would enable them to challenge those who misinterpret it for the purpose of oppression. However she identifies an alternative approach to “reading the Bible differently” by using “reading with” and “reading to” as complementary steps in Bible study. She argues that ““reading with’ the community should only be a preliminary step to the Bible study, for ‘reading with’ implies that the scholar understands (even if the scholar does not agree with) the position from which the community is reading. By first ‘reading with’ the community, the scholar already grasps the process involved in the ways in which the community reads, before the actual Bible study”.<sup>185</sup> Nadar’s concern is that “reading with” should be shifted to “reading to” in the Bible study. This means that “reading with” would

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<sup>179</sup> Nürnberger, *Biblical Theology in Outline*, 2004, 2.

<sup>180</sup> Ukpong, ‘Developments in Biblical Interpretation’, 2000, 23.

<sup>181</sup> West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 2003, 99; West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently’, 1996, 26.

<sup>182</sup> West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently’, 1996, 96; Musa Dube, ‘Reading of Semoya Women’s’, 1996, 73; Weems, ‘Response to “Reading with”’, 1996, 258; Nadar, ‘Power, Ideology and Interpretation’, 2003, 2002

<sup>183</sup> West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 2003, 18.

<sup>184</sup> Jill Arnot, ‘French Feminism in South Africa frame’, West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently’, 1996, 25.

<sup>185</sup> Nadar, ‘Power, Ideology and Interpretation’, 2003, 203.

serve to, at the beginning of the Bible study, share a common understanding with the community, while during the actual Bible study process the scholar should rather “read to” the community. Nadar highlights that contextual Bible study is a place to conscientize women, to make them aware of the oppressive use of scripture and of oppressive cultural and social systems, and to assist them to work for social transformation.

In developing “Feminist Pedagogy” Nadar, however, recognizes that a “democratic classroom” is one of the most important values of this pedagogy. Nadar agrees with Freire’s understanding of liberative education as a space where the oppressed are conscientized to be aware of the ways in which they have been asked to participate in their own oppression through an education system that enforces the status quo.<sup>186</sup> Therefore, Nadar argues, “the principles of a ‘democratic classroom’ where the role of the teacher as the all-knowing subject is ideally minimized, such an advocacy role need not be seen as a dominating act but rather as an exercise in collaborative learning”.<sup>187</sup>

Nadar’s concept of “reading to” the community posits such an educational setting as “the place to conscientize women”. The conscientization to which Nadar refers here is different from the Freirean concept of “conscientisation” (in Portuguese “conscientizacao”). Paulo Freire states, “...*conscientizacao* does not lead people to ‘destructive fanaticism’. On the contrary, by making it possible for people to enter the historical process as responsible subjects, *conscientizacao* leads them to search for self-affirmation and thus avoids fanaticism”.<sup>188</sup> In his book titled *The Politics of Education*, Freire argues, “Since the basic condition for conscientization is that its agent must be a subject (i.e., a conscious being), conscientization, like education, is especially and exclusively a human process. It is as conscious beings that men are not only *in* the world but *with* the world, together with other

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<sup>186</sup> Sarojini Nadar, ‘The Feminist Teacher: Pedagogy of the Oppressed Woman?’ *Journal of Constructive Theology*

(JCT): *Gender, Religion and Theology in Africa*. Vol. 14, No 2 & Vol 15, No 1 (UKZN: 2008 – 2009), 37-56.-

<sup>187</sup> In “Feminist Pedagogy”, Nadar seems to be very liberal in regard to the freedom and sharing between teacher and students, which differs from her views on reading the Bible to the community. Does this represent a paradigm shift to “reading with” or a distinction between the “classroom” and the “community” settings respectively? Regardless, in my opinion the theoretical justification for the “democratic classroom” could be also implemented in CBS as it is a tool of education (Sarojini Nadar, ‘Sacred Stories’ As Theological Pedagogy’ in *Journal of Constructive Theology, Gender, Religion and Theology in Africa*. Vol. 14, No 2 & 15, No 1 (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2008-2009),9-23; Nadar, ‘The Feminist, Pedagogy of oppressed’, 2008-2009, 37-55; Sarojini Nadar, ‘Contextuality and Intercontextuality in Theological Education: An African Perspective’, D. Werner, D Esterline, N Kang, J Raja (eds), *Handbook of Theology Education in World Christianity*. (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010), 129-137)

<sup>188</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 47

men...”.<sup>189</sup> According to Freire the subjectivity of people is more important than to patronize the contribution of the oppressed (poor and marginalized) in the conscientization process. People need to be authentic, adhering to who they are and move forward from there. If they merely want to be seen as contributing to a discussion, they will fail to reach the objective of conscientization which is self-affirmation.

Therefore, “reading with” in CBS is important. As West argues, “‘Reading with’ takes seriously the subjectivity of both the biblical scholars and the ordinary poor and marginalized reader of the Bible, and all that this entails for their respective categories and contribution”.<sup>190</sup>

This study employs the method of “reading with” in Bible study. The implication of “reading with” from a disability perspective is the need to consider the “subjectivity” of two groups of people, the non-disabled and those with disabilities.<sup>191</sup> Through the ‘reading with’ approach to Bible study, they can be enabled to accept their differences and enrich each other by their experiences. West states, “For us, reading the Bible and doing theology in this interface calls for dialogue and difference...”, a speaking with “which vigilantly foregrounds both the readings and resources of biblical studies and the readings and resources of the poor and marginalized”.<sup>192</sup>

The notion of ‘reading with’ is important from a disability perspective, because able-bodied people sometimes view people with disabilities as ‘cursed’, or as a source of shame. People with disabilities have been seen as sick people who are helpless and should be treated like children. As a result, the disabled have become frustrated, isolated and are prevented from seeing themselves as equal to other human beings.<sup>193</sup>

In other words, the aim of ‘reading with’ from a disability perspective is, on the one hand, to promote and stimulate in the minds of people with disabilities a sense of confidence and the knowledge that they are useful in any field of life, including in biblical interpretation. On the

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<sup>189</sup> Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), 76.

<sup>190</sup> West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently’, 1996, 25.

<sup>191</sup> “Non-disabled people and PWDs” in this study are church leaders from the Presbyterian Church, most of whom are apparently able-bodied and have been trained to read the Bible with tools and resources (I will explain this later in the next section); and PWDs are the IMAN’ENDA members. Even though some members are able-bodied people they often identify with PWDs because most of them are family members, friends or guides.

<sup>192</sup> West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently’, 1996, 26.

<sup>193</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 34, 44; Kamba, ‘Integration des personnes avec Handicap’, 1996, 8.

other hand, 'reading with' stimulates them to interact with each other. West agrees with Ellsworth who speaks about the importance of "friendship" in interacting with others in "their worlds". West quotes Ellsworth, stating that this "is an appropriate and acceptable 'condition' under which people become allies in struggles that are not their own". West points out that in such situations "we become partially constituted by work with other groups".<sup>194</sup> Friendship is from the disability perspective an important issue, especially in view of the practice in parts of Africa whereby families keep children with disabilities hidden in their homes, or place them, out of shame, in institutions, leading to the notion that these children are a "burden" on society. So, "...most [people with disabilities]... are perceived as lacking in the ability to make anything out of their lives. In terms of what our culture regards as interesting, such persons do not make interesting friends".<sup>195</sup> This experience has been expressed as follows,

I desire to be understood and recognized, even if this means to be unpopular and disliked. And the only persons who can so recognize me, and thereby give me the sense of being someone, are the members of the society to which...I feel I belong. My individual self is not something which I can detach from my relationship with others, or from those attributes of myself which consist in their attitude towards me. Consequently, when I demand to be liberated from, let us say, the status of political or social dependence, what I demand is an alteration of the attitude towards me of those whose opinions and behaviour help to determine my own image of myself" (Isaiah Berlin).<sup>196</sup>

The method of 'reading with' in Bible study is concerned with whether biblical scholars and the poor and marginalized reciprocally find their participation in the Bible study process useful.<sup>197</sup> That concern is addressed by Nadar when she raises the alternative way of 'reading with' before the actual Bible study begins, as explained above. Nadar's concern is that in the Bible study process the position of the scholar is unclear. She clarifies the role of the scholar by dividing the Bible study into two steps. In "reading with" the community, the role of the scholar, is largely that of shaping and contributing to the discussion that is raised by the community itself explaining its views and experiences. Only in the second step of "reading

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<sup>194</sup> Gerald West, 'Community Reconstructing Biblical Studies Pedagogy: The Case of Tamar and Kerina', in *JCT, Vol 78*, 2008 -2009, 73-90.

<sup>195</sup> Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, 2008, 27.

<sup>196</sup> Reinders, *The Future of the Disabled*, 2000, 66.

<sup>197</sup> West, 'Reading the Bible Differently', 1996, 26.

to” does the scholar bring his or her own resources into full play. Thus, she says “it would be misleading to suggest that the scholar ‘reads with’ the community” as if this were a reciprocal process, because it is only in combination with the second step of “reading to” that it becomes so.<sup>198</sup>

West responds, “While the ongoing process of conversion by ‘reading with’ demands continuing accountability to communities of the poor and marginalized, this ‘community consciousnesses’ does not exclude our accountability as scholars”.<sup>199</sup> West goes on to say, “Contextual Bible Study also offers additional critical resources for a structured articulation. Our research has shown that while poor and marginalized ordinary readers do have critical resources for interpreting their texts and contexts, they do not have the historical, sociological, literary, or symbolic tools to be critical of the biblical text in the same way as biblical scholars”.<sup>200</sup> Following West’s arguments, ‘reading with’ the community does not lessen the impact of biblical scholars. It establishes not only the particularity of each party, but in fact also the complementarity of ordinary readers and biblical scholars. For example in the Bible study that I conducted on 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10,<sup>201</sup> I asked the participants to explain what Paul says about his body in the text. Most participants interpreted the notion of ‘body’ in the text in terms of their resources, and thus focused on physical weakness.

However, my reading as a scholar trained to apply critical biblical tools deepened this interpretation of ‘body’ by not only searching in but also behind the text.<sup>202</sup> Such critical resources will constitute a hermeneutical engagement by providing and appropriating interpretation for and by people with disabilities and by biblical scholars who want to foreground an interpretation that addresses the concerns of people with disabilities.

In other words, ‘reading with’ in Bible study is the most important and central part of this process, because it leads to the enrichment of the two parties (Biblical scholars and ordinary people), who each contribute their knowledge for the sake of the transformation of both. This brings us to the next element of Contextual Bible Study which is the “socially engaged dimension”.

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<sup>198</sup> Nadar, ‘Power, Ideology and Interpretation’, 2003, 203.

<sup>199</sup> West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently’, 1996, 27.

<sup>200</sup> West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently’, 1996, 32.

<sup>201</sup> See my chapter 5, in the section “Autobiographical Criticism” and “People with disabilities in Dialogue with scholars”.

<sup>202</sup> I will explain this in chapter 5 where I analyze 2 Cor. 12, 1-10.



### 3.3.4 Socially engaged dimension

West defines socially engaged biblical scholars as scholars who have received a call to read the Bible with the poor and marginalized in an equal collaboration; sharing the pain of their struggle for survival, for the purpose of their liberation..<sup>203</sup> This is called “conversion from below”.<sup>204</sup> Gutierrez states, “The only significant change, the only change that will make a difference to the poor, will be change that comes ‘from below’”.<sup>205</sup> Working for conversion from below by socially engaged scholars is not only a calling, but also entails a willingness to serve the poor and marginalized in the community. It is, in addition, a requirement of Christians in the context of liberation theology. Clearly, this is not an easy task and for that reason it is a calling which not all biblical scholars are able to respond to.

The experience of vast numbers of oppressed in Latin American history, led to the church becoming engaged in the discussion of the process of liberation. The argument was that,

Those who want to shape their lives to the demands of the gospel find it increasingly difficult to accept vague, romantic appeals to ‘fellowship’ and ‘Christian unity’ that do not take account of the causes underlying the present state of affairs, or of the concrete conditions required for the construction of a just society. Such vague appeals forget that the catholicity, the universality, of the church is not something attained once for all time, or something to be maintained at any price. It must be won continuously, by courageous effort and open-eyed struggle.<sup>206</sup>

This thinking led to the establishment of the liberation hermeneutic, which requires Christians, including biblical scholars, to choose to walk together with the poor and marginalized.

In this study, the socially engaged include church leaders who are committed to work with people with disabilities and who accept that a person with a disability is God’s creation. Weiss states that people with disabilities are well described as, “... absent from history and gradually becoming a part of it. As they have gradually become a part of history, their

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<sup>203</sup> West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 2003, 46.

<sup>204</sup> West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 2003, 46; West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently’, 1996, 26.

<sup>205</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*. (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1923), xii.

<sup>206</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*. (London: SCM Press LTD, 1983), 29.

oppression has been revealed. The Christian community must respond to this oppression. One of the ways this response might occur is in the form of a critical liberation theology of disability”.<sup>207</sup> Janet A. Lees attempts to extend this reflection by arguing that liberation theology could be developed by people with disabilities (people with communication disorders in her context), through Bible study. In her view, “[The liberation hermeneutic’s] purpose would be that disabled people would be speaking for themselves, doing theology from their own experiences, teaching church and society what life is like from their perspective and working towards its transformation for justice for all people”.<sup>208</sup> Lees’ concern is how the Bible would be interpreted and developed by and with people with disabilities. The key issue of my study is similar in that the Bible study has to be interpreted by ordinary readers, in this case people with disabilities, together with the socially engaged scholar (disabled or not).

Therefore, the socially engaged in this study are the church leaders and religion lecturers - those who are accepted as part of the struggle world of people with disabilities. Such an encounter between the world of the socially engaged and that of people with disabilities involves “reading the Bible and doing theology... [and] calls for dialogue and difference”.<sup>209</sup>

Dialogue in partnership implies that both parties recognize their “role as servants”, meaning that both serve the same greater goal, in this case justice, social inclusion and equality for those with disabilities and the apparently able-bodied. What is crucial in this dialogue between the two parties is that “their contribution may be distinctive and different, but it is not in any way better or more significant”.<sup>210</sup> The encounter between ordinary readers and socially engaged biblical scholars entails complementary reading in the sense that the scholars contribute to critical resources for interpreting texts and contexts.<sup>211</sup> Hence, the presence of socially engaged biblical scholars is an essential part of the process.

Lees argues however that, when interpreting the Bible from a disability perspective, “even trained biblical scholars start off as ordinary interpreters of the Bible”.<sup>212</sup> This implies that socially engaged scholars, while experts on the Bible, may not be experts on disability.

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<sup>207</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 95.

<sup>208</sup> Lees, ‘Interpreting the Bible’, 1997, 14.

<sup>209</sup> West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently’, 1996, 26.

<sup>210</sup> West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently’, 1996, 28.

<sup>211</sup> West, ‘Reading the Bible Differently’, 1996, 32.

<sup>212</sup> Lees, ‘Enabling the Body’ in *This Abled Body*, 2007, 164.

Therefore, interpreting the Bible from a disability perspective requires the inclusion of “PWDs as research partners rather than [as] the object of research...”<sup>213</sup> West argues, “Indeed, this is what all biblical scholars do: they trace a *line of connection* between biblical texts and between biblical texts and other ancient texts; they also trace *lines of connection* between biblical texts and the worlds that produced them”.<sup>214</sup> However, West goes on to argue, “Socially engaged biblical scholars go further by overtly tracing a *line of connection* between biblical texts and contexts and the texts and context of present communities of the poor and marginalized”.<sup>215</sup> This indicates that in disability studies and Biblical studies, biblical scholars should be informed about issues surrounding disability and “explore the development of theologies by and with people with disabilities”.<sup>216</sup> An example is the Bible study that I conducted in Kinshasa with Presbyterian church leaders on Acts 3, 1-10, the details of which are discussed in chapter 6 of this thesis. The text deals with the “crippled beggar” sitting at the gate of the Temple called the “Beautiful Gate”. One of the questions asked was, “*Why does this disabled man sit outside the Temple?*” Most of the participants were apparently able-bodied people. Only two persons with disabilities were present. The participants were divided into six sub-groups: four of these were composed only of church leaders and their spouses; the other two sub-groups each had one person with a disability among its participants. It was noticed that the responses from sub-groups that consisted of only church leaders were based on the historical and sociological situation of people with disabilities in the ancient Jewish context where crippled beggars were considered impure and useless. Their responses were as follows:

Sub-group CL 2: “*He sits outside because he is a disabled person (according to the Jews’ perception, this crippled man was impure and his place was with the gentiles)*” and “*he wants to beg as he is disabled*”;

Sub-group CL 4: “*He sits outside to beg; and he sits outside because at that time a disabled person was considered impure*”;

Sub-group CL 5: *He sits outside because he wants to beg money; and he is neither informed nor educated about the importance of being in the temple*”;

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<sup>213</sup> Lees, 'Enabling the Body', 2007, 164

<sup>214</sup> West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 2003, 57.

<sup>215</sup> West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 2003, 57.

<sup>216</sup> Lees, 'Interpreting the Bible', 1997, 10.

Sub-group CL 6: *He sits outside because he is ignorant of who he is, because at that time disabled people were considered as cursed and impure. For those (family, friends) who carried him do not know who he is*".

However, the two sub-groups in which two people with disabilities participated responded according to the current realities of people with disabilities in the DRC. They responded as follows:

Sub-group CL 1: *"He sits outside to beg and if he does not sit outside 'who will care for him?'"* (The last sentence is a local expression used by street children, reacting to attempts by persons to stop those among them who have disabilities from begging)"

Sub-group CL 3: *"He sits outside, because he is being used by those who carried him for their own gain"*. For example, today there are local or international organizations dealing with disability who profit from PWDs: apparently able-bodied people "use PWDs for begging in shops and on markets".

The above example shows that the first sub-groups focused its understanding of the reading on a perception of the contemporary context of the text, using their experience of disability; and without taking account of the current realities of people with disabilities.

The last sub-groups on the other hand referred to the lived experience of one of the participants and offered what it "had at hand: their own lives, experiences, and struggles".<sup>217</sup>

Therefore, I argue that socially engaged biblical scholars need to engage with a liberation interpretation of disability which, from the perspective of people with disabilities, "acknowledges our struggle against the discrimination that is pervasive within the church and society as a part of the work of coming to our bodies".<sup>218</sup>

To end this discussion, what West says is clear:

Critical modes of reading the Bible enable ordinary "readers" to recognize the ideological nature of the biblical text (and their context) and to develop critical tools which will enable them to do their own critical analysis of the text (and context). The transfer of critical resources between their reading practice and the reality of their

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<sup>217</sup> Mesters, 'The Use of the Bible', 1981, 9.

<sup>218</sup> Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 1994, 86.

daily life...For some socially engaged biblical scholars, the contextual bible study process is primarily an opportunity to practice and rehearse for the real thing critical analysis of social reality.<sup>219</sup>

In conclusion, the interaction between the socially engaged and the poor and marginalized creates the need for both “community consciousness” and “critical consciousness”, which indicates that the critical analysis of social reality and the need to read the Bible systematically are crucial elements of Contextual Bible Study.<sup>220</sup>

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have analysed the CBS methodology and identified the key components of Contextual Bible Study as defined by Gerald West, and I have applied this method to the perspective and the context of people with disabilities. The chapter has also served to present the theoretical justification of the praxis of this study.

I will devote four chapters to the analysis of my fieldwork: there will be a chapter for each Bible study session, and a chapter in which I present the interviews that were conducted with Protestant Church Leaders and Catholic high school pupils. The analysis and interpretation of the different Bible studies will broadly follow the same analytic steps. This means that I will first report on the conducting of the Bible studies and make some comments on the way CBS took place among its specific participants. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the participants’ responses during the Bible studies, focusing on the specific text the groups engaged with and on the concerns raised. The analysis of the responses will be done on the basis of the theoretical framework outlined for this study. Next, I will consider the text in the light of my own disability experience within the framework of “autobiographical criticism”. And finally, I will present a dialogue between the responses of participants on the one hand, and scholarly work related to the texts on the other hand. Here too, I will bring in my own disability experience. Each chapter will contain detailed explanations of the location where a particular CBS took place and how I interacted with the participants.

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<sup>219</sup> West, *The Academic of the Poor*, 2003, 48.

<sup>220</sup> West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 2003, 46; West, ‘Articulating, Owning and Mainstreaming’, 2005, 29; West, *Contextual Bible Study*, 1993, 18.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY ON EXODUS 4, 1-17

#### 4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will explore two Bible studies conducted with IMAN'ENDA members: firstly with IMAN'ENDA members and secondly together with Presbyterian women pastors.<sup>221</sup> I will structure this chapter into six sections: Firstly, an introduction of the text of Exodus 4, 1-17 will be presented, in which I will outline the nature of the text and explain the relevance of re-reading the text from a disability perspective. This is followed by a discussion of details of the construction of CBS questions. The second section will provide details of the participants in the Bible studies. The third section contains a description of the Contextual Bible Study on Exodus 4, 1-17. In this section I will describe two separate Bible studies and comment on the way in which they progressed. Fourthly, an analysis and interpretation will be presented. My analysis is based on a selection of aspects from, and a comparison between, the two Bible study sessions. I will focus on similarity and dissimilarity of the responses. Thereafter I will examine the responses on the basis of the theoretical framework of this study. The fifth section is my autobiographical criticism in which my re-reading takes centre stage, using narrative interpretations in existing literature and focusing on psycho-spiritual considerations, all this within the framework of liberation theology of disability. The material in this section deals with aspects that the Bible study participants did not explore and will serve as background for a dialogue, also presented in the fifth section, between responses of the Bible study participants and scholarly literary materials relating to the text. An address and challenge to PWDs as well as apparently able-bodied people will conclude the chapter.

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<sup>221</sup> In the Presbyterian Church of Kinshasa (CPK), a group has been established under the “Family and Women” (in French, *Femme et Famille*) department, “*Union des Femmes Pasteures Presbyteriennes*” (UFPP). I was one of the initiators of this group. The purposes of the UFPP are, firstly, to share experiences with each other and secondly, to support each other using the gifts and skills that members have. Most members of the UFPP are theologians and each of them has a ministry, for example, a ministry for street children or for single young mothers, and so on. As many of them have no parishes to lead, they have time available for and with IMAN'ENDA members.

## 4.1 Introduction of the text of Exodus 4, 1-17

Exodus 4, 1-17 is one of the rare positive texts dealing constructively with disability in the Bible, as opposed to the many texts which “focus on medical diagnosis” or which “...locate disability in an individual’s body and tend to view disability as an individual tragedy”.<sup>222</sup>

Chapter 4 of Exodus is a follow-up scenario of the encounter between God and Moses on Mount Horeb where God was manifest in a burning bush. Chapter 3 of Exodus is concerned with God’s plan to deliver his people, the Israelites, from oppression in Egypt and bring them to Canaan. Moses’ task is to explain to the elders the plan to request Pharaoh to let Israel go and to journey into the wilderness to worship God. Moses points out that, in comparison to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, he is insignificant. Moses objects five times to his God-given task (3. 11, 13; 4. 1, 10, 13) and he uses fear to excuse himself from the mission that God urges him to take on.<sup>223</sup> In chapter 4, Moses is empowered by God to accept this mission.

Before continuing, I would like to make two points. Firstly, it should be noted how a re-reading of this text might be understood within the theological trajectory of the book of Exodus and how it could be interpreted. Following the “hermeneutical line of thinking”, the book of Exodus has taken on a “reservoir of meaning”.<sup>224</sup> This meaning is linked to the notion of liberation from bondage and, hence, the book of Exodus is linked to the liberation of oppressed people universally, for example in South America. As Jose Severino Croatto, states, “we are joined to prolong the Exodus event because it was not an event solely for the Hebrews but rather the manifestation of a liberative plan of God for all people”.<sup>225</sup> Secondly, the text reveals the biblical understanding of disability in Yahwist narratives, which name God as the source of disability instead of adopting the legal Priestly perspective that “disability is primordial chaos breaking into God’s created order (Lev. 21: 17-21)”.<sup>226</sup> Therefore, the v. 10 – 11 of chapter 4, which deal with “disability” are important for this study and indicate the need for a positive re-reading of disability narratives.

In the following section I will discuss how I constructed the CBS questions and how they refer to the relevant of the theoretical framework of this study (liberation theology of disability, the psycho-spiritual aspect of personality and Christian education theories) for this

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<sup>222</sup> Bruce, ‘A Daughter of Abraham’, 2005, 1; Avalos et al, *This Abled Body*, 2007, 15.

<sup>223</sup> Carol Meyers, ‘Exodus’ in *The New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2005), 55.

<sup>224</sup> Jose Severino Croatto, *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978), 12.

<sup>225</sup> Croatto, *Exodus*, 1978, 12.

<sup>226</sup> Avalos et al, *This Abled Body*, 2007, 91.

actual passage. I will further highlight socio-historical aspects in the text that I found significant for the CBS.

#### 4.1.1 Construction of Contextual Bible Study

The construction of the CBS questions was the outcome of the workshop Patricia Bruce, Gerald West and I held in November 2008. The questions were constructed in accordance with our experiences and expertise. The CBS questionnaire was constructed in following the Ujamaa Centre design.

The following questions of Bible study on Exodus 4, 1-17 will be posed:

1. Re-tell the story to each other (two persons).
2. What do you think this story is about?
3. Who are the principal characters and what is their relationship?
4. What problems/difficulties does Moses think he will face in dealing with the Israelites?
5. What is Moses' disability?
6. How does God deal with Moses' disability?
7. What does this text tell us about God's attitude to disability?
8. How does God's attitude to disability compare to our society's attitude to disability?
9. How does this text challenge us?

I will next explain how we went about choosing each question that I used in CBS in the light of my theories and methods.

The first question, "***Re-tell the story to each other (two persons)***"The question offers to each participant to put the story into their own words, thereby indicating their initial understanding of the text. This helps the facilitator also to understand something of the reception history of this text in this community. The question is also vital to draw participants into the process. It also gives confidence to the participants who think that they do not have anything to say, and provides them with the opportunity to talk.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> I am aware and I have experienced that participants in CBS for the first time find it difficult to start speaking; and sometimes they find this embarrassing, especially those who are not used to talking much. In this Bible



The second question, “***What do you think this story is about?***” thrust the participants to connect the text with their context. In CBS, this called “community consciousness” as I stated in chapter three that this text was unfamiliar text, in the sense that not many preachers relate this to disability; and most people, including PWDs themselves, have narrowed the understanding of disability. However, “disability is a very diverse experience” so that no one could say today s/he does not have disability. Therefore, though the question is an open question, allowing the participants to say whatever they want to say, this question was prepared to make participants aware of the diversity of disability.

The third question, “***Who are the principal characters and what is their relationship?***” takes the participants to the text as it is called in CBS “critical consciousness” question, meaning it offers resources from biblical scholarship, by drawing on literary analysis. In addition, locating this question in the theory of personality, which deals to recognition of weakness and search of identity, was intended to help participants to understand how a person like Moses related to his brothers, Israelites and to God.

The fourth question, “***What problems/difficulties does Moses think he will face in dealing with the Israelites?***” again requiring literary analysis, focuses the participants on the text. It motivates participants with disability and apparently able-bodied people to name these problems or difficulties. The theory of liberation theology of disability motivated me to construct this question in sense that the text provides insight into the real identity of people PWDs through Moses’ situation. Thus, v. 1 might require the socio-historical resources of “childhood of Moses” for better understanding the text in sense that the verse might be dealt to Moses’ background since he was born, his relationship to his brothers, to Egyptians and to God.

The fifth question, “***What is Moses’ disability?***” in v. 10 was a constructed to create awareness among participants about the form of disability in this text. This question required socio-historical understanding of the “childhood of Moses” and I understood “stuttering as a disability” based on psychological insights into the causes of stuttering. The themes such as “speech” or “speaking”, and the concept of “disability” in the ancient time, functioned as

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study, this happened in the first group, but in the second group participants were so engaged that I had to stop them and move forward.

useful resources for discussing the text in this question. This might be a constructive question together with the next question, which opposed those scholars, who have interpreted “Moses’ slow in tongue and slow in speech” in different ways.<sup>228</sup> Some even reasoned that the phrase could be an example of metaphoric language and not refer to actual speech impairment.<sup>229</sup>

The sixth question, “***How does God deal with Moses’ disability?***” focuses on the text and required to go behind the text. The question is the basis of this Bible study in sense that through this question, participants would discover how God, as a character in the text, responded each time Moses said “no” and would consider the implications of this from the perspective of disability. It shows again how this passage is a positive biblical text related to disability rather than in other biblical text (such as a Leviticus) as I stated above. The socio-historical resources of disability in ancient time would be required to this question. The theory of personality, in “finding the meaning” which is dealt to self-awareness, discovery of self,<sup>230</sup> led the construction of this question in considering how far people with disabilities knowing themselves.

The seventh question, “***What does this text tell us about God’s attitude to disability?***” Invites the participants into the text. Verse 11 offers resources for this question. The theory of liberation theology of disability was applied to construct this question, which involves the recognition and acceptance of the body’s limits.<sup>231</sup> The question was constructed to challenge people with disabilities and apparently able-bodied people in regard to God’s attitude to disability.

The eighth question, “***How does God’s attitude to disability compare to our society’s attitude to disability?***” returns participants to the first question and refers to their context. In CBS it is called a “community consciousness” question. In this question the point is to make a comparison between society’s view and God’s view of disability. The question was strengthened by the theory of personality, which deals with self-acceptance as a way to deal to correct all negative perceptions that society have toward PWDs.

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<sup>228</sup> John Muddiman & John Barton, *The Oxford Bible Commentary: Exodus 4, 1-17* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 72

<sup>229</sup> Meyers, ‘Exodus’, 2005, 61.

<sup>230</sup> Graber, *Victor Frankl’s Logotherapy*, 2004, 34.

<sup>231</sup> Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology*, 2009, 119; Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 1994, 83.

The ninth question, “*How does this text challenge us?*” is the last question that also returns participants to the first question and it locates participants in their context. According to CBS, which is the methodology of this study, the last question prepares the participants to take action. The intention behind this question was to see how participants would react and respond to this passage.

#### **4.1.2 Participants**

I conducted the Bible study on Exodus 4, 1- 17 twice, first with IMAN’ENDA members only, and the second time with mostly the same IMAN’ENDA members along with Presbyterian women pastors. The first Bible study was held on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2009 with seventeen participants: eleven women and six men aged between 25 and 50. The participants included 12 persons with disabilities (3 with visual impairment and 9 with physical disability) and 5 apparently able-bodied persons. The Bible study was held in an IMAN’ENDA member’s house. The venue was other than planned and was at such a distance that some members, especially those with disabilities, were prevented from attending the Bible study. The second Bible study was held one week after the previous one during a weekend excursion organized by IMAN’ENDA<sup>232</sup> at the “Carrefour de Jeunes” (a youth centre of the Protestant church). There were 48 participants. The group was composed of 32 women and 16 men of whom 30 had disabilities, while 18 were apparently able-bodied persons from 12 to 55 years old<sup>233</sup>; included in this group were 8 Presbyterian women pastors.

Since its inception, IMAN’ENDA has opted for accepting apparently able-bodied persons as members. IMAN’ENDA works with pastors who are committed to and concerned for the needs of people with disabilities. Most of these pastors are invited to preach to, or to teach, IMAN’ENDA members. A group of 8 women pastors from the Presbyterian Church also joined IMAN’ENDA and offer their expertise to support and strengthen the work of IMAN’ENDA.

These women pastors have played a role in evangelism and some are chaplains in Presbyterian schools. Despite their ordination in the Presbyterian Church, women pastors

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<sup>232</sup> IMAN’ENDA traditionally strengthens links between its members by spending a two or three day weekend away. I took this opportunity to conduct two Bible studies, Exodus 4, 1- 17 and 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10 with 48 participants. These will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>233</sup> Out of 30 people with disabilities, 1 person had a hearing impairment, 2 persons had a visual impairment, 2 persons were intellectually disabled and 25 persons were physically disabled.

have not had as much opportunity to lead a parish as their male colleagues. Therefore women pastors have created a space for themselves in which to share their experience and offer care, among others by conducting ministry in IMAN'ENDA.

I will employ the code MP to denote the Bible study with 17 participants, and MW for the Bible study with 48 participants in order to accentuate the fact that the text from Exodus 4, 1-17, was studied with two different groups of IMAN'ENDA members on different days and in different places.

## **4.2 A description of Contextual Bible Study on Exodus 4, 1-17<sup>234</sup>**

In this section I will provide some details of the workshop process followed for each group. I will report on the MP group Bible study and on how CBS functioned in relation to the participants, Thereafter, I will comment on the MW group Bible study in the same way. In the next chapter I will analyse the two Bible studies by comparing them.

### **4.2.1 Bible study with MP group**

#### **Step 1**

IMAN'ENDA members regularly meet one Sunday a month. On one such occasion I took the opportunity to meet IMAN'ENDA for the first Bible study. Three months previously, the members were reminded that they would meet for a new Bible reading. Unfortunately, the available venue was far away and several members could not attend. Of the 45 people who were expected, only 17 made it to the meeting.

Before starting I took a few minutes to explain CBS and its process as the CBS approach to reading the Bible differs from what IMAN'ENDA members are used to (IMAN'ENDA employed traditional teaching). I informed the participants that CBS takes account of the concerns and needs of poor and marginalized people. I showed them that CBS is a new way of “learning by sharing”, implying that we would take time to hold discussions in small groups and to share viewpoints.

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<sup>234</sup> I will not report on all responses during the two Bible studies. However, I will select and summarize the relevant responses according to the purpose of this study.

We discussed together how we would proceed. Firstly, participants were divided into small groups. At this point, I explained to the participants the importance of sitting with a few people in a circle while participating in discussion, saying that it was a sign of unity and safety “where everyone is equal with everyone else and can be seen and heard by all”.<sup>235</sup> The purpose of this was to create a feeling of trust among the participants. For the sake of IMAN’ENDA members, the chairs had already before the meeting been arranged in a close circle.<sup>236</sup> Seventeen participants were divided into 3 sub-groups (two groups of 6 and one group of 5 persons). As a second step I advised the participants who were friends to join particular sub-groups together, while I proposed to separate married couples or relatives. This was done in order to make them feel comfortable enough to express freely what was on their minds. Thirdly, the participants of each sub-group appointed a discussion leader and a ‘rapporteur’ to record the proceedings. The first two as well as the last questions of Bible study were discussed in the plenary; the other questions were discussed in the small groups. One hour was spent on this Bible study.

In the case of this session, I was a suitable candidate to be the main facilitator of the Bible study.<sup>237</sup> However, in every Bible study that I conducted I had four assistants: one young man with a slight disability who noted down the questions and responses on the board and three apparently able-bodied persons. The last three were in charge of laying out the seating arrangements and recording the proceedings. I led discussion in the plenary and went around the small groups. This assistance helped me in my own physical limitations and also allowed me to be part of the small groups’ discussions.

In the plenary the Bible study opened with an invitation to one of the participants to pray for the session, followed by three persons who volunteered to read the Bible text which offered participants an opportunity to hear the text spoken by different voices. At this point I posed the first two questions which connect the participants’ resources to the text.

### **Question 1: Re-tell the story to each other**

This first question involved two persons who had to re-tell the story in language familiar to them. At first this seemed weird to the participants, but I explained that it would be an

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<sup>235</sup> Wink, ‘*Transforming Bible Study*’, 1989, 95

<sup>236</sup> I used to limit the need to move around, taking into account the physical condition of participants as well as the requirements of people with auditory impairments who were placed in the same group with other members for the sign language facility.

<sup>237</sup> Due to the fact that I was introducing the CBS as a new way to read the Bible, I was the best person to act as facilitator, being myself a person with a disability.

effective way to make them feel that they “owned” the story. I also explained that, given time constraints, the exercise would not require each person to tell the whole story but rather that the story would be assembled by various persons, one starting and the other ending it. Some participants started re-telling while others referred to the text in order to make sure that what they were saying was correct.

### **Question 2: What do you think this story is about?**

I invited participants to give their initial reactions to the text from the perspective of their own context. In other words, the question connected the participants to the text in terms of and using their experience and resources. These are their responses as they expressed:

*“God’s calling”; “the appearance of God to man”; “dialogue between God and man”; “freedom”; “lack of confidence”; “Moses’ doubts”; “face the disability”.*<sup>238</sup>

The first two questions were posed in the plenary and apparently presented the participants with something new to them, an approach with which they were not familiar. After some explanation participants seemed to feel sufficiently at ease to confront the questions although, after the first question, some were still hesitant and not sure about what they were doing. However, as they got involved in responding they began to find it interesting.

### **Step 2**

I asked the participants to work in small groups according to their seating arrangements, because “the style of these studies is one of **participation** and **discussion**”. In CBS, participants “play a key role and have a valid contribution to make”.<sup>239</sup> Dividing them into small groups reinforced their relationship and helped them to develop a sense of being equals and of being able to rely on each other.

The participants were divided according to the principles of IMAN’ENDA which means that there was no discrimination between people with disabilities and able-bodied people. Most able-bodied people played a part in the lives of people with disabilities (as relatives or, in some cases, as guides). As regards the participants who were blind, I placed one in each sub-group. Sub-group MP1 was composed of 5 persons with disabilities and one able-bodied

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<sup>238</sup> I present responses as they were written on the flipchart and compare them to what was recorded on the tape recorder.

<sup>239</sup> West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 12.

person (3 men and 3 women), sub-group MP2 consisted of 3 people with disabilities and 2 able-bodied individuals (1 man and 4 women), and sub-group MP3 comprised 4 people with disabilities and 2 able-bodied individuals (1 man and 5 women). I placed the participants in particular sub-groups according to their friendships with one another and, as stated above, I separated married couples or relatives, so that they would feel free to say what was on their minds.

The following questions (from 3 to 6) aimed to make the participants concentrate on the text and read it carefully.

As describe above, participants were divided in 3 sub-groups, two of 6 each and one of 5. In the actual Bible study each sub-group was named after the person who was leading the discussion, although in this report, I label each sub-group with “MP” and a number. The first sub-group, “MP1” was led by a man with visual impairment; the second sub-group “MP2” by an able-bodied woman, and the third sub-group by another able-bodied woman, “MP3”.

### **Question 3: Who are the main characters and what is their relationship?**

While the participants were discussing the questions, I moved from one sub-group to another in order to see how they were coping. I noted that two groups were hesitant but that MP1 was very active. Afterwards I asked participants to round off their deliberations and I invited each sub-group to report back on what had been discussed. A representative of each group presented the various responses.

The responses to question 3, asking participants who the main characters are and what their relationship is, follow below.<sup>240</sup>

Sub-group MP1 mentioned:

*“Moses and God”, the latter being identified as “the creator of all universe, the Lord of all creation”; and “Moses as shepherd of the Jewish nation and of the Jewish group in Egypt who fled from Pharaoh in order not to be killed”.*

Sub-group MP2 reported:

*The main characters were “Moses, God, the Israelites and the Egyptians; Moses is shepherd, the Lord is God, the Israelites were people of God and the Egyptians were people of Pharaoh”.*

Sub-group MP3 answered:

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<sup>240</sup> I put the participants’ responses in italics and inverted commas.

*“Moses and God”* were the main characters and God was *“the Lord of the all universe, the creator”* and *“Moses was the shepherd and was Jewish”*.

In this sub-question, participants seemed to confuse the meaning of the term “relationship” with “what they knew about the main characters” and often did not deal with the relationship. This was caused by a language problem.<sup>241</sup> The sub-group MP2 did identify the relationship between the characters, making the link between the Israelites and God, and the Egyptians and Pharaoh

#### **Question 4: What problems/difficulties does Moses think he will face in dealing with the Israelites?**

The responses to question 4 were as follows.

Sub-group MP1 reported:

*“Moses is afraid to appear in front of the Pharaoh; he is afraid to be in opposition to Pharaoh; Moses is not clear about what the words of the Lord means; and Moses is uncertain because of the fact that he is slow of speech and tongue”*.

The responses of sub-group MP2 were:

*“Moses is afraid to confront Pharaoh.....as he runs away from the Royal palace, because he killed an Egyptian; he is not sure whether his brothers, the Israelites, would welcome him easily; Moses is afraid to speak due to his disability; and Moses does not really know God as the Lord of Israelites”*.

Sub-group MP3 answered the question as follows:

*“Moses is afraid to oppose to Pharaoh and he is afraid of being slow of speech and tongue”*.

In answering this question, most participants focused on the problems that Moses would face with regard to the Egyptians, rather than on those concerning the Israelites. Only sub-group MP2 mentioned that Moses was not sure whether his brothers, the Israelites, would receive him well.

Observing the participants at work, I noticed that those in the MP1 sub-group were actively involved in the discussion and that they rotated the role of “rapporteur” so that everybody got a chance to present a report. As regards sub-group MP2, I had to constantly encourage the participants to complete their responses. They said for example: “Moses is afraid to confront Pharaoh...” Something seemed to be missing and I would ask questions such as: “what makes

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<sup>241</sup> The problematic in this question is that the composition of this question was in English, translated to French and to Lingala. Some words, such as “relationship” we could not translate properly into Lingala. Some members who are less educated have found it difficult to respond accordingly.



you say that?” This made them realize that more reflection was needed and they would complete their responses.

The participants of MP3 were hesitant to respond. Most of their responses had already been covered by others sub-groups.

### **Question 5: What is Moses’ disability?**

Sub-group MP1 said that “*Moses’ disability is a speech disorder and lack of faith*”.

Sub-group MP2 stated in their report that “*Moses’ disability is a stammer*”.

The response of sub-group MP3 was that “*Moses’ disability is a slowness of speech and tongue*” and they added, “*Moses’ disability is lack of faith*”.

I was impressed and surprised that most participants in all sub-groups quickly recognized the fact of Moses’ disability.

Sub-groups MP1 and MP3 added a “lack of faith” as a disability which involves a kind of “metaphoric interpretation of the Bible” and is qualified by some scholars as a “spiritual disability”.<sup>242</sup>

### **Question 6: How does God deal with Moses’ disability?**

In response to question 6, the sub-groups expressed their views as follows.

Sub-group MP1 reported:

“*God sees what is inside of Moses instead of his handicap; Moses’ disability is not a handicap for God to use him as an instrument; God does not see Moses’ disability; and Moses’ disability is not a big deal for God to accomplish his mission in Moses*”.

The responses of MP2 were:

“*God sees inside us rather than from outside; God does not care about our disability; God considers Moses’ potential as being greater than as Moses sees it himself*”; and *Moses’ disability is not an obstacles for God to use him*”.

The replies of MP3 were expressed as follows:

“*God takes account of what is inside us rather than our physical condition*”; “*Moses’ disability is not a handicap for God to work with him*”; and “*God treats Moses as anybody else without paying attention to his disability*”.

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<sup>242</sup> Meyers, ‘Exodus’, 2005, 61.

All the sub-groups gave answers such as “God sees what is inside of Moses instead of his handicap”, indicating that the participants did not interpret the question correctly. The MP2 sub-group added: “God does not care about our disability” which sounds as though God denies the disability. This confusion was due to the translation from English into French and into Lingala. I conducted this Bible study in Lingala whereas the question had been conceived in English, “*How does God deal with Moses’ disability?*” (in French: “comment Dieu traite notre handicap?”) in Lingala the verb “to deal with” (in French, “traiter”) was translated as “see” (in Lingala, “komona”), which was inaccurate

However, some of the responses were pertinent to the question such as MP1’s response, “*Moses’ disability is not a handicap for God to use him as an instrument*”. The MP2 sub-group stated, “*God considers Moses’ potentials as being greater than as he sees it*”. These responses indicate an insight into how God deals with Moses’ disability.

### **Step 3**

I asked the participants to return to their group for a discussion of the final questions. These questions are similar questions in that they move the CBS into community consciousness, and allow the participants to make connections between the text and their context.

**Question 7: What does this text tell us about God’s attitude to disability?**

**Question 8: How does God’s attitude to disability compare to society’s attitude to disability?**

The responses of MP1 to Question 7 were as follows.

*“God does not see the disability as an obstacle to serve him; God looks at the heart of Moses instead of his appearance; and God does not see Moses’ disability”.*

The response of sub-group MP2 was:

*“God does not see the weakness of our physical condition, yet he sees our spiritual condition”.*

The views of sub-group MP3 were:

*“God does not see the disability as an obstacle to serving him”; and “God does not take account of appearances”.*

Here again, participants seemed to be confused by the question. Their responses generally seemed to suggest that God ignores the weakness/difficulty, experienced by human beings with a disability.

The responses of MP1 to Question 8 were as follows.

*“Society limits a person with a disability, but God sees beyond the disability; Society discourages a person with a disability and he thus remains inactive, but God sees beyond disability; and Society sees physical condition as ‘abnormal’, but God considers our spiritual condition”.*

The answers of sub-group MP2 were expressed like this:

*“Society looks at the outward appearances, but God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16, 7); the ignorance about himself of a person with a disability leads to a lack of self-confidence (this ignorance sometimes comes from the family), but God gives the capacity to a person with a disability to shame the society”.*

The responses of sub-group MP3 were:

*Society denigrates a person with a disability, but God takes into consideration a person with a disability; Society wants to see before taking action with regard to a disabled person, but God does not take account of that because God knows a man better than he knows himself and Society limits a person with a disability, but God sees beyond the disability”.*

In responding to this question, most participants managed to make a distinction between what is meant by “God’s attitude” and “society’s attitude to disability”. Sub-group MP2 quoted the biblical passage where Samuel anoints David in 1 Samuel 16, 7; they explained that this passage reveals how God does not value that which humankind considers important, indicating that God’s attitude is very different to society’s attitude.

The second answer of the MP2 sub-group seems to be out of line with the question, but the sub-group explained that, in their discussions, they had searched to understand as well how a person with a disability sees him/herself. Some participants in MP2 were in agreement, that many people with disabilities do not know who they are and what they are capable of, so that they end up on the street begging for money. Others argued that this situation sometimes is a result of the family’s attitude. However, they said, when a person with a disability is rejected by family, God rescues that person by giving him or her different abilities which in turn undermine the prejudices of society.

The participants of MP3 explained their second answer by giving the example of what may happen to people with a disability who apply for a job. Usually they are tested intellectually to see if they are “normal” and in addition they need to provide medical proof as regards the nature and extent of their disability. The sub-group argued that society does not accept a person with a disability as such, but tends to presume that he is “abnormal”, whereas God the creator sees the person with a disability as a “normal person”.<sup>243</sup>

The responses to question 8 expressed how participants found a connection between the text and their real life situation.

#### **Step 4**

I asked the participants to respond in the plenary for the final question as it deals with action to be taken by each participant, according to what he or she had learnt through the Bible study. This also allowed those who had had little opportunity to speak to raise their voice and share their viewpoints.

#### **Question 9: How does this text challenge us?**

I summarize the responses as follows.<sup>244</sup>

*“To be considered as a human being like others in society, family or the church”;*

*“Every person has a mission to serve God whatever his condition”;*

*“Once you hear God’s calling do not take account of problems/difficulties, which surround you”;*

*“Avoid society’s views, but consider God’s attitude”;*

*“God works with a disposable heart (meaning that God works with those who are willing to do something)”;*

*“As human beings God calls us to do amazing things, and this text challenges us to not lose self-confidence whatever the circumstances”.*

This was an exciting part of the Bible study session because everybody wanted to say something. It was a moment of self-commitment of participants, expressed in their reactions to the question. The question called for an action plan and was directed at participants

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<sup>243</sup> I use the terms “normal” and “abnormal” here purely from a disability perspective, that is, to show how society views people with disabilities.

<sup>244</sup> As stated before, I did not report all responses to avoid repetition.

themselves, implying that people with disabilities are becoming conscious of their value for society. They understand that God teaches them to focus on what He wants them to do, rather than to consider society's view of disability. At the same time, the apparently able-bodied participants were also being conscientized so that they would take a more positive view of people with disabilities.

### **Step 5**

As we had started with an opening prayer, I asked participants to also close the session with prayer.

#### **4.2.1.1 Summary**

The Bible study on Exodus 4, 1-17 with MP participants was a success, in sense that as I have stated before, shifting from the preaching and teaching method to an approach of sharing together in Bible reading was a new experience for the participants and required some getting used to. However, the way in which the Bible study was structured, encouraged participants to take an active part, even though some questions elicited a few answers that seemed beside the point.

The participants had been familiar with the story of Moses in the book of Exodus before this Bible study but they had never been made to approach it in this way. The discussion of the final question gave rise to confession, conversion and self-commitment.

Full of excitement the participants insisted that IMAN'ENDA members who had not been able to attend be made aware of this new Bible reading via CBS. Hence, during this meeting and together with participants, we set the date, time and place for the next Bible study.

#### 4.2.2 Bible study with MW group<sup>245</sup>

##### Step 1

The Bible study with the MW group was done with 48 participants of which 40 were IMAN'ENDA members with disabilities and 8 were Presbyterian women pastors.<sup>246</sup> As I stated earlier, the second Bible study was held in the Protestant Church's youth centre where IMAN'ENDA members spent a weekend for training.

In the plenary I began the Bible study by inviting a woman pastor to pray for the opening session and continued by explaining the process of CBS as well as my reasons for arranging the chairs in a circle.

The MW group was divided into 4 sub-groups, each comprising 12 persons. I gave each sub-group a number from 1 to 4. I asked the women pastors to form their own sub-group together with 4 others, one man with visual impairment, one woman with physical impairment and 2 apparently able-bodied men. This sub-group was headed by a woman with a disability and labelled group 1, hereafter referred to as MW1. The reason I put the women pastors together, rather than spreading them over the different sub-groups, was to avoid the possibility that their leadership experience and access to certain resources would intimidate others. Later in the session I explained this to the participants.

The second sub-group, MW2, was led by a woman with a disability and composed of 3 apparently able-bodied men and 9 people with disabilities (8 women with a physical impairment and 1 man with a visual impairment).

The third sub-group, MW3, was headed by a man with a physical impairment. MW3 consisted of 9 people with disabilities (1 young woman with a hearing impairment,<sup>247</sup> 5 women and 3 men with physical impairment) and 3 apparently able-bodied men.

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<sup>245</sup> The second Bible study happened one week after the first one.

<sup>246</sup> See details above of the number of the participants and the venue in section 4. 2

<sup>247</sup> There was a sign language interpreter included in this sub-group.

The fourth sub-group, MW 4, was led by a woman with a disability and composed of 10 people with disabilities (one man and one woman with speech disorders, 7 women and 1 man with physical impairment) and one man and woman who were apparently able-bodied.

The process of recording spoken reports was the same as in the previous Bible study which means that the sub-groups chose their discussion leader and ‘rapporteur’. The first two questions and the last were discussed in plenary sessions; the other questions were dealt with in the sub-groups and the results presented in a report. I proposed three persons to read the Bible in French, Lingala and Braille. Then I posed the first two questions, which were meant to lead the participants to link their resources to the text.

### **Question 1: Re-tell the story to each other**

This step helped me to determine how and to what degree participants were involved and taking an active part. I was aware that some of those present had also participated in the first Bible study and that some would already have discussed the CBS with others. Many people wanted to speak but I asked three persons to summarize the story according to their understanding of it: one woman with hearing impairment, one man with visual impairment and an apparently able-bodied woman. The three persons selected for reading the Bible, represented a minority group of IMAN’ENDA of which most members are physically disabled. The choice was made to make them feel part of the group as the CBS is “a safe place for participants – a place of trust and affirmation”<sup>248</sup> Thus I tried to stimulate them to contribute with confidence. They presented the story as follows.

Claudine Mapendo’s (hearing impairment) version

*“The story is about Moses, who was prophet of God. God wanted him to go and liberate the Israelite people. Moses doubted despite the miracles and power that God showed him, but God kept telling him that he would be with him.”*

Manix Otete’s (visual impairment) version:

*“The story tells us about Moses and God. God chooses Moses to go and tell the Israelite people that God has heard their cries and comes to liberate them. But Moses had fear because he killed an Egyptian and he was afraid that Pharaoh was looking for him. Hence he fled from Egypt and went to Midian (where he found refuge and got married with his wife Sephora). When God asked Moses to go and liberate the Israelites, he doubted and wanted to know the true God. That is why God proved Himself to him with miracles such as 10 plagues and changing the stick into a snake. Although these were God’s wonders Moses refused and*

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<sup>248</sup> West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 10,

*made the excuse that he is not able to speak properly. So, God got angry with Moses, as a consequence, God had the project to help Moses to speak well, but He changed his mind and provided for Moses his brother Aaron to speak for him....”*

Elisee Dina’s (able-bodied woman) version:

*“The story starts with the complaining of Moses. God sent him but he was not sure that his people [the Israelites] would listen to him. God said to Moses that he would be with him. Despite the several signs that God showed him, Moses refused God’s mission. He made the excuse that he had difficulty in speaking clearly, and he begged God to send another person.”*

### **Question 2: What do you think this story is about?**

The question was asked in order to get the participants’ initial reaction to the text and in order to connect them to it through using their experience and resources. Their responses were presented in the report-back as follows:

*“God’s empowerment”; “Faith”; “Belief”; “Being equipped”; “Disability is not an excuse”; “Personal inadequacy”; “New leadership”; “Fear of rejection”; “God’s patience”; “Divine mission”; “Miracle”; “God’s sovereignty”; and “The human weakness”.*

While sharing their responses, the MW participants made clear that the story of Moses in Exodus was familiar to them. The different versions of the story, as related by the three participants in their summaries, showed a diversity of understanding and interpretation.

The responses given to question 2 show how the extended thinking of participants resulted in different versions of the story. The participants’ responses embraced a variety of views of the text. These will be discussed later in my analysis and interpretation section.

### **Step 2**

The participants were asked to sit according to the seating arrangement made in readiness before the start of the session. The following questions (from 3 to 6) were all aimed at making the participants concentrate on the text and read it carefully.

### **Question 3: Who are the main characters and what is their relationship?**

The sub-groups brought out the following reports on their dealings with question 3.

MW1 stated: *“There are 4 characters in the main that characters emerge: Moses and God, and the passive characters who are the Egyptians and the Israelites”.*



As regards their relationship, this sub-group argued that

*“God is the Lord of Israelites and Moses is Israelite. God allowed Moses to be born and grow up in Egypt in the royal palace as a prince of Pharaoh, because God had a purpose to save the Israelites from the slavery of the Egyptians”.*

The responses of sub-group MW2 were expressed as follows.

*“The main characters are Moses and God”.*

As regards their relationship, it was stated that:

*“Moses is an Israelite and God was the Lord of the Israelites”*

Points, made in response to question 3 by MW3, were:

*“Moses and God are the main characters; the Egyptians and the Israelites are the passive characters”.*

Regarding the relationship between God and Moses, they stated,

*“Moses was a servant of God and God was an instructor; and Moses grew up in a royal palace as a prince, grandson of Pharaoh”.*

Sub-group MW4 reported back:

*“Moses and God are the main characters; the Israelites and Egyptians are the passive characters”.*

On the relationship between God and Moses, the Israelites and Egyptians, they stated,

*“Moses, an Israelite, was born and grew up in Egypt; God is for all nations, but God chose the Israelites as an elect nation”.*

The comments of sub-group MW1 on the relationship between the main characters are not drawn from the text, indicating that some participants were familiar with the larger story.

MW3 differentiated between God and Moses as a human being. They stated that despite the position which Moses had in the royal palace as a prince and grandson of Pharaoh, before God he was a servant. This indicates the superiority of God and the inferiority of the man Moses.

The MW4 sub-group made the link of the relationship God-Moses-Israelites. This sub-group put the emphasis on the Israelites as an elect nation.

In summary, as opposed to the previous Bible study session, this time all sub-groups responded to the second part of the question; the answers were sharper and indicated that,

having taken part in both Bible studies, participants now understood the relationship between the characters.

**Question 4: *What problems/difficulties does Moses think he will face in dealing with the Israelites?***

In response to question 4 sub-group MW1 stated:

*“Moses experienced doubt by thinking they (the Israelites) will ask him a question like ‘Who is your God?; Moses had no confidence in God, nor in himself, because of his speech impairment; Moses was afraid to confront Pharaoh, because he knew that he was an oppressor and killer and Moses was afraid also that his brothers, the Israelites would not listen to him”.*

Sub-group MW2 explained its views as follows.

*“Moses was afraid to return to Egypt, because he knew that he was not one of the Egyptians and was an oppressor and a killer; He was not confident in himself, because he knew that he was slow in speech and tongue; and finally Moses had no faith in God”.*

Sub-group MW3 responded:

*“Moses had no confidence in God, and had a lack of faith; Moses had no confidence in himself, because of a speech disorder and Moses was afraid and doubted that he could do what God was telling him to do”.*

The responses of sub-group MW4 were:

*“Moses knew that he could not face the Pharaoh, because of the act he did in Egypt; Moses doubted himself because of his disability; Moses was afraid of failure and that the Israelites would not listen to him and Moses had no faith in God”.*

The responses from all sub-groups reflect that the participants referred to other passages in Exodus and, while I was circulating among them, I noticed that participants were aware of the story of Moses in the book of Exodus.

**Question 5: *What is Moses’ disability?***

In dealing with question 5, sub-groups responded as follows.

MW1 answered:

*“Moses’ disability was spiritual; and, in “the current context, a ‘speech disorder’ “.*

MW2’s response was:

*“Moses’ disability was a stutter and spiritual”.*

Sub-group MW3 reported that:

*“Moses’ disability was speech impairment and lack of faith”.*

According to MW4 sub-group stated:

*“Moses’ disability was a stutter and lack of faith”.*

Most sub-groups had begun by discussing the issue of Moses’ disability in relation to an earlier question and had agreed that, according to v. 11 of Exodus 4, Moses had a disability. Sub-group MW1 had a different opinion: participants did not think that stuttering could be considered as a disability but others argued that in this context it should be viewed as a disability. However, all sub-groups stated that besides the physical disability of Moses, he had a spiritual disability, meaning lack of faith in God.

### **Question 6: How does God deal with Moses’ disability?**

In response to question 6 sub-group MW1 reported:

*“God wanted to show that he is in control of everything, v. 11; From many cases in the Bible (Job, Jeremiah, Hannah and so on), we realized that God knows everything and that he can allow pain and suffering for his purpose; and God wanted Moses to know that through weaknesses something strong can emerge (an example is that of Jesus on the cross)”.*

The responses of sub-group MW2 were:

*God wanted to show Moses that disability is not an obstacle to serving him; God wanted to use Moses’ disability for his glory and to shake people’s assumptions; God wanted Moses to recognize that his disability cannot limit him; and pain, suffering and disability could be used for God’s purpose”.*

Sub-group MW3 replied:

*“God did not see Moses’ disability, this means God does not take account of our weaknesses”; and God wanted to show Moses’ that disability is not an obstacle to serving him”.*

Sub-group MW4 responded as follows.

*“God as a Sovereign takes everything in his control; God recognized Moses’ potential through his weaknesses; God uses the weakness of people to shame the strong people; and God wanted to show Moses that he has power to weaken people and to strengthen people according to his purpose (example of the Israelites’ journey to Canaan)”.*

The responses of most sub-groups reveal that they extended their arguments by looking at other individuals whom God allowed to suffer for a specific purpose. This thought was

expressed by MW1 which was composed of women pastors. They supported their statement with biblical examples such as the crucified Jesus whose pain, suffering and death saved Christians. In addition, they mentioned the examples of Job, Jeremiah and Hannah.

Sub-group MW4 focused on Moses' case and compared it with biblical examples of suffering and weakness, for example the journey of the Israelites to Canaan.

In the MW3 sub-group there was a disagreement when some participants argued that v.11 should not be taken literally because God cannot make one disabled, whereas others interpreted v.11 as indicating that "*God did not see Moses' disability, meaning that God does not take account of our appearances*". Failing to reach agreement on v. 11, MW3 posed the question: "*Does it mean God created disability?*" I proposed to the participants to discuss this point along with the following question.

### **Step 3**

I invited participants to return to their sub-groups for a discussion of the final questions. These questions aimed to turn the participants' attention towards links between the text and their own contexts.

#### **Question 7: What does this text tell us about God's attitude to disability? Are there some similar biblical texts in the Bible?"**

I added this sub-question to help the participants - especially those who hold the opinion that "God cannot make somebody disabled" - to become aware of a broader view of "disability" as expressed in biblical texts and to guide them to make sense of V.11 of Exodus 4.

Sub-group MW1 responded to question 7 as follows.

*"God wanted to tell us that through the weaknesses, God can be glorified (2 Corinthians 12, 10); The text tells us that God can raise the weak people to shame the strong people (1 Corinthians 1, 26-28); and God wanted to show us that through the disability something amazing can happen"*.

The replies of sub-group MW2 were:

*God can allow suffering/disability for his purpose (an example is Job's suffering); God allows suffering, weakness, to highlight that the grace of God should be sufficient (an*

*example is that of Paul, when God said to him ‘my grace is sufficient in your weakness’ (2 Corinthians 12, 9)).*

Sub-group MW3 had the following responses.

*God does not take account of our disability and the disability cannot limit someone serving God.*

Sub-group MW4 reported that:

*Disability does not hinder the purpose of God; and God looked at capability instead of weaknesses (1 Samuel 16, 7).*

The participants of sub-groups MW1 and MW2 responded positively to question 7, grasping its implications by using biblical texts.

However, sub-groups MW3 and MW4 were still preoccupied with the question raised in the earlier session and did not respond logically to question 7, while they lacked the time to check other biblical references.

During the plenary session the above-mentioned question was brought up again and I allowed the participants to discuss it for some time without intervening. I realized that the question revealed contradictions in the minds of participants and I was concerned to see the source of their incorrect assumptions regarding “disability”. Some participants had been taught that disability is a consequence of original sin. Participants who held this opinion based it on the creation story in Genesis 1, 26-27, where God created a man in his image, meaning that he was a perfect creature. Yet, when the man sinned God sent him away. From then onward God cursed man and suffering, pain, disability and death became part of human existence.

Others had also thought that having a disability, or giving birth to a child with a disability, was a form of punishment for sin. Finally, through this discussion, based on the biblical texts that some sub-groups (MW1 & MW4) had referred to, participants came to understand that God allows suffering, pain and disability among humankind for the purpose of his glory. And that God makes some people weak in order to shame those who are strong as well as to demonstrate his power (I Corinthians 1, 27-28).

**Question 8: How does God’s attitude to disability compare to society’s attitude to disability?**

The responses of sub-group MW1 were:

*“God sees and loves people with disabilities unconditionally whereas society loves them conditionally only; God considers people with disabilities as human like others, but society sees people with disabilities as ‘abnormal’ people; and God trusts people with disabilities, but society doubts them”.*

Sub-group MW2 replied that:

*“God does not pay attention to our physical condition, but society does and God looks at the heart, but society looks at the appearance of people with disabilities”.*

Sub-group MW3’s response was that:

*“God loves and cares for people with disabilities, but society rejects them”.*

The report of MW4 stated:

*“God accepts people with disabilities as they are, whereas society rejects them; and God looks at the inside of people with disabilities, but society sees the physical side”.*

Although most sub-groups did not have sufficient time to respond fully to question 8, their reports show how they situated themselves in the text and how they viewed the attitude of society towards people with disabilities as compared to the attitude of God.

#### **Step 4**

I asked participants to observe 10 minutes of silence for meditation and to consider what the last Bible study had taught them. As I stated above, CBS is not only for getting information, it is also for empowering and equipping the participants. Thereafter I posed question 9, which required them to respond individually as “I” and not collectively as “we”.

#### **Question 9: How does this text challenge us?**

With regard to question 9 I prefer to provide the response of each individual and of the category to which he or she belongs, in order to show participants’ distinct perceptions of the Bible study. I have coded each category in the following way: PWDs means people with disability (ies); WP means woman and pastor(s); ABP means able-bodied person. These codes will be used in my analysis where I differentiate between the opinions of the three categories of participants. Thereafter I will, on the basis of the theoretical background of my studies, apply the Bible reading results to my main research question, “How can the CBS methodology contribute to a holistic education of PWDs?”

The responses of the MW2 group to question 9 were summarized as follows.

*To listen to God's voice personally (PWD, WP);*

*Not to let fear hinder the mission of God in me (PWD);*

*God works through my suffering (WP);*

*God works through my weakness for his glory (PWD)*

*Be inspired by the words of God (WP);*

*Disability is not an excuse (PWD, ABP);*

*Not complain about my limits, God is in control (PWD, WP);*

*Disability is not a sin nor a consequence or a punishment of sin (PWD, WP, ABP);*

*To live in view of God instead of society's view (PWD, ABP);*

*To introduce this kind of subject of Contextual Bible Study to pupils (WP);*

*To preach or organize a sharing Bible study around this text (WP).*

This part of the Bible study session made clear that participants had discovered new meanings of disability through sharing. The challenge of the text was taken up in the sense that people with disabilities felt encouraged, valued by God, and ready to take responsibility for their own lives.

## **Step 5**

I asked participants to pray in order to close the session.

### **4.2.2.1 Summary**

The second Bible study of Exodus 4, 1-17 was well assimilated by the participants, in part because of the contribution of those who had participated in the first Bible study but also because of the presence of women pastors. These impacted the Bible study in the sense that they had accepted to learn from ordinary people and, simultaneously, to make their resources for a good understanding available.

The challenge of the Bible study stimulated people with disabilities to take action. They felt involved in and touched by the study. As concerns able-bodied participants, they committed themselves to review their attitude toward people with disabilities. In addition, the women pastors, being able-bodied persons, decided to start doing Bible study with their pupils in school in “religion courses” and to preach in public on subjects such as the meaning of disability in God’s view.

### **4.3 Analysis and Interpretation**

My analysis and interpretation will be based on selecting from and comparing the two Bible study sessions. As I have already commented on separate responses, I will in the current section focus on similarity and dissimilarity of responses in order to answer the main question of my research, “How can the Bible be a tool of transformation for people with disabilities?”

The process of repeating the readings in Contextual Bible Study is advisable to ensure that all participants are able to fully take part in the study, not leaving anyone out.<sup>249</sup>

In my study, the re-reading of a biblical text with the same (and sometimes an extended number of) participants was useful for two main reasons. I was sensitive to the fact that gathering people with disabilities would be a challenge with regard to transport facilities in the DRC and in addition I was aware of the fact that not all participants might be literate. Therefore, the text of Exodus 4, 1-17 was studied twice with the IMAN’ENDA members in order to give all of them an opportunity to participate in the Bible study and to draw as much as possible from it so that, in turn, more input could be gained from them.

The first question posed was: “*Re-tell the story to each other*”. The reactions to this question were different in each group of participants. Those in group MP found it amusing. They seemed not to understand the reason for the question until I explained its importance for the research and for the CBS process. However, the MW group participants were actively involved in responding. This may be in part because MW consisted of some participants of group MP in the first Bible study, expanded with others. Those who had taken part in the discussion in group MP already understood the CBS process and the role of the question therein.

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<sup>249</sup> West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 13.



In the second Bible study session, I changed the method of retelling the story as I mentioned above, is to give these selected members, who are the minority of the group, opportunity to be involved. After telling each other the story as they had understood it, three persons were selected to summarize the text. This showed, firstly, that in CBS there are many ways of dealing with questions and a CBS facilitator therefore needs to be dynamic and creative.<sup>250</sup> Secondly, different versions of retelling a story reveal different ways and levels of understanding and clarify how the participants' readings have been influenced by their particular resources. Here are some examples:

Claudine Mapendo's version (MW participant), stated that "*the story is about Moses, who was a prophet of God*". It is not stated in the text that Moses was a prophet, but maybe she concluded from this reading that, as Moses was sent by God to liberate his people, he must be a prophet.

The second example concerns Otete' story (MW participant) which went beyond the text and placed it "in context", showing the whole story of Moses sent by God. This indicates that he had additional resources to deepen his understanding of this text. Otete' statement reveals contradictions. He said: "Moses refused and made the excuse that he is not able to speak properly", yet "God had a project to help Moses to speak well..." This denotes that the storyteller paid no attention to the disability issue or that he knew the story but had never read it from a disability perspective.

The third reader, Dina (MW participant), said "*the story start with the complaining of Moses*". She stated: "*Despite the several signs that God showed him, Moses refused God's mission. He made an excuse*". Dina's reading of the story reflects what she had heard before, possibly in a sermon.

Otete and Dina mention that Moses made an excuse and had difficulty in speaking clearly. These statements relate to a tendency in the Bible to avoid referring unambiguously to disability, a kind of "betrayal of people with disabilities".<sup>251</sup> In other words, their statements seem to imply that "Moses' speech difficulty" was "metaphoric" in nature, as some scholars

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<sup>250</sup> West, 'Doing Contextual Bible Study', 2007, 13

<sup>251</sup> Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology*, 2009, 36.

have stated when dealing with Exodus 4, 10-11.<sup>252</sup> This will be discussed further at a later stage.

Question 2 was posed to make participants reflect on the text in relation to their experience. The intention behind question 2 was to ascertain whether participants could link the text to the issue of disability and find the related themes. Both groups immediately identified the issue of disability. The way in which they linked the themes with disability was interesting. For example the MP group included the following themes (in each instance I try to comment on their responses according to their understanding):

“*Freedom*”, which they linked to Moses telling God about his fear of rejection, and fear resulting from his lack of fluent speech;

“*Lack of confidence*”, referring to Moses having to meet with Pharaoh without a convincing argument that God had sent him.

“*Moses’ doubts*”: as participants explained, Moses doubted that God could help him to speak freely;

“*Face the disability*”: Moses spoke freely to God about his disability.

The themes developed by group MW were:

“*Disability is not an excuse*” by which they meant that Moses’ speech difficulty was not an excuse for refusing God’s mission;

“*Personal inadequacy*” referring to Moses (deficiency of speech);

“*Fear of rejection*”: in other words, a lack of faith in God, by some described as spiritual disability;

“*God’s sovereignty*”, which entails that everything, is controlled by God and that disability can be allowed by God for his glory;

“*Human weakness*”: participants meant that speech deficiency is part of human weakness.

The first two questions did lead the participants to associate their realities and their experience with the text. In responding to these questions, participants felt that their personal issues were linked to the Holy Scripture. As behind the construction of these questions, the aim was to help participants to open their understanding of the diversity of disability. Some responses given such:

“*Personal inadequacy*” this is to refer to what kind of disability Moses had;

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<sup>252</sup> Meyers, ‘Exodus’2005, 61.

“*Fear of rejection*” this was demonstrated that it is a lack of faith in God. And some participants understood this as a spiritual disability.

Therefore, participants of this Bible study understood through this passage that there are many forms of disability apart from physical disability.

In dealing with question 3, “***Who are the main characters? And what is their relationship?***” participants of group MP confused “relationship” with “knowing about the main characters”. Some of them argued that there were four characters: Moses, God, the Israelites and the Egyptians”. Others stated that there were two main characters: Moses and God. The participants of group MW argued that there were 2 main characters, Moses and God, and that the Egyptians and the Israelites were passive characters. The latter group noted an important point regarding the vital relationship between God and the man Moses. They argued that, despite the holiness, superiority and greatness of God, the man (in this case Moses), who is weak, inferior and a sinner, is still wanted by God. From these responses, a fascinating insight into God’s character in relation to a man emerged. This will be discussed later.

Interestingly, in both groups (MP and MW) most participants were aware of the story of Moses in the book of Exodus, but admitted they had never understood it in this particular way. This might require an adjustment of my earlier statement that the text of Exodus 4, 1-17 was an “unfamiliar text”. However, I realized that the text was known but also, that it was “unfamiliar” from a disability perspective. In other words: it was a “familiar text, read in an unfamiliar way”.

Question 4 was: ***What problems/difficulties does Moses think that he will face in dealing with the Israelites?*** Participants in group MP found that Moses saw his “disability” as his biggest difficulty. This became apparent in many of their responses that mentioned especially v. 10 of Exodus 4. Group MP expressed their responses in relation to the disability issue as follows.

*“Moses is uncertain because of the fact that he is slow of speech and tongue”;*

*“Moses is afraid to speak regarding to his disability”;*

*“He (Moses) is afraid of being slow of speech and tongue”.*

However group MW extended their responses to include an exploration of the whole dialogue between God and Moses. They responded:

*“He [Moses] knew that he was an oppressor and killer”;*

*“Moses was afraid also that his brothers, the Israelites would not listen to him”;*

*“Moses was afraid to return to Egypt because He knew that he was not one of the Egyptians and was an oppressor and a killer”.*

Here, the participants’ responses seem wrong, because these details are not mentioned clearly in the text. However, at this stage, CBS become interesting in facilitating the ordinary readers (who in this text are IMAN’ENDA members) to interpret the text with their resources.<sup>253</sup> Thus all to say that these responses will serve to understand later on what was the motive of Moses’ objection to God; and the cause of his “slow in speech and tongue”.

Interestingly, both groups MP and MW found that among the difficulties that Moses would have faced was his “disability”.

Comparing the responses to question 2 with those to questions 4, I find that participants of both groups were able to identify the feelings experienced by people with disabilities. These feelings were expressed in terms and phrases such as “uncertainty”, “fear of rejection”, “fear of disability”, “lack of confidence”, “self-doubt” and “fear of not being able to be oneself (lack of identity)”.

Question 5: ***What is Moses’ disability?*** Participants of both groups had no difficulty in identifying Moses’ disability. It was a “speech disorder”, “stutter” or “speech impairment”. One of the sub-groups of MW did not agree that “stuttering” could be seen as a disability,<sup>254</sup> but the group changed its minds after analysing v.10-11. The participants in that sub-group noted that, when Moses complains to the Lord about his lack of speech fluency, mentioning that it was a long term problem, God’s reply was to show him that is the Lord who determines man’s abilities or disabilities (v. 11). Thereafter the participants were convinced of Moses’ disability and that it could be called a “stutter” and that he was “slow of speech and tongue”. Behind the construction of this text, socio-historical understanding of the “childhood of Moses” would have useful in looking at the concept of “speech” or “speaking” in the ancient time. Yet, participants of both groups did not deal to that as some were at first surprised to notice that “stuttering” could be a disability. I deal with this issue in section on “People with disabilities in dialogue with scholars”

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<sup>253</sup> In this part, all they are doing is locating this text within the larger narrative they remember. This means they are ‘re-writing’ the text to some extent.

<sup>254</sup> The participants who held the opinion that “stuttering” was not a disability thought that “stuttering” did not really handicap a person.

Question 6: *How does God deal with Moses' disability?* This question was understood differently in each group. With group MP I conducted the Bible study in Lingala and sometimes I used French words, although the question had been conceived in English. The verb “to deal with” is in French “traiter, percevoir” and in Lingala it was translated as “komona”. However, in French “komona” means, “voir”, which in English is to “see”. Thus, some participants seemed to understand the question to be, *how does God see Moses' disability?* Their responses were:

*“God sees what is inside of Moses instead of his handicap”;*

*“God does not see Moses' disability”.*

Also regarding question 6, participants found it difficult to fit their responses to the question. The question was clearly focused on how God deals with Moses' disability, yet some participants applied the text to their own situation, replacing Moses with “us”. For example,

*“God sees inside us rather than our appearance”*

*“God takes account of what is inside us, rather than of our physical condition”.*<sup>255</sup>

Nevertheless, some responses showed that, despite the translation problems, participants had understood the question, as translated from English to Lingala, correctly. Their responses were:

*“God considers Moses' potential as being greater than what Moses thinks himself”;*

*“God treats Moses as would anybody, without paying attention to his disability”.*

Group MW considered the question in depth and in diverse ways. Some sub-groups dealt with the question by looking broadly at the concept of disability before focusing on Moses specifically. Others focused immediately on Moses and widened their understanding of disability in view of the total message of the Bible. The text of v.11 inspired most participants to go beyond the text and needed additional resources to enable them to examine the socio-historical context. Opinions were divided. Most sub-groups argued as follows.

*God wanted to show that is in control of everything;*

*God knows everything and can allow pain and suffering for his purpose.*

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<sup>255</sup> It was difficult while the Bible Study was in process to correct participants and to keep urging them to return to the question, because in the beginning I had encouraged them to talk; I told them that there was no wrong or right response. I said that in order to make them feel free to respond and to respect their fellow group members' feelings and responses.

They dealt, in other words, in a general way with the view of the Bible on pain and suffering. They understood the concept of disability as being linked to other experiences of “suffering, pain, and weakness”. Thus they saw parallels between biblical personages such as Job, Jeremiah, Hannah, Moses. Using these examples, they argued that God is in control of everything that happens, good or bad, and that He allows suffering for his purpose.

As regards those, who focused specifically on Moses’ case, they reasoned as follows.

*God considered Moses’ potential through his weaknesses;*

*God wanted to show Moses that disability is not an obstacle to serving him.*

The participants linked their comments on Moses’ case to a comparison of other biblical events. They stated that, through pain and weakness, strength can emerge. The example of the Israelites’ journey to Canaan was given to illustrate that the experience of suffering and pain may also shape and strengthen the inner life.

On the other hand, some participants in one of the sub-groups found it difficult to accept v. 11 literally. According to them God could not create somebody disabled. In the same group, other participants tried to understand v. 11 as an indication that God does not see the physical condition of a person but sees only the spiritual condition. Discussion in this sub-group did not lead to agreement on the matter. Instead they raised the question: “*Does it mean that God created disability?*” “I suggested discussing this point later, because I expected that the next question might help to clarify the difference between “God’s dealing with disability” and “God’s attitude to disability”.

Question 7 asks ***What does this text tell us about God’s attitude to disability?*** Group MP repeated their responses to question 6. The same occurred in group MW2. Questions 6 and 7 seemed to cause confusion in both groups (MP and MW). Group MP did not really respond to question 6, but instead their answers jumped ahead to what was asked in question 7. Their responses to this question tended towards a suggestion that God ignores the weakness and difficulty experienced by a person with disability.

For the benefit of participants who, in regard to the previous question, had expressed the opinion that God cannot create disability, I added another component to question 7, so that it read as follows. *What does this text tell us about God’s attitude to disability? Are there similar biblical texts in the Bible?* The MW group responded to the amended question by finding biblical references which deal with suffering and disability; this helped to provide

them with an overview of suffering and disability in the Bible, and made a difference to the responses. MW (MW1 & MW2) responded positively, viewing disability and suffering as a way through which God works to show his power.

Questions 3 to 7 aimed to make participants focus on the text. Responding to the concerns and problems they raise, requires the critical tool of reading the Bible “behind the text” and the examination of “comparative biblical texts”. Such questions are called “critical consciousness questions”, because resources of biblical scholarship need to be brought into play<sup>256</sup>

Question 8: ***How does God’s attitude to disability compare to society’s attitude to disability?***

This question refers back to the points I raised about a misunderstanding of questions 6 and 7. The answers of group MP showed that a confusion of questions 6 and 7. In other words, group MP had a problem with the translation of the question whereas in group MW participants’ responses were well articulated. In addition, both groups repeated some of the responses given to question 6. These seemed to imply that God does not have any interest in the physical condition of Moses. The responses were expressed as follows.

*“God sees what is inside of Moses instead of his handicap”;*

*“God does not see Moses’ disability”;*

*“God does not care about our disability”;*

*“God treats Moses as he treats everybody without paying attention to his disability”.*

Despite the confusion, participants of both groups raised certain issues that I found relevant to this study. The question, “*Does it mean that God created disability?*” emerged and I began to see participants becoming immersed in the discussion. By leading the discussion and seeing its progression I realized that many people, especially those with disabilities, have been taught that their physical condition is the consequence of sin. Hence, they became overwhelmed with emotion when they realized, through the Bible study, that this was not the case and that God uses people with disabilities and weakness to do his work.

I link this aspect to the responses of group MP to question 8, regarding the comparison between God’s attitude and that of society to disability. Participants in sub-group M3 of

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<sup>256</sup> West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 8.

group MP applied the question to their own experience before they embarked on a broader discussion of how people with disabilities see themselves. They responded:

*The ignorance of a person with a disability himself leads to a lack of self-confidence (this ignorance comes sometimes from the family), but God gives the capacity to a person with a disability to shame society.*

The group explained why they raised this point, saying that most people with disabilities do not know or value their essence or their existence. Therefore a number of people with disabilities do not conduct themselves with dignity, perhaps - according to some - because of the attitudes of their families.

This affirms what I have stated earlier in my discussion of theories of personality from the perspective of disability: it is important for people with disabilities to find the meaning of their physical condition because they are in fact prejudiced against themselves. Charlton states: “Self-pity, self-hate, shame, and other manifestations of this process are devastating for they prevent people with disabilities from knowing their real capabilities and from recognizing the option they in fact have”.<sup>257</sup>

This study aims to help people with disabilities that have such “false consciousness” and are alienated by oppressive biblical teaching, based on a particular interpretation of certain biblical texts, telling them that they are cursed or that they are not created like others. The aim of my study is specifically to help people with disabilities to find meaning in their condition through Bible study so that they can live positively.

The final question of this Bible study, question 9, asked ***How does this text challenge us?*** This question was discussed in the plenary session after a period of reflection. I asked participants to ruminate on what God was telling them through the Bible study. I also requested that participants personalize their responses rather than generalizing them.

The participants of group MP were expressive in their reactions and showed excitement. They felt that God was on their side and talked to them personally and they committed their lives to God. They realized that they were valued before God. They understood that God teaches them to not consider society’s view, but to focus their minds on what God wants them to do. Similarly, able-bodied participants had realized, through this Bible study, that PWDs should be considered positively in society.

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<sup>257</sup> Charlton, *Nothing about Us Without Us*, 1998, 28.



As regards the participants of group MW, I prefer to record their individual responses, taking into account the different understanding of the three categories of participants. I organize their responses according to three themes.

Discover a new meaning of self (people with disabilities):

1. *“To listen to God’s voice personally”* (they said that in difficult times it is best to listen to God);
2. *“Not to let fear hinder the mission of God in me”* (admitting that sometimes fear holds back the work of God in their life);
3. *“God works through my weakness for his glory”* (they realized how God works and recognized that their condition is for the glory of God);
4. *“Disability is not an excuse”* (accepting that their physical condition should not be used as a pretext for delaying the work of God);
5. *“Not complain about my limits. God is in control of everything”* (through the Bible text, they understood that complaining is no option because God knows their situation);
6. *“Disability is not a sin nor a consequence or a punishment of sin”* (these were for PWDs liberating words that indicate a change of mind in the sense that, through the Bible study, they realized that their situation is acceptable before God);
7. *“To live in line with God’s view instead of society’s view”* (they understood that society’s view is destructive whereas God’s view is restorative for their lives).

Discovering a new meaning of self falls within the theories of personality which underpin this study. In psychotherapy, having a self-understanding as a human being is a starting point for playing a responsible role in society.<sup>258</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes argues that “Self-awareness is the cornerstone – the foundation of all the other emotional intelligence competencies. It must come first, because if we don’t know ourselves and what we’re feeling, how can we possibly know or understand someone else and how they feel?”<sup>259</sup> This confirms what I have noted earlier, namely that the discovering of self is from the disability perspective a crucial requirement, because “disability is a frame of mind”, meaning that PWDs have internalized the notion that they are blemished by God. As a consequence they feel separated from God. Our re-reading of the Bible did uncover new insights with spiritual dimensions that help PWDs to restore their broken relationship with God.

2. To review attitudes toward disability (able-bodied participants and women pastors):

*“God works through my suffering”* (meaning that in any situation involving suffering, disability and pain, God is in control);

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<sup>258</sup> Graber, *Victor Frankl’s Logotherapy*, 2004, 34.

<sup>259</sup> Lifeline Durban, *Personal Growth Training Manual*, 2003, 5, 6.

*“Be inspired by the words of God”* (in a difficult situation accept the encouragement of God);

*“Not complain about my limits, God is in control of everything”* (touched by the Bible study, these able-bodied participants realized that complaining about people with disabilities is not an option)

*“Disability is not a sin nor a consequence or a punishment of sin”* (this represented a marked change of mind about the image of disability as linked to sin).

Women pastors, along with other able-bodied participants, raised questions regarding attitudes toward disability. Mindful of principles of inclusivity, scholars recommended that, while PWDs are preparing to enter society, non-disabled persons should be equipped with appropriate skills and knowledge to ensure an effective inclusion of PWDs.<sup>260</sup> Learning through shared Bible reading turned out to be a suitable and highly effective process, leading non-disabled people, including women pastors, to review their attitude toward PWDs.

### 3. Able-bodied people challenging people with disabilities

- *“Disability is not an excuse”* (meaning that sometimes people with disabilities use their condition to neglect their duties);
- *“Disability is not a sin nor a consequence or a punishment for sin”* (they emphasized these words because some PWDs do not know who they are and don’t realize their value, but rather complain about their condition);
- *“To live in God’s view instead of society’s views”* (in other words, PWDs should not follow society’s present, negative image of disability, but live positively, confirming God’s view of them).

A careful examination of these responses made clear to me that they emanated from family members, friends and guides of PWDs, who were challenging PWDs. Because of my disability experience I understand their concerns and I am aware that some PWDs, especially those who have become disabled at a later age, could cause their families and environment many worries and troubles, because of a failure to accept their situation and due to self-hate, shame and lack of faith in God.

The responses to and findings around the text of Exodus 4, 1-17 confirm what this study is seeking for: how the words of God can, through CBS, affect the minds of people with disabilities as well as those of able-bodied people, empowering them for action. The next section will deal with my academic interpretation of the text as well as with my experience in this regard as a person with disability.

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<sup>260</sup> Sue Philpott, ‘Principles of Inclusivity’, 2007, 2.

#### 4.4 Autobiographical criticism

In this section I will focus on my personal re-reading of the Bible text in question, based on my experience of my own disability and on my work with other disabled people and those who participated in CBS, using narrative interpretation of the existing literature, considered from a psycho-spiritual perspective. The material in this section will serve as a bridge to the next section which will present a dialogue between Bible study participants and scholarly materials related to the Exodus text.

My starting point is to link the chapter 3 to the actual text, which is chapter 4. I will interpret verse by verse, according to my understanding as a PWD, employing my academic resources. The aim of this section is to demonstrate how God views disability in the text of Exodus 4, 1-17.

**Verse 1.** The text of Exodus 4 continues the dialogue between Moses and God that began in Exodus 3. In some biblical versions it starts with “Then Moses answered...” (NRSV). As I stated earlier, chapter 4 of Exodus is a further development of the scenario presented in chapter 3. Moses’ objection or hesitance to encounter God is described from chapter 3, 14-17 as follows:

- Moses is unworthy (3, 11) and God says he will be “with” him (3, 12)
- Moses does not know God’s name (3, 33) and God reveals the name (3, 14-17).<sup>261</sup>

In 4, 1, I hear Moses’ third complaint: “What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say: ‘the Lord did not appear to you?’” Moses mentions his brothers, the Israelites, saying that they would not listen to him, as they “...would not hearken to his speech”.<sup>262</sup> Here, I see that Moses was expecting to receive something more than what God had revealed to him earlier. I mean, Moses needed more proofs that show God is really appeared to him. In addition, I argue that in these moments Moses remembers how his brothers rejected him once (2, 13 -14) and fears it could happen again. At this stage, Moses is being conscious of his limitations. His question to God, “What if they do not [*believe*] me or [*listen*] to me...” shows

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<sup>261</sup> Meyers, ‘Exodus’ 2005, 55.

<sup>262</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, Libronix Digital System,

his feelings, he sees himself useless, worthless, and unable to transmit what God has asked him to do.

**Verses 2–9** describe the wonder of God to Moses in responding to Moses’ concerns of *believe* and *listen*. The “miraculous signs given to Moses were proof that God actually had appeared to him. These signs were intended to convince Moses’ fellow Hebrews (v. 5), not Pharaoh”.<sup>263</sup>In other words, sometimes for people to *believe* or *listen*, may not need necessarily to hear the voice or the words. But, through diverse ways of communication such as seeing, touching, and feeling.

Moses might not have known the God of Israel as he grew up in Egypt where he was familiar with Egyptian culture and religion. Hence, God empowers him to work miracles so that he recognizes the might of God (3, 13-22).

**Verse 5** says that God performed this wonder for the Israelite people as well, so that they will believe that “the Lord, the God of their ‘fathers’ – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob – has appeared to [them]”. This is mentioned three times as God has himself introduced to Moses thrice (3, 6, 15, 16; 4, 5). God speaks twice of Moses “remembering” God to his people, and the third time of the “souvenir” of his work (the rod). Also the manner of the introduction of God to each of the three fathers (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) was different, revealing how God works in a particular way through each of them. Therefore, each experience of the father has impacted on the Israelites and given them a sense of their source of strength (i.e. the father). Abraham's encounter with God brought forth promises of blessings. As regards Jacob, despite his deceit and trickery, God worked through him and, in a face to face encounter, transformed him. Mostly, however, I want to focus on Isaac's experience with God, because it can be related to the experience of PWDs. Isaac can be related to minority groups since some scholars point out that he was the “least” of the ancestors (fathers). In the journey of God and the Israelites, Isaac functions as an object rather than a subject. This becomes apparent in Abraham's blessing of the arrival of his son (Isaac) at the age of 100, and in the story of his faithfulness when he has to sacrifice Isaac. Again, Isaac is an object rather than a participant in the story of Jacob's deceptions. This indicates that, although Isaac did not play a leadership role, God accompanied him and impacted on his life and his community (his family and the broader society). God’s words Moses that “I am the Lord, the God of their fathers” and “the Lord of Abraham, the Lord of Isaac and the Lord

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<sup>263</sup> *The Bible Readers’ Companion*, Exodus 4, 2-9, Libronix Digital System,.

of Jacob”, reveal that God encounters meets everyone regardless of position. And such encounters form a source of empowerment for all people.<sup>264</sup>

**Verse 8** indicates that Moses did not work miracles through his own power nor for his own glory, but through and for God. Thus the Lord said to him: “If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second...” This illustrates one of the characteristics of God which is identifying with human limits. This means that God, who is beyond limits, accepts to be active within the limitations of human beings. God Almighty accepts to work within the constraints of human weaknesses and the God of perfection identifies with improvements on a human being.

**Verse 10.** Moses’ fourth complaint is: “I have never been eloquent”, implying that he is “slow of speech and of a slow tongue hesitant in speech” (HCSB). “Eloquent” in Hebrew (P’al), translated into English, is “words”, “say”, “command”, “tell” and “relate”. In other words, Moses saying that he is “slow of speech [saying or speaking]”, means that he is deficient in speech or, literally, that he is “uncircumcised of lips” (6, 30). In other words, he had speech impairment.

**Verses 11 – 12.** God’s initial reaction to Moses’ objections was to remind him that he is the Sovereign Lord, “the Lord [who] determines man’s abilities or disabilities”. This makes clear that “the commission of Moses (3, 9-12) is at the heart of the episode, but the point of focus is the identity of Yahweh (3, 1-8; [4, 11])”.<sup>265</sup> The verse speaks clearly about the issue of disability: “...Who gives man his mouth, who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” Here it is stated that God is in control of everything and he is thus also the author of disability.

The Lord said to Moses, “Now go, I will be with thy mouth...and teach thee what thou shall say” (KJV). God has planned to use this disabled mouth for able teaching.

God did not say: I will heal your mouth so that you can speak clearly. Rather, he said “I will be with your mouth”. The healing in this passage is “psychological” in that God wants to enable Moses, to make him realize that, even in his weakness, he has ability.

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<sup>264</sup> Nancy L. DecLaisse-Walford, *Isaac*, in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 647-648.

<sup>265</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 121.

**Verses 13-17.** Moses's fifth objection, "O, Lord, please send someone else to do it" (NIV). Moses experienced psychological pain as a result of his faltering speech vis-a-vis to Pharaoh and his brothers. Although God encouraged him, saying "I will help...you (3, 12; 4, 12), the awareness of his verbal deficiency weighed heavily on Moses (Exodus 6, 12; 30).

Moses' suggestion that another person might replace him angers God (v. 14). God perhaps saw that Moses did not trust him and did not understand the way in which he dealt with this mission. As God is slow to anger but abundant in his grace, he provided Aaron, Moses' brother, to help him (v. 14–15). God does not strike when provoked, but provides more grace so that he may ultimately be obeyed.<sup>266</sup> God's provision of a brother to speak on behalf of Moses points to their inter-dependency in this undertaking and that two are better than one (16). God thus identifies with both brothers in order to reinforce the execution of the mission.

The Lord said to Moses, "He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him". Linking these words with verse 8, as stated above, one of God's apparent characteristics is his identification with human beings. Moses was given the privilege of being in the "position of God": this is God working through weaknesses to draw out strengths.

#### **4.4.1 Summary**

My re-reading of the text of Exodus 4, 1-17, is a response to a crucial question as a person with a disability, "How does God view disability?" In the situation of disaster, uncertainty, loneliness, fear, and despair that PWDs in many cases experience, the question which often arises is, "Is God aware of my situation?" Through this text, it is revealed that God views disability as another possibility to ability. The text reveals that, despite Moses' limitations and fears, God has chosen him for the purpose of his mission. As I stated in my comment on v. 8, the God of all-power, who is beyond limits, accepts to work with human weaknesses.

This step of reading the text from my own experience as a person with a disability, as a church minister working with PWDs, and as a biblical scholar, enlightened my perception of God's view of disability, and it nurtured my understanding for the next discussion, namely, dialogue with PWDs and with the work of various scholars.

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<sup>266</sup> *The Bible Reader's Companion*, Exodus 4, 2-9, Libronix Digital System.

## 4.5 People with disabilities in dialogue with scholars

The section deals with a dialogue between responses of Bible study participants and scholarly comments on the Exodus text. I select, on the one hand, the main topics discussed by the CBS participants and, on the other, the comments which I gathered from scholarly materials that oppose or ignore the positive view of disability in the Bible in general and in the Exodus text in particular. The section aims to acknowledge the contribution, made by PWDs, to biblical interpretation. It involves the power of CBS to prepare the participants for setting up and executing an action plan, in this on what West calls, “Articulating and owning”<sup>267</sup>, and it involves an understanding of the theological context. Hence, this section will serve in theological reflection on disability in chapter 7 of this study. The three main themes in this regard are now discussed:

### *Characters and relationship*

Some biblical commentators state that the book of Exodus raises questions about the characteristics and the motives of God whereas others (ultimately also referring to God’s nature and motivations) assert that “Yahweh acts to deliver the Israelites from slavery simply because he is the God of justice who delivers the oppressed, and not because they are his people or because of any prior commitment”.<sup>268</sup>

Gerhard Von Rad, in his book *Moses*, explains the relationship between God and Moses (and humankind in general) as follows. “...God condescends to men, he reveals Himself to men as the God who is there to help – the constant, active God”;<sup>269</sup> The text of Exodus 4, 1-17 reveals some of God’s characteristics: God Almighty and provider (v. 1-8), the Sovereign God, the creator of everything (v. 11), and the God who is slow to anger and abounding in dedicated love (v. 14 – 16). Ignoring completely the disability of Moses, von Rad states that Moses’ figure is represented as the “greater” Hebrew and lawgiver, “the most majestic figure in the Old Testament and history”, the mediator of God’s word to the people.<sup>270</sup>

However the participants of Bible study (MP and MW) emphasized another aspect in answering the question on the relationship between God and Moses. They argued that God, in

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<sup>267</sup> West, ‘Doing Contextual Bible Study’, 2007, 3.

<sup>268</sup> Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary: Exodus 4, 1-17*, 72, 2001.

<sup>269</sup> Von R. Gerhard, *Moses*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, (London: World Christian Book, 1961), 121.

<sup>270</sup> Meyers, ‘Exodus’, 2005, 13; Gaebelein A., *Moses-His First and Second Coming*. (New York: Our Hope, 1940), 13.

all his greatness, chose a man like Moses, who was weak, inferior and a sinner. Moses' weakness lay in the fact that he was unable to communicate in public, which made him afraid to accept God's mission. Chapter 3, 11 where Moses says to God "who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt" (NIV) is linked to chapter 4 v. 1 where he asks "what if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'the Lord did not appear to you'" (NIV). Both show Moses' lack of confidence in himself. He fears failure. In the responses of Bible study participants a "disability insight" into God's character and attitude towards man (Moses) emerges: God does not call only upon the wise or powerful. He likes to use "what is foolish in the world to shame the wise and what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (2 Corinthians 1, 22). Therefore, the relationship between God and Moses was an intimate one in the sense that they were in dialogue with each other, and simultaneously they were redeemer and saved one.

### *Moses' disability*

Verse 10, Exodus 4 contains Moses' final complaint to God: he is "slow of speech and tongue", in other words lacking fluent speech. Meyers, argues that this phrase means, "I am not eloquent" and considers the expression "slow of speech and slow of tongue" as metaphorical, and not as the description of a speech impediment.<sup>271</sup> The authors of an on-line commentary conclude that "Moses laboured under a natural defect of utterance or had a difficulty in the free and fluent expression of his ideas in the Egyptian language, which he had long disused..."<sup>272</sup> Donald T. Williams, on the other hand, in his sermon, on the same text (Exodus 4, 1-17) and relies on Acts 7, 22, and states that Moses was mighty in words: he was "obviously eloquent as a writer, indeed the greatest writer of his generation".<sup>273</sup>

Moses' disability has been viewed in various ways by different scholars. Some note that Moses protests to the Lord in Exodus 4, 10: "I slow of speech, and of a slow tongue", are linked to what he says in Exodus 6, 12,30: "I am of uncircumcised lips". A legend concerning the childhood of Moses explains that he was subjected to a test which involved a hot coal being applied to his lips, Hence his subsequent vocal disability. This use of a hot coal reappears in the prophet Isaiah's account of how his "unclean lips" are made clean by a Seraph who touches them with a hot coal (Isaiah 6, 5-7)".<sup>274</sup> The examination of v. 10-11,

<sup>271</sup> Meyers, 'Exodus', 2005, 61.

<sup>272</sup> A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testament. Libronix Digital Library System;

<sup>273</sup> <[http://doulomen.tripod.com/sermons/Ex4\\_1-17.html](http://doulomen.tripod.com/sermons/Ex4_1-17.html)> [2009/12/07].

<sup>274</sup> *The Dumb Devil of stammer*, <<http://mhtml:file://G:\New Folder\PhonophobiaThe Dumb Devil of Stammering.mht>> [ 2009/12/07]



suggests to me that one of Moses' complaints concerned a lack of eloquence and of "oratorical skills".<sup>275</sup>

This verse elicited controversial opinions among the participants of the Bible study. Most persons with disabilities quickly concluded that Moses' disability could have been "stuttering" or "speech impairment". Some able-bodied participants did not accept that "stuttering" could be seen as a disability. They argued that "stuttering" or "stammering" is not a permanent affliction and is not apparent or prevalent all the time.

In my view, being slow of speech and tongue indicates a lack of fluent speech. Acts 7, 12 however, shows Moses as being "mighty in words", but not verbally eloquent. This allows for an understanding of Moses' disability as a "speaking disability", meaning "stuttering" or "stammering". These two terms are synonyms, the "former implied a difficulty in initiating speech sounds, whereas the latter term was used to identify speech marked by a compulsive repetition of sounds". Stuttering/stammering is a "unique" disability, differing from other disabilities in part because it is not always apparent: "people who are deaf don't have sudden burst of good hearing, and paraplegics don't have the periodic ability to rise out of their wheelchair and dance. But, people who stutter aren't perceived as stutterers until they actually stutter, and no stutterer stutters all the time".<sup>276</sup>

In the light of Moses' childhood and his early, and referring to possible causes of stuttering, Moses' lack of eloquence could well have been a disability, in our understanding of the word. On the one hand, the events before and after Moses' birth (1, 15 – 22; 2, 1-8) indicate that his speech difficulty could be caused by anatomical factors, related to "birth injuries resulting in definite neurological disturbances..."<sup>277</sup> On the other hand, the story of Moses' life could explain his speech impairment. The book of Exodus describes how Moses became aware of his origins and discovered his real identity, which, in turn, drove him to kill an Egyptian for beating a Hebrew man where after he was forced to flee from Egypt to Midian (2, 11-15). Therefore I argue that fear and a lack of identity could have caused Moses' speech difficulty.

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<sup>275</sup> Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible*, 2001, 72.

<sup>276</sup> James F. Bender, *The Personality Structure of Stuttering* (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1939), 11; Roger J. Ingham & David Prins, *Treatment of Stuttering in Early Childhood: Methods & Issues* (San Diego: College – Hill Press, 1983), 2.

<sup>277</sup> Bender, *The Personality Structure of Stuttering*, 1939, 109; Robert Logan, *The Three Dimensions of Stuttering: Neurology, Behavior and Emotion*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (London: Whurr Publishers Ltd, 1999), 91.

From a psychological perspective, fear and lack of self-esteem are among the probable causes of stuttering. The text of Exodus 4, 1-17 indicates that Moses suffered from fear, caused by past experiences, and from low self-esteem. Stuttering could thus be considered as a disability, depending on the stutterer's circumstances. In the context of this study, stuttering is a disability because it is perceived as an obstacle to the accomplishment of God's mission and an excuse for Moses to refuse to obey.<sup>278</sup>

### *How God deals with disability*

Verse 11 breaks with the stereotypes that able-bodied people entertain about people with disabilities. Scholars (Weiss, Bruce, Avalos and Kabue) demonstrate that most biblical texts, related to disability, have a negative view thereof. These texts reflect a stance which "has a long history in both the Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament".<sup>279</sup> Verse 11 is among the rare positive texts as regards disability in the Bible.<sup>280</sup>

Referring back to verse 11, the text raises problems like those posed by sub-group MW3 of the Bible study in their reaction to question 5: "Does it mean that God created disability?" Other problems that could be posed are for example: how does verse 11 understand a God powerful enough to use miraculous signs in order to convince Moses that it is indeed God who is sending him on a mission, while at same time God is unable to change Moses' affliction? Does it make sense that a God of power and might who controls everything fails to make Moses speak fluently? In answer to this problem Weiss reasons that "Disability is a dramatic reminder that God's ways are not our ways. God is not what we expect".<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> In writing this I am aware that stuttering may or may not be classified as a disability. According to the disability rights movements, "it is the right of the individual to decide whether he/she is disabled or not" (Disabled People South Africa (DPSA), *Pocket Guide on Disability Equity, An Empowerment Tool*. (Pretoria: DPSA, 1999), 4). Thus, my conclusion is that in this context, Moses' speech difficulty, or stuttering, was a disability, because Moses himself saw his speech difficulty as an obstacle, a barrier to daily activity. Moses wanted to exclude himself from mainstream activity and he considered himself unfit to undertake God's mission due to what he saw as a disability.

<sup>279</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 111; Bruce, 'A Daughter of Abraham', 2005, 3; Avalos et al, *This Abled Body*, 2007, 3; Kabue, *A Church of All and for All*, 2003, 3.

<sup>280</sup> A scholar of the liberation theology of disability, Kerry H. Wynn, in his article, 'The Normate Hermeneutic and Interpretations of Disability Within the Yahwistic Narratives', draws on the biblical understanding of disability from Yahwistic narratives, rather than from the Priestly inspired materials on disability. Wynn attempts to interpret some narratives from a disability perspective, for example the "Blindness of Isaac" and the "Disabling of Jacob", in order to reconstruct the "modern Normate hermeneutic" (Wynn, 'The Normate Hermeneutic and Interpretations of Disability Within the Yahwistic Narratives', *This Abled Body* 2007, 91).

<sup>281</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 111.

However, many biblical commentaries on vv. 11-19 have not dealt with the text in any depth at all, at least from a disability perspective, while others avoid the issue altogether.<sup>282</sup> Donald T. William interprets vv. 11 -19 as follows. "...At any rate, by balking, Moses loses the opportunity to become eloquent, but he does not get out of the assignment. The third principle is that God is going to accomplish his purposes with or without you, but you will lose a blessing if you are not obedient. It is always better to obey God".<sup>283</sup> In other words, William says that Moses' continued speech impairment is the result of disobeying God.

In my reading of biblical commentaries focusing on this text, I have found that, with regard to v. 10 and especially v. 11, many writers neglect to study the verse from a disability perspective. Some comments I came across read as follows. "Yahweh's reply focuses on divine omnipotence", "the author of this text takes for granted that YHWH is the creator", "...That the Lord determines man's abilities or disabilities..." The focus is solely on God's all-powerful nature and not on the experience from the viewpoint of the person with a disability.

The interpretative thinking of these scholars is associated with the perception of disability in biblical times, which attributes disability to sin. Bruce states,

This strand is known as 'contractual theology' and is found, for example, in Deuteronomy 28 where many disasters are listed and attributed to a failure to obey the commandments of God. These disasters include crop failure, war, siege, starvation, captivity, drought, adultery, disease and disability. There is a contract between God and his people, and the ideas that a person's behaviour results in blessings or curses is a major strand in OT theology...In the OT God usually only punished his people after repeated warnings and attempts to get them to repent. However, it is not easy to apply this contextual theology in today's world. Pain or suffering or disability usually comes without warning. Wrong behaviour has consequences and sin certainly can lead to disaster – a drunk driver might have an accident and be disabled as result – but equally that driver may crash into an innocent person who is subsequently disabled. Our world is

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<sup>282</sup> Muddiman, 'Exodus 4,1-9' in *The International Bible Commentary*, 1998, 409

<sup>283</sup> Donald T. William, 'Sermon on Exodus 4, 1-19' in 2 <<http://doulomen.Tripod.com>>.[2009/12/07].

so shot through with evil that is often not a simple thing to pin the blame on any given individual.<sup>284</sup>

Bruce thus highlights that “contractual theology” condemns people with disabilities as sinners. As Weiss argues, “This [aberration theology] cause[s] suffering, alienation, isolation, and shame in the lives of people with disabilities and their families. A challenge and [re-] interpretation is needed”.<sup>285</sup>

The re-reading of the text makes God’s intention clear, namely to work through Moses’ weakness. God challenges Moses, showing that everything is in his control (v. 12). God says: “Now go, I will help you speak and will teach you what to say”. This is not an instantaneous event with God speaking and immediately acting, as mentioned in v. 1-2, but it is rather a progressive action of God through Moses’ weakness. God repeats the same words: “I will help both of you speak and teach you what to do” (v.15b), even after Moses’ objections. This indicates that God in his providence planned to work through Moses’ weakness.

In responding to question 6, “How does God deal with Moses’ disability”, the participants of Bible study (both groups MP and MW) made the following statements: “*God sees what is inside of Moses instead of his handicap*”; “*God sees what is inside of Moses instead of his handicap*”; “*God does not see Moses’ disability, God does not care about disability*”.

These remarks almost seem to imply that God ignores Moses’ speech impairment. They were made by people who are themselves living with disabilities. The comments indicate that they are self-oppressed and alienated from their condition. The remarks reflect a strand of thought that “emphasizes the absence of disability in an eschatological future”,<sup>286</sup> where spirit triumphs over body. However, this thinking tends to encourage an integration of body and spirit, because the (disabled) body is viewed negatively and it is, as it were, “side-lined” while the “spiritual” is pushed to the forefront.

Participants of the MW group expressed their responses in what I found to reflect positive thinking: *God considered Moses’ potential through his weaknesses; ‘God wanted to show that disability is not an obstacle to serving him.* These remarks confirm God’s address to Moses in v. 16, namely “...He [Moses’ brother] will speak to people for you and it will be as

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<sup>284</sup> Patricia F. Bruce, ‘The Bible and Disability: Historical perceptions’. Unpublished paper presented at African Enterprise on Disability and Theology, Pietermaritzburg, 2010, 5.

<sup>285</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 111.

<sup>286</sup> Bruce, ‘The Bible and Disability’, 2010, 2.

if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him”, indicating that Moses, in his weakness, could play God’s position (4, 16; 7, 1). The interesting point is that God makes a number of suggestions to deal with Moses’ fear of rejection – these take Moses’ disability into account (i.e. God does not ignore it) but intends to use Moses with his disability. In other words, through Moses’ weakness strength could emerge.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

The text of Exodus 4, 1-17 represents a challenge to people with disabilities as well as to apparently able-bodied people. During the Bible study, this text led to much discussion about how people with disabilities see themselves. Participants realized that, before judging society’s attitude towards disability, it is essential to confront the views of people with disabilities themselves: how do they see their condition and their existence. It is PWDs themselves who need to make a difference. They need to take responsibility for the ways in which they respond to their situation and accept that God is in control of their lives. They should recognize that God knows them better than they know themselves and accept that God loves them as they are.

In addressing apparently able-bodied people, the text calls for a constructive view of disability. Able-bodied persons should look beyond disability to see that people with disabilities are human, like others. Disability should be considered as part of the diversity of God’s creation.<sup>287</sup> Both people with disabilities and apparently able-bodied people are faced with the challenge of understanding that God works in many ways and his ways are not ours so that the human logic of associating pain and suffering with sin is not necessarily God’s way of reasoning.

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<sup>287</sup> Here I would like to agree with Molsberry who states that people with disabilities present the amazing diversity of human beings, in terms of “self-perception, mobility, hygiene, relationship, and perception of beauty...It’s a truth hidden from the general population caught up in the illusion of the perfect” (Robert F. Molsberry, 2002), 92).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 12, 1-10**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

In this chapter I will describe, analyze and interpret the Bible study on 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10, conducted with IMAN'ENDA members and women pastors.

The chapter is structured in six sections. The first section: presents an introduction to the text of 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10, in which I will give a brief summary of the general letter of 2 Corinthians, with the emphasis on the selected text and taking account of a re-reading of this text from a disability perspective. This will be followed by details of the construction of the CBS questions. The second section will provide information on the participants in the Bible study, such as numbers, age and gender. The third section describes the CBS that was conducted on the text, including a description of how the Bible studies proceeded. The fourth section presents an analysis and interpretation of the CBS which will focus on the convergence and divergence of the participants' responses in relation to my theoretical framework, especially "personality theory" and "Christian education theory". In the fifth section my personal re-reading, which I called "autobiographical criticism" in which my reading taken centre stage, using narrative interpretations in existing literature and focusing on Psycho-spiritual considerations, and this will be framed in liberation theology of disability theory. The section will serve as a bridge to a dialogue between PWDs responses and biblical scholarly comments on the text, which will be presented in the sixth section. An address and a challenge to both people with disabilities and apparently able-bodied people will conclude this chapter.

#### **5. 1 Introduction of the text 2 Corinthians 12, 1-12**

The second letter of Paul to the Corinthians is an apologetic text in which Paul defends his apostleship against his opponents who have criticized him for preaching free of charge, for his suffering, and for his refusal to boast about his spiritual experiences. Paul's lifestyle and practices call the legitimacy of his opponents' apostleship into question, based as it is on their

demand for payment and on their own tales of spiritual experiences (2 Cor. 11, 12).<sup>288</sup> Interpretation of this text presents difficulties and complexities in terms of the social location of Corinth and its varying backgrounds.<sup>289</sup> The text covers Paul's most interesting themes, focusing on the theology of suffering, weakness and power.<sup>290</sup> These themes are developed in different ways in the chapters preceding 2 Cor. 12.

In the text of 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10, Paul responds to a particular attack in which his opponents, the "super-apostles" (2 Cor. 11, 5), referring to his physical presence, argue that "Paul's disabilities disqualified him as an apostle".<sup>291</sup> In reply, Paul quotes their own words: "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak" (2 Cor. 10, 10). Paul's responses to his opponents re-evaluate the concept of disability which was considered as a sin and as evil in both the ancient Jewish and ancient Greco-Roman cultures.<sup>292</sup> His re-evaluation constitutes a challenge to people with disabilities as well as to non-disabled people.

The re-reading of the text will emphasize the notion of "power through a weak body" from the disability perspective that Paul defends in his mission against opponents and critics.<sup>293</sup>

In the second part of this section, I will point out the relevance of the re-reading of this text, the particular contribution that I made from a disability perspective, and how we constructed each question in the CBS and how the questions are relevant to the theoretical framework of this study (liberation theology of disability, the psycho-spiritual aspect of personality and

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<sup>288</sup> Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, 2 Corinthians: Paul's Apostleship opposed in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 49-50 (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1993); Timothy B. Savage, *Power through weakness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 54; Martin Albl, 'For Whenever I Am Weak, Then I AM Strong': Disability in Paul's Epistles', *This Able body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*. (Atlanta: SBL, 2007), 155; Jennifer Larson, 'Paul's Masculinity', *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol. 123, No 1, 2004, 87-97; Jennifer A. Glancy, 'Boasting of Beatings (2 Corinthians 11: 23-25)', *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol. 123, No 1, 2004, 99-135.

<sup>289</sup> Glancy, 'Boasting of Beatings', 2004, 102.

<sup>290</sup> James D. G. Dunn & John W. Rogers, '2 Corinthians' in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003) , 1353

<sup>291</sup> Albl, 'Whenever I Am Weak', 2007, 155.

<sup>292</sup> 'The concept of disability in the two cultures, ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman, was different in terms of their respective contexts. In Greece, disability was a matter of family or state: failing to "produce" a "vigorous" and "mighty" man damaged the family and by extension, the state. For example at Sparta, all children were placed on a shield for a medical test. A child with a weakness or disease was condemned to die; whereas a healthy child deserved to survive. In the Jewish tradition, disability was also a family matter, but they placed disability in a religious context. Hence, any disease or physical problem was related to, or the consequence of, sin (Lev. 26, 16; 27-28). However, both cultures in the first century viewed disability as contributing to an unbalanced society (Albl, 'For Whenever I Am Weak', 2007, 153; Bruce, 'Construction of Disability', 2010, 254; Kamba, 'Integration Sociale,' 1996, 7).

<sup>293</sup> The 'Paul's body' debate by scholars will be further discussed in the section entitled "Dialogue with Scholars and People with Disabilities".

Christian education theories). I will mention the socio-cultural aspect in the text that I found relevant to the CBS.

### **5.1.1 Construction of Contextual Bible Study questions**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the construction of the CBS questions was the outcome of a workshop attended by Patricia Bruce, Gerald West and me drawing on our work as biblical scholars and on our common experiences of disability in November 2008.

#### **The questions follow below:**

1. Re-tell the story to each other (two persons).
2. What is the text about?
3. What are the steps in Paul's argument in this text?
4. What does Paul say about his body in this text?
5. How does Paul understand his disability?
6. What does God say to Paul about his disability?
7. How does society understand disability and how do disabled people understand their disability? Share your experience if possible.
8. How can we create opportunities for people with disabilities to exercise their gifts and leadership?

In the following part, I will explain how we chose each question that I used in CBS through the lenses of the theory and the methods of this study.

The first question, “*Re-tell the story to each other (two persons)*”, offers to each participant the opportunity to connect to the text; it allows the participants to better understand the text and to retell the story in their own words. This question helps the facilitator understand whether this text is familiar to the participants or not.

The second question, “*What is the text about?*” leads the participants to connect the text with their context. CBS refers to this as a “community consciousness” question. This question is deliberately open, and allows the participants to say whatever they want. Yet, it was also intentionally prepared to make participants aware of the issue of disability in this text.



The third question, “*What are the steps in Paul’s argument in this text?*” focuses the participants on the text. In CBS it is called, “critical consciousness”; the intention behind this question was to see how participants would understand the logic of the text, because this text has been found by scholars to be a severe letter written to the Corinthian church.<sup>294</sup> Hence, the question invites participants to break the text according to their understanding.

The fourth question, “*What does Paul say about his body in this text?*” offers an opportunity for literary analysis, and also focuses the participants on the text. It might reveal the way PWDs victimize against themselves in times of pain and trouble. In relation to the themes that come out of the text, such as “body”, “thorn” and boasting, aspects of a socio-historical and cultural nature provide useful resources for a better understanding in verses 7 and 8.

The fifth question, “*How does Paul understand his disability?*” again offers literary analysis; it connects the participants to the text. It makes participants with disabilities and apparently able-bodied people aware of a process of self-discovery. The theory of liberation theology of disability and theories of personality were basic to the construction of this question in order to see to what extent PWDs discover themselves in difficult situations.

The sixth question, “*What does God say to Paul about his disability?*” keeps participants’ attention on the text. This question, based on v. 9, is the central theme of this Bible study, “Power through a weak body”. The theory of liberation theology of disability supports the construction of this question, which might engage participants in an acceptance of the body’s limits. The question was constructed to challenge PWDs, as well as the apparently able bodied, in terms of their views toward disability.

The seventh question, “*How does society understand disability and how do disabled people understand their disability?*” brings participants back to the first question and refers to their context. In CBS it is called a “community consciousness” question. The intention behind this question is to lead the participants to make a comparison between society’s view and the views of PWDs in terms of disability. The question was supported by the theory of personality, which deals with self-acceptance in order to help PWDs who are alienated and

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<sup>294</sup> See Bob Utley, *Paul’s Letters to a Trouble Church: I and II Corinthians*—(Bible Lessons International, Marchall, Texas, 2002) <<http://www.ibiblio.org/freebiblecomm>> [20/11/2012].

have internalized society's negative views about PWDs. ne. This question might correct the attitudes of apparently able-bodied people toward PWDs. The question also expects testimonies from the participants to strengthen the reflection on this question.

The eighth question, "*How can we create opportunities for people with disabilities to exercise their gifts and leadership?*" returns participants to their context, which is "community consciousness" in the sense that it moves people forward to plan action in regard to what has been studied in the CBS. In this Bible study, the action plan is for PWDs to stand against all sorts of discrimination. The intention behind this question was to see how PWDs and apparently able-bodied people would express and plan action for the consideration of PWDs. The theory of liberation theology of disability, which deals with liberation and acceptance of the body's limits, supports the question.

## **5.2 Participants**

The participants in this CBS were the same as in the previous Bible study (48 members of IMAN'ENDA, including women pastors), but the biblical text was a different one. The group was composed of 32 women and 16 men, of whom 30 were people with disabilities and 18 were apparently able-bodied persons from 12 to 55 years old.<sup>295</sup>

## **5.3 A description of Contextual Bible Study focusing on 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10**

In this section, I only do an overview of the responses, which will be developed in more detail in the next section of analysis and interpretation. The process was the same as the second previous Bible study. This Bible study took place in the same venue, the Protestant Church's Youth Centre, where IMAN'ENDA members spent a week-end away for training.

The Bible study happened on the day after the previous study with the 48 participants.

I asked the participants to form sub-groups according to where they were sitting. The sub-groups were, as in the previous Bible study, divided into 4 sub-groups of 12 persons each.

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<sup>295</sup> Out of 30 people with disabilities, 1 person had an auditory impairment, 2 persons a visual impairment, 2 persons had an intellectual disability and 25 persons physical impairments.

The sub-groups were given the same names and kept the same leaders, apart from the women pastors who preferred a change of leadership and replaced a man with visual impairment with a woman with physical impairment. In this study I indicate the group with “MW”, and the sub-groups will be called “MW” with a number.

The recorder’s process was the same as the previous Bible study. The first two questions and the last were discussed in the plenary. The other questions were discussed in sub-groups and after they report back to the plenary.

In the plenary I asked one of the women pastors to open the session with prayer. Three persons volunteered to read the Bible in French, Lingala and Braille. I asked two persons to summarize the story according to their understanding. As the participants had become used to the process of CBS, they were fully prepared to answer questions that required them to link their resources to the text.

### **Question 1: Re-tell the story to each other**

The first question invited participants to re-tell the text as a story to each other. The dialogue was lively, participants were talking and laughing. It was a sign that they were familiar with the CBS process. Thereafter I asked three persons (different ones from the previous Bible study, one woman with physical disability, one woman pastor, and one man with visual impairment) to summarize the text according to their understanding. These are their summaries.

Odette Matondo’s version (Matondo has physical disability):

*“The text is about Paul who shows that through his weakness God’s signs are manifested in his life, like the fact of lift-up to heaven”.*

Astride Ntumba’s version (Astride is the woman pastor);

*-The story of this text tells us about the situation of suffering of Paul. He was one of Jesus' apostles, he even was the last but God had been working with him much more than with other apostles. Paul had a ‘thorn’ which was an obstacle for him to serve God well according to*

*the Jews' conception of suffering. Thus, he prayed thrice so that God remove his 'thorn', but God said to him that "my grace is sufficient to your suffering".*

Badain Katuku's version (Katuku is visually impaired):

*"The text talks about the experience of Paul who was lifted up to the third level of heaven. In spite of his disability, his 'thorn', God used him as His servant. And he went to heaven not with his physical body which had a disability, but with his spiritual body; which means that one day in heaven we will not be having this 'thorn' or our disabilities ..."*

### **Question 2: What is this text about?**

In the responses to question 2, participants gave their initial reaction to the text according to their experience and resources. These are their reactions:

*"The grace of God is sufficient; Paul and vision; The revelation of God; Paul's unsuccessful prayer, The failed healing prayer, The physical body; Lowliness; Being satisfied in your situation; Insufficient in Sufficient; To boast or not to boast (pride); The man's appearance is not God's concern; God is standing in the weaknesses; Dealing with weakness; God's power rested on weaknesses; God works with people without taking account of their physical condition, and Suffering in God's purpose".*

The two first questions linked the text to the real situation of the participants in the sense that they used their own language and terminology to express their reactions based on their own understanding.

### **Step 2**

The sub-groups were given the following questions 3 to 6 to work on.

**Question 3: How many parts do you divide this text into according to the logic of the text? Give each sub-division a theme.**

In the report-back on question 3 sub-group MW1 divided the text into two parts:

*"Paul's vision and the grace of God; and Paul's thorn"*

Sub-group MW2 divided the text in three parts:

*“God’s vision to Paul; Paul’s thorn; and God’s grace”.*

Sub-group MW3 recognized four different parts in the text:

*“Paul’s vision; Paul’s status; God’s grace toward Paul; Paul’s prayers and God’s willingness”*

Sub-group MW4 divided the text into three parts:

*“Paul’s vision; self-projection; and God’s response to Paul”*

In this question, the responses of the first two sub-groups show the link between Paul’s vision, Paul’s thorn and God’s grace. However, the last two sub-groups’ responses raised different and additional themes.

#### **Question 4: What does Paul say about his body in this text?**

The responses of sub-group MW1 were:

*“The text shows that Paul was strong inside himself (spiritually) but weak physically; Paul speaks about physical pain; and Paul asks God to take away the thorn which was in his body”.*

In their sub-group discussions MW1 found that, even though Paul was weak in body, he was spiritually strong because of the amazing things that he had heard and seen and that he could not reveal. The participants argued that the fact of spending time in prayer and of asking God what was going on in his body, affirmed his spiritual strength.

Sub-group MW2 responses to question 4 were:

*“Paul’s body’s pains bothered him (that is why he prayed three times asking God to remove the pain); the weakness of his body (Paul understands that God allows his weakness to prevent him from boasting or from pride); and Paul asks God to take away the thorn which was in his body”.*

Sub-group MW3 responded as follows.

*“Paul says his body is a burden (that is why he prayed for God to remove the pain); Paul shows that something is missing in his body; and His body’s pain comes from witchcraft”.*

This sub-group understood v. 7 in their own context: some African, including Congolese beliefs maintains that disability is caused by witchcraft (“bondoki” in Lingala).

Sub-group MW4 responded to question 4 by stating:

*Paul says that his body’s weakness prevents him from boasting about his life (in order to live according to God’s will); and the cause of his pain is the devil.*

### **Question 5: How does Paul understand his disability?**

Sub-group MW1 replied:

*Paul understands that his disability came from Satan and that this was permitted by God to afflict him so that he could not boast; Paul thinks his disability forces him to commit himself to God; and His disability is a counter-balance to God’s power.*

Sub-group MW2 gave the following responses.

*Paul understands that his disability becomes part of him; Paul’s disability is for God’s purpose; and his disability keeps him from boasting.*

Sub-group MW3 replied that:

*Paul understands his disability as a counter-balance to God’s power; In his weakness the grace of God is sufficient; Paul understands that his disability allows him to be humble; and his disability was given by a devil to prevent him from boasting.*

Sub-group MW3 concluded in the course of its discussion that God sometimes allows the devil to torment people so that they may prove their faith (they referred to the case: of Job 1, 6-22). However in this text, they said, God might allow the devil to torment his people in order to keep them away from bad things.

The responses of sub-group MW4 were:

*Paul understands his disability as a constant reminder of his weakness; and Paul understands that his pain is permitted by God for his glory.*

**Question 6: What does God say to Paul about his disability?**

Sub-group MW1 responded as follows.

*His grace is sufficient in Paul's weakness; God chose Paul as he is to shame the strong (I Corinthians 1, 27); and God is glorified through weaknesses.*

Sub-group MW2's responded:

*My grace is all over your weaknesses; God says in other words to Paul: - 'do not worry I love you as you are', 'your weakness is not a problem for me to show my power' and 'when you feel weak then I will give you strength..*

Sub-group MW3 reported:

*God would say to Paul 'I accept you as you are', 'I give you power in exchange for your weaknesses' and 'I will be glorified through your weaknesses.*

The replies of sub-group MW4 were:

*My power is greatest when you are weak; I work through your weaknesses to shame the strong; and I love you as you are.*

In response to this question, most sub-groups interpreted v. 9 in relation to their own context of disability, using the metaphors of their own language.<sup>296</sup>

**Step 3**

I asked participants to return to their groups and discuss question 7, on the basis of their own experiences, then after they came in the plenary for report back

**Question 7: How does society understand disability and how do people with disabilities understand their disability? Share your experience if possible.**

Sub-group MW1 responded:

*Society has neglected people with disabilities; They think that people with disabilities are cases of bad luck sent by God.*

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<sup>296</sup> The metaphor in this context is kind of a "figure of speech"; participants used language in the way they would like God to speak to them.

They chose one of their members to express her personal experience.

Lucie said:

*I did not accept myself as God's creation; I thought that God did not love me, because I am the only one in my family who is physically disabled. Yet, I have opened my heart to Jesus Christ and then I have understood that God loves me as I am. However, I still have a problem, because of my disability; my family-in-law does not accept me as a person like others.*

Sub-group MW2 presented its view as follows.

*Society, like family, rejects its children with disabilities and believes that disability comes from the devil.*

One member of the group gave a personal testimony.

Manix said

*I am rejected by my family because of my visual impairment. My family thinks that I am a source of trouble and a bad luck. I am not treated equally to my brothers and sisters who are able to see: they are in school and some are at university, but I was not given a chance by my family to rehabilitate in school or church after my accident. Yet, I feel more blessed than my brothers and sisters at home in the sense that I am not sick as they are often and when I need something there is always a way to get help from people outside. So, I thank God for this opportunity he has given me to talk with others and share our difficulties.*

Sub-group MW3 reported as follows.

*Society, just like family, thinks that sending a child with a disability to school is a misuse of money.*

They chose one of their members, Aisha, to share her experience

Aisha said:

*I was not encouraged by my family to study nor to learn something for my future life. This attitude affected me and I was thinking also myself that I am "bon a rien" (good for nothing) in society. But, through IMAN'ENDA's teaching I was encouraged to accept myself as God's*



*creation and I received support to continue my studies. Today I am a qualified nurse in Democratic Republic Congo.*

Sub-group MW4 response was:

*Society as a family hides its children with disabilities in the house, but God surprises them with his grace.*

Mymy Baroza presented personal experiences.

*My family locked me up. They were ashamed of me because of my physical disability; I was not able to go to school or even to learn to do something, but by the grace of God, at a later age a nun took me from my family home and enrolled me in a sewing centre. Therefore, today I am a famous tailor and important person in our suburb.*

In regard to this question each sub-group decided to present a personal testimony. The testimonies demonstrated the different experiences of disability by PWD's as well as different perceptions of disability in society.

#### **Step 4**

In the final part of the Bible study I asked participants to respond to the last question by putting themselves in the position of people who advocate improvement of the situation of disabled people in the church, at school, and in public places. The exercise was done in the sub-groups.

#### **Question 8: How can we create opportunities for people with disabilities to exercise their gifts and leadership?**

With regard to the discussions about this question, I chose to record the voices of particular participants in the three categories of Bible students: PWDs (people with disabilities), WPs (women pastors), and ABPs (able-bodied persons). I recorded one voice from each sub-group in order to evaluate the different opinions emanating from the three categories. I will later subject these data to the underpinning theories of my study, so as to assist me in forming an answer to my main research question, "How can CBS methodology contribute to a holistic education of PWDs?"

Sub-group MW1 responded in this way:

*Church needs to recognize and accept that people with disabilities are human like others :*  
(PWD, WP);

*Discovering the gifts and talents of people with disabilities in church* (WP);

*The church needs to find ways to involve people with disabilities in the communities and create space, for example for Bible study together with non-disabled and organize disability awareness sessions in church* (WP);

*Provide accessibility of church, schools, public places* (PWD, WP, ABP).

In this sub-group the voices of church leaders (the women pastors) were dominant because they had been deeply impacted by sharing the Bible study.

The replies of the MW2 sub-group went as follows.

*People with disabilities need to be accepted as they are (and should not be used for advertising the evangelist's power for the purpose of attracting people into their congregations)* (PWD);

*The need for education and training in diverse fields, like tailoring, computer literacy and others"* (PWD, ABP);

*Church and school need to facilitate access for people with disabilities* (PWD, ABP);

*The Church needs to motivate people with disabilities to be involved in different church activities"* (PWD).

In this sub-group, the attitude of church leaders towards people with disabilities was discussed. The participants tried to point out how the leaders cause feelings of fear, anger, humiliation, and disbelief in people with disabilities, to such an extent that some no longer wish to attend church services because of the attitude of church leaders.

Sub-group MW3 reported:

*People with disabilities need to be loved as they are (not by praying for them every Sunday for their healing or for a miracle) (PWD);*

*People with disabilities need to be considered as human beings, like others (sometimes they are classified as less than human) (PWD, ABP);*

*By approaching and learning from people with disabilities they can be helped to express themselves and to exercise their gifts in church (ABP, PWD);*

*To facilitate access by building a ramp, by having a sign language interpreter, by creating awareness of the Braille Bible in church and school (PWD, ABP).*

Participants with disabilities in this sub-group emphasized their doubts about “healing and miracle prayers”. They argued that such prayers are based on the assumption in some churches that prayer is the best way to love and care for people with disabilities. They stated that such an attitude leads people with disabilities to feel they are set apart and treated differently from other church members. They insisted that most people with disabilities accept their impairment as simply a part of the way they are. They appealed to churches and schools to accept them in the same spirit. The non-disabled participants of this sub-group shared their experience of getting to know and becoming closer to people with disabilities and of discovering that people with disabilities are different personalities with their own gifts and talents.

The responses of sub-group MW4 were formulated as follows.

*Church needs to include people with disabilities in different activities (not only in the “Diakonia” department) (PWD);*

*Churches or schools should create training courses (sewing, reading and writing, computer literacy) (PWD, ABP);*

*The church does not need to decide or assume what people with disabilities need; rather they need to consult them (PWD);*

*Access facilitation for people with disabilities in church (ABP, PWD);*

*People with disabilities must also be involved in community activities so that others get an opportunity to be with them (ABP).*

Some participants with disabilities of sub-group MW4 shared their experiences of the church, explaining that the only church department in which they are welcome is Diakonia which deals with the poor, the widowed, the orphaned, the elderly, and the disabled (the category is collectively known as “babola” which means “people who have nothing”). Participants argued that the inclusion of people with disabilities in this category creates the perception that they are useless or, at least, “helpless” and have nothing to contribute to the church.<sup>297</sup>

## Step 5

I asked the participants to close the session with a prayer.

## 5.4 Analysis and Interpretation

The text of 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10 was studied by the same people who participated in the previous Bible study. They preferred to remain in the same sub-groups and to have the same sub-group leaders with the exception of sub-group MW1 which changed its leader.

The analysis and interpretation of this section will be based on the convergences and divergences of the participants’ responses, meaning that the focus is on the evaluation of shared and different reactions to questions posed in the Bible study. The purpose is to find an answer to the research’s main question, namely how the Bible can be a tool of transformation for people with disabilities.

The first two questions: - *Re-tell the story to each other* - and - *What is this text about?* - aimed to involve participants in the process of Bible study and to make them connect the text to their own contexts. Participants found this stage very interesting because as, most of them were teachers, they were used to this process. The responses given to question 2 reflected their understanding of the text. Their responses were formulated as follows.

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<sup>297</sup> The Diakonia department, in French “Department de diaconie”, is one of the church departments used by deacons to provide food, clothing and money to the poor (including widowers, people with disabilities, orphans, old persons and so on), referring to Acts 6, 1-7.

*The grace of God is sufficient*, was related by participants to what Paul said in v. 10 after he realized that he was limited, and that only God was in control of everything;

*Lowliness* was interpreted by participants as indicating that the weakness of Paul made him submissive to God;

*Being satisfied in your situation*, was linked to Paul's words, 'for when I am weak then I am strong' (v. 10); this was the stage of acceptance of his status as a person with a disability;

*Insufficient in Sufficient*, participants said, was demonstrated when Paul's weak body experienced God's revelation;

*To boast or not boast (pride)*, referred to what Paul said about the revelation he had received but which he could not reveal because of the 'thorn' imposed on him;

*Man's appearance is not God's concern*; participants stated that what Paul saw in his body; was not that which God was concerned with;

*God is standing in the weaknesses*, in other words, God is among the people who are marginalized in society;

*Dealing with weakness*, is associated with Paul's three prayers in which he refers to his physical situation;

*God's power rested on weakness*, the participants' response is related to what God told Paul: 'My grace is sufficient for you and my power is made perfect in your weaknesses';

*God works with people without taking account of their physical condition*; participants thought that Paul, after praying, stopped focusing on his condition.

The responses given to question 2 by the participants dealt with "bodily weakness", which is interesting because the question was intentionally asked in order to see whether participants would connect the text to their context of disability. As I noted in the previous chapter, it was at this stage difficult for participants to express their views in detail, because the question guided them as it were towards one specific theme that they were meant to "pick up", namely the disability theme related to this text.

Participants raised in fact a number of themes which needed critical tools for an effective interpretation. For example, '*to boast or not boast (pride)*': Paul spoke of his "humiliating

corporal vulnerability” reflecting the ways in which the current civilizations (Greco-Roman and Jewish) looked upon the damaged body, linking it to “shame” and “honour”. The “scarred body” was in first century Greco-Roman thought associated with questions of “power and the legal status as a freeborn, freed, or enslaved person, and hence with domination and submission and with honor and shame.<sup>298</sup> Meanwhile, a “whippable body” was a mark of dishonor and shame.<sup>299</sup>

Nevertheless, the participants’ explanation of the theme of the text as being ‘*to boast or not boast*’ makes the point - especially from a disability perspective - that people with disabilities may have experienced great things in their lives, but they feel constrained from displaying them because of their condition.

Therefore, the CBS encourages the meeting of, and the forming of partnerships between, people with disabilities on the one hand and “socially engaged biblical scholars” on the other, in order to provide much needed tools to both sides and to create balance.<sup>300</sup>

The questions 3 to 6 made participants focus on the text. Question 3, “***How many parts do you divide this text into according to the logic of this text? Give each sub-division a theme***”, was posed to see whether participants would be able to make a logical link between Paul’s vision or revelation and his “thorn”.

The responses of all sub-groups were comprehensible and inclusive in the sense that most mentioned “Paul’s vision” as the starting point of the text, while “Paul’s thorn” was identified as the central theme and “God’s grace” as the conclusion. Some groups added further themes such as “Paul’s prayers”, “God’s willingness” and “self-discovery”. All these responses infer that participants had tried to understand the logic of this text.

In answer to question 4, “***What does Paul say about his body in this text?***” participants gave various viewpoints and emphasized different aspects. Their responses could be summarized in three points. Firstly, Paul said his body was weak but strong inside, recognizing that his inner being had been taken up to the third heaven (v. 2-4). The responses were:

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<sup>298</sup> Glancy, ‘Boasting of Beatings’, 2004, 101.

<sup>299</sup> Glancy, ‘Boasting of Beatings’, 2004, 107.

<sup>300</sup> I developed the “critical tools and resources” in my third chapter referring to West: “Reading the Bible Differently”, 1996, 32.

*The text shows that Paul was strong inside himself (spiritually) but weak physically;*

*Paul shows that something was missing in his body;*

*Paul spoke about his body's weaknesses".*

Secondly, participants found that Paul's body presented a burden to him; hence he spent time in prayer to ask God to take away his burden. They argued:

*Paul asks God to take away the thorn which was in his body; Paul's body pains bother him (that is why he prayed three times asking God to remove the pain).*

Thirdly, participants mentioned Paul stating that his thorn came from the devil. These were their responses:

*His body's pain comes from witchcraft;*

*The cause of his pain is the devil.*

Sub-group MW3 discussed this point in the context of African beliefs that a weak body or a disability is caused by witchcraft.

The responses to this question show how PWDs react to their disability or to physical pain. Most of them feel weak, and experience pain which they ascribe to being cursed or punished by ancestors or by God.

Some responses to question 4 showed the participants as being somewhat confused, as if they were already anticipating question 5 which focused on Paul's understanding of his disability. For example:

*The weakness of his body (Paul understands that God allows his weakness to prevent him from boasting or pride); and*

*Paul says that his body's weakness prevents him from boasting about his life (in order to live according to God's will).*

Question 5, “*How does Paul understand his disability?*” was well understood by the participants. The question was intended to let participants discover, through the text, how one could understand the significance of Paul’s disability by seeing it in God’s light. The participants’ responses showed the possible different meanings of disability as suggested by the text.

*Paul understands his disability as a constant reminder of his weakness;*

*Paul understands that his pain is permitted by God for his glory;*

*Paul understands his disability as a counter-balance to God’s power;*

*Paul understands that his disability allows him to be humble;*

*His disability was given by a devil to prevent him from boasting;*

*Paul understands his disability becomes part of him;*

*Paul’s disability is for God’s purpose;*

*Paul thinks his disability situation forces him to commit himself to God.*

The responses given by the participants at this point show a positive understanding of the text in the sense of accepting disability as such. Most participants have been told that their condition comes from the devil or that it is a curse from God (especially in an African context (Chapter 2)), but through this text they began to accept their condition in the knowledge that God is in control of everything.

The implications of Paul’s statement lead us to the theories of personality from a disability perspective that I have discussed earlier: people with disabilities need to find the meaning of their physical condition – a process which may be called self-discovery.

Self-discovery implies a growing awareness and better understanding of the self in order to be happier and take responsibility for one’s situation. Self-awareness can be defined as the ability to see oneself with one’s own eyes, conscious of one’s suffering, feelings, beliefs,



values and goals.<sup>301</sup> In the case of PWD's self-awareness includes giving meaning to one's disability and determining one's possibilities.

Question 6 was: *What does God say to Paul about his disability?* Most sub-groups tried to make sense of v. 9 by putting it in their own language. Their responses reflected what they themselves would like to hear in relation to their own situations. They agreed that the text reveals that God has a purpose, whatever the nature of one's suffering. Their responses were expressed as follows.

*My grace is all over your weaknesses;*

*God says in other words to Paul: 'Do not worry I love you as you are', 'your weakness is not a problem for me to show my power', 'when you feel weak then I will give strength';*

*God would say to Paul: 'I accept you as you are', 'I give you power in exchange for your weaknesses', 'I will be glorified through your weaknesses';*

*My power is greatest when you are weak;*

*I work through your weaknesses to shame the strong. I love you as you are.*

The re-reading of this text made clear that God has a purpose in permitting suffering. Yet, it should be born in mind that it is a daily live concern of all human beings to avoid suffering and pain. From a disability perspective, "disability often brings a very visible kind of suffering. Physical pain and weakness, exclusion from the mainstream of society, significantly increased family responsibilities, blatant discrimination, and economic injustice are examples of some of the common experiences that cause suffering in the lives of people with disabilities".<sup>302</sup> Therefore, people with disabilities need to find the meaning of suffering in their lives because: "to live is to suffer; to survive is to find meaning in the suffering".<sup>303</sup>

Victor Frankl states, in regard to his own attempts to find such meaning, that there is a deeply fundamental level of meaning that he calls "supra-meaning", or "transcendence", and which lies beyond the finite intellectual capacities of man.<sup>304</sup> Such meaning is linked to spirituality. Paul's prayers were a search for the meaning of his suffering. God's revelation gave him

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<sup>301</sup> Lifeline Durban, Personal Growth Training Manual, 2003, 5, 6.

<sup>302</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 91, 92.

<sup>303</sup> Lifeline Durban Course quoting Victor Frankl in *Searching the Meaning: Logotherapy*, 2003, 30.

<sup>304</sup> Ann V. Graber, *Victor Frankl's logotherapy: Method of choice in Ecumenical Pastoral Psychology* (Ohio: Wyndham Hall Press, 2004), 6.

confidence in himself. “He sees that the disability, even if instrumentally associated with the demonic, is ultimately of divine origin and has a divine purpose”.<sup>305</sup>

### Step 3

I asked participants to return back to their groups to discuss question 7.

The final questions asked that the participants applied the text to their own situation.

Responses to question 7 - *How does society understand disability and how do people with disabilities understand their disability? Share your experience if possible* - reflected the degree to which participants were concerned with their own experiences and with their real life situations. They focused on how society understands disability but, through their personal stories in which their feelings became apparent, participants also showed how they themselves perceived their reality as people with disabilities.

In interpreting the responses of each sub-group I will mention the stereotypical attitude of society vis-à-vis people with disabilities and will show in what manner participants arrived at an understanding of their disability.

Sub-group MW1 stated: *Society has neglected people with disabilities.*

The social stereotype that underpins the side lining of PWDs is revealed in the opinion that: people with disabilities are not worth bothering about since they cannot make a meaningful contribution to society.

Lucie’s story indicates a lack of acceptance until she was empowered and accepted her physical condition as such, even though she still feels oppressed by her family-in-law.

Sub-group MW2 said: *Society, like the family, rejects its children with disabilities.*

This attitude reflects the stereotypical perception that disability is caused by the devil or is a curse from God.

Manix’s story expressed feelings of being rejected but also of being blessed.

Sub-group MW3, made the statement: *Society, just like the family, thinks that sending a child with a disability to school is a misuse of money.*

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<sup>305</sup> Albl, Whenever I Am Weak, 2007, 157.

Here another stereotypical attitude is showcased, namely that sending a child with a disability to school is a waste of money.

Aisha's story accentuated how the lack of acceptance made her think that she was *bon a rien*, good for nothing, and how negatively she was affected by her family's attitude.

However, education empowered her and she gained in self-confidence.

Sub-group MW4 stated: *The society as a family hides its children with disabilities in the house, but God surprises them with his grace.*

Here another stereotypical attitude is reflected, namely that people are ashamed of their children with disabilities.

For example, Mymy told how she felt ignored by her family and by society. She got an opportunity to be educated and now she has more self-esteem.

Participants' stories were centred on family and education because they know the serious problems that people with disabilities experience within the context of family life. As stated previously, in most instances these problems are due to misconceptions about disability and are also a result of poverty. However, family is the first place where a person with a disability should find security and protection, and where he or she should develop self-esteem. Apart from love, the most precious thing that parents (family) can offer a child is education, since this opens the route to self-sufficiency and opportunities to contribute to society by using one's talents.<sup>306</sup>

The final question (8) was, "***How can we create opportunities for people with disabilities to exercise their gifts and leadership?***" In reaction to this question, participants spoke of their longing to act and transform their communities (family, church, school and workplace). Subjects discussed by sub-groups were the concerns of people with disabilities in their daily lives: their wish to fully use their gifts, and to be trusted in positions of leadership. Most sub-groups mentioned the following concerns.

### *Acceptance*

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<sup>306</sup> During May and June 1996 in Kinshasa, Zaire (now the DRC), I conducted an interview with "street persons with disabilities" who were commonly known to stir up trouble in shops and to beg for money. Some of them revealed that they lived on the street because they had been rejected by their families. Others declared that a lack of financial support from the family and a lack of education or training had led them to try to survive in the street. (Micheline Kamba K, 'Integration Sociale des Personnes avec handicap: Une Approche Psycho-Pastorale'. Memoire de Licence, UPZ, 1996, 14).

Each sub-group expressed the wish to be accepted, and several statements targeted non-disabled people in society (churches or schools) for not looking beyond the disabilities of PWD's.

By "acceptance" participants meant that they needed to be respected by non-disabled people as human beings like any others. They needed to be approached in a friendly way by people open to, and keen to discover, their qualities and gifts.

#### *Healing prayer*

"Healing prayer" turned out to be a burning issue, which was passionately discussed by certain sub-groups. They stated that the offering of healing prayer reflected a specific attitude that negatively affected people with disabilities and made them fearful and angry, leading even to a loss of faith and a tendency to oppose God.

#### *Access to facilities*

Participants proposed various action plans such as promoting the building of ramps, the instituting of sign language interpreters, and creating awareness of Braille by having Braille Bibles in churches and schools. These measures would make people with disabilities feel more included and more effective in the community.

#### *Education (training)*

Participants expressed their desire to be trained in different fields (sewing, literacy and computer literacy) in churches and schools to enable them to be self-sufficient and to provide them with opportunities to contribute to society at large.

The concerns cited above indicate that participants felt that change should come from society. However, one group (MW4) thought that society could create opportunities for people with disabilities only, if they themselves made an effort to "involve themselves in the communities".

## **5.5 Autobiographical Criticism**

In this section I am reading through the lens of my disability experiences and of doing Bible study with peers with disabilities, using narrative interpretation of the existing literature,

considered from a psycho-spiritual perspective. My interpretation will follow my understanding of the text which will be divided into five parts. The section aims to show that the text is part of a critical discourse of disability and thus falls within the scope of liberation theology.

Various themes have been attributed to the text of 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10 in different Bible versions.<sup>307</sup> During my re-reading however, I have found that the text covers many subjects covered by one theme, namely that of “power through weakness”. This theme arises in the context where Paul feels assaulted for his “weak presence”. In response to his “opponents taking Christ as his model, Paul argues that weakness, humility, and suffering for the cause are badges of honor in God’s eyes...”<sup>308</sup> To better understand the emergence of this theme I break the text up into five parts:

The first part concerns “Paul’s vision” (v. 1-2a), the second part deals with “Paul’s body” (v. 2-6), the third part with “Paul’s Thorn” (v. 7-8), the fourth part focuses on “God’s grace” (v. 9) and the fifth part on “Paul’s response to God’s grace” (v. 9b-10). This breaking up of the text, along with the comments linked to each part, will clarify the overall theme of this Bible study.

Verse 1-2a: Paul’s vision. I start my reading with v. 1: “I must go on boasting” (NIV), indicating a response to a “further ground of boasting among Paul’s rivals...” In the Greco-Roman context, to enhance one’s status, one would exhibit a wounded and scarred body. Jennifer A. Glancy in her article, ‘Boasting of Beatings’ presents the controversy around Paul’s boasting of beatings. I stated above that, although the display of wounds or scars was standard practice in Greco-Roman culture, the difference between a “scarred body” and a “whipped body” during the Roman era remains unclear. The problem that Glancy presents concerns the reason for Paul’s boasting. Did Paul’s boasting of his beatings imply honor, or

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<sup>307</sup> Different themes are highlighted in different versions: the English Standard Version (ESV) presents this text as “Paul’s Vision and His Thorn”; The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) calls it “Sufficient Grace”; The International Standard Version, New Testament (ISV/NT) heads this text with “Paul’s Thorn”; the New American Standard Bible (NASB): 1995 (update) calls this text “Paul’s vision”; New International Reader’s Version (NIRV) presents it as “Paul’s vision and His Painful Problem”; the New King James Version (NKV) names the passage “The vision of Paradise” and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) “Paul’s Visions and Revelations”.

<sup>308</sup> Larson, ‘Paul’s Masculinity’, 2004, 95.

shame and dishonor?<sup>309</sup> What I find interesting in this study is that Paul boasted of the weaknesses endured by his body. Hence he says, “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (11, 30). In other words, scars resulting from being whipped would not bring one honor, but battle scars would.

The verse is a follow up of Paul’s challenge of “boasting about these sufferings”. Paul showed his rivals that when one wants to boast, one has to support one’s boast with facts. Thus, for him “...it was not empty boasting – ... [but about letting] the facts speak for themselves...” (2 Corinthians 11, 16 – 33; Acts 9, 3; 22, 6, 17)<sup>310</sup>

In v. 2 Paul narrates his experience using the third person to “refrain from boasting about himself ... and thus turn the Corinthians’ attention to his weakness”.<sup>311</sup> The experience of his vision dates back fourteen years and, on the one hand, Paul wants to show his opponents that he is qualified only by God (and not by mystical experience), and, on the other hand, he wants to focus on the damaged ‘body’ which was repugnant to the Corinthians. Paul wanted to emphasize that despite his weak body (in or out of body) he had experienced great things that he could not speak of. Therefore, in the next verses, Paul would say to his opponents, “I want you to look at what I am, not what I was. The man I want you to take into account is not the one who experienced an astonishing revelation then but the one you see now, in all his weakness; *so no-one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say (v. 6)*”.<sup>312</sup>

V.2b – 6, Paul’s body. Paul’s attention focuses on his body because it was a preoccupation of the Corinthians who tended to focus on appearances.

The word “body” is altogether mentioned 91 times in the Pauline letters, with different and rich meanings attached to it. In some of Paul’s letters “body” has been used to refer to the church or to the Christian congregation (Romans 12, 4-5; 1 Cor. 10, 16-17); as “bodily parts” which mean that the members are part of the body of the church. Elsewhere the term “body” indicates a “whole person” or a human being in all its aspects (Romans 8, 23). It is described

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<sup>309</sup> (Glancy, ‘Boasting of Beatings, 2004, 108, 109; James D. G. Dunn and & John W. Rogerson, Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: on 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10; 1367. William B. Eerdmans’ Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2003; Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 1996, 41).

<sup>310</sup> The Bible Exposition Commentary on 2 Corinthians 12, 1. Libronix Digital System (Logos Bible Software, <http://www.logos.com> [06/2008])

<sup>311</sup> Lincoln 1979 in Eerdmans’ Commentary on the Bible: 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10, 1367, 2003.

<sup>312</sup> Barnett, *The Message of 2 Corinthians*, 1998, 177.

also as a “mortal body” (Rom 6, 12; 8, 23) and it relates to the physical body, which is always influenced by wickedness and sin. Meanwhile, recent investigations about the perception of Paul’s body in 2 Cor. 10 – 13 link it to a gender concept in the Greco-Roman world, namely that masculinity was related to an “individual’s anatomical sex” as well as to a display of virility.<sup>313</sup> However, this text speaks about Paul’s own body; and he describes it as weakness and burden (v. 6, 7).

The recurrence of the phrase “whether it was in the body or out of the body...” (v.2-3), seems to relativize the body in the context of his vision. However, Paul underlines his body, which he describes as a weakness. Here Paul responds directly to his opponents who attack him by saying that “his bodily presence...is weak” (2 Cor. 10, 10). There is a link between these verses, 2 Cor. 10, 10 and 2 Cor. 12, 1-3. Paul would say that the body has a “*raison d’être*” only if the spirit is worthy and on a higher plane than the body. Paul wanted to reverse the values of the Corinthians who were exalting physical presence (body), rather than spiritual dimensions.

The Corinthian context at the time when Paul arrived was that of a city “at the height of its glory, a tribute to human-made splendour... people [who] looked to the cults for satisfaction, and satisfaction as they defined it, as personal exaltation and glory”.<sup>314</sup> The Corinthians had a particular penchant for self-display, giving much attention to “personal appearance and impressive speech” as the most remarkable of “human traits”. This meant that Corinthians tended to look critically at physical presence and they showed their repugnance of Paul’s appearance.

Paul’s Thorn (v7-8): v.7b shows how Paul defined “thorn” as being like a “burden”, a “limitation” of his body or a “weakness. The word “thorn”, in other contexts, may be translated as “a sharp stake used for torturing or impaling someone”.<sup>315</sup>

“A thorn in one’s flesh” is an expression, which refers to an object that, or a person who, continuously annoys or hinders its victim.<sup>316</sup> The verb “to torment”, as used in “a messenger of Satan, to torment me” (NIV version); refers to a permanent annoyance or pain (‘torment’

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<sup>313</sup> The concept of Paul’s masculinity being defined as an impairment in the Greco-Roman world, as Larson describes in her article will be discussed further in the next section of “Dialogue with scholars” (‘Paul’s Masculinity’ 2004, 86).

<sup>314</sup> Savage, *Power through weakness*, 1996, 36, 47-53.

<sup>315</sup> The Bible Exposition Commentary, on 2 Corinthians 12, Libronix Digital library.

<sup>316</sup> John Muddiman & John Barton, *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

comes from the French tormenter, to torture) which makes the subject of the torment anguished or profoundly uncomfortable. This was “a physical affliction of some kind that brought pain and distress to Paul”.<sup>317</sup> In other words, it is an experience that could be understood from a disability perspective.<sup>318</sup>

Paul’s statement, reflecting his understanding of disability, represents two opposite perspectives (v. 7). On the one hand he recognizes that he was disabled in order to prevent him from boasting, on the other hand he says that the “thorn” comes from Satan to torment him. This illustrates how Paul tries to reverse the Corinthians’ culture. As Savage states, “...in Corinth, perhaps more than elsewhere, people were eager to embrace those who projected themselves with vigour and force. Paul not only rejects this perspective but turns it on its head. He conforms to the meekness and gentleness of Christ and in this way seeks to build up his converts”.<sup>319</sup> In other words, Paul is thoroughly familiar with the negative social definition of disability in ancient Jewish and ancient Greco-Roman society where it was seen as a curse. He is also aware of the boasting of the arrogant, leading to self-commendation.

Paul, however “completely reverses standard categories of thought, speaking of the ‘foolishness’...and ‘weakness’..., of the ultimate source of wisdom, strength and power”<sup>320</sup>.

God’s grace (v9): The verse starts with “But he said...” (NIV), introducing an opposition to the previous sentence in v. 8b, where Paul says that he prayed three times to plead with God to take away his pain. “But...” indicates an opposition, a negation which means that God opposed or refused to give Paul what he asked for or, rather, that God responded according to his purpose for Paul.

“My grace is sufficient for you” (NIV) is translated from the Greek, “My favour is enough, adequate for you”. The question is: “Grace for what?” And the answer: “So that the power of God be manifested in weakness, in other words, the power of God strengthens the weak body”.

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<sup>317</sup> The Bible Exposition Commentary, on 2 Corinthians 12. 2008.

<sup>318</sup> The experience of pain and suffering can be understood very vividly from a disability perspective. Joni Eareckson, an American woman who is tetraplegically disabled and has experienced breast cancer, in her book, *Suffering and Healing*, explains that God had chosen to be disabled by coming to this earth so that we could have a better life. Yet Eareckson states that no one can passively accept disability. She said in answer to the question whether, had she been given the choice, she would have chosen to be disabled, “I wouldn’t. It’s hard!”

<sup>319</sup> Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 1996, 69.

<sup>320</sup> Albl, ‘Whenever I Am Weak’, 2007, 150.



Paul's response to God's grace (v10): "Therefore" means, "as a result of", "on which account", "because of that". In other words, Paul understood the reason that God allowed him to have a thorn. Thus Paul says: "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weakness...for when I am weak, then I am filled with ability and power" (NT: Expanded Translation). The verse is about Paul's acceptance of his feeble body.

### **5.5.1 Summary**

My personal reading of 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10 as an academic and as a person with a disability and working with and among PWDs, guides my interpretation in answering the main question of this Bible study: "What does God say to Paul about his disability?" Disability in Paul's context, though widely debated by scholars, in my opinion meant a "weak body", "a shamed body". The suffering that Paul endured in his body which he described as "a thorn in one's flesh", indicated Paul's suffering was really physical pain, which caused him to alienate himself and compromised him in his daily activities. This understanding could easily flow from a disability perspective in the sense that it reflects the realities of PWDs in terms of suffering, weaknesses, self-denial and self-hate. Therefore, God's response to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you; and power is manifested in weaknesses" is a constructive one, which can liberate a person with disability to accept the body's limits.

The materials that come from my re-reading will serve as the basis for engaging in the dialogues that follow with PWDs and the materials of scholars.

## **5.6 People with disabilities in dialogue with scholars**

This section will deal with discussions between the participants in the Bible study, in the light of viewpoints expressed by biblical scholars, and focus on aspects of the text of 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10 that emerge both from biblical scholarly writings on the *body* and on *Paul's* and *God's understandings of disability*. The aim is to reflect on the relevance of the contribution made by PWDs to biblical interpretation of this text. It engages with the theological understanding of this context which will help a theological reflection on disability that will be discussed later in this study.

## The Body

Question 4 of the Bible study was, *-What does Paul say about his body in this text? -* Commentators speculate that Paul's disability caused him to have a "repulsive physical appearance".<sup>321</sup> As the Corinthians were preoccupied with the external and the spectacular, they perceived Paul's body as abhorrent.

Based on his own translation of the text from Greek into English and specifically of Paul's opponents' judgment that, his "bodily presence is weak", Albl says that this indicates that the "whole person" is considered weak (e.g. 1 Cor. 6, 15; Rom. 12, 1). Referred to 2 Corinthians 10, 10, Dunn suggests that when Paul's opponents say that "the presence of his body" (which is the literal translation of the Greek, the word for "body" should really be translated by a term such as "embodiment" by which he understands "the whole person, especially in his or her concrete relationship with other persons – as embodied in his or her physical existence".<sup>322</sup> Similarly Deborah Creamer argues that, "when he [Paul] talks of the body, he is attending not only to the physical but also to the social body..."<sup>323</sup> This implies that, when Paul's opponents say that the presence of Paul is weak, they criticize not only the weakness of his "physical body", but his whole person.<sup>324</sup> Galatians 4, 14 (where Paul mentions disability) is interpreted by some commentators along the following lines. "The Galatians were 'tempted' to reject Paul as sinful or demon-possessed, since disabilities were connected with sin and evil in both ancient Jewish and ancient Greco-Roman thought".<sup>325</sup>

Referring to recent research on "Paul's body" in 2 Cor. 10-13, certain scholars link "Paul's body" to the context of gender in Greco-Roman culture. Jennifer Larson says: "Paul's letters to the Corinthians show that his opponents in Corinth made a number of specific references to his physical appearance and character".<sup>326</sup> Larson argues that for slaves, who had been emasculated, their masculinity was fundamentally impaired. This was so, because any man

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<sup>321</sup> J. Dunn in Albl, 'Whenever I Am Weak', 2007, 156; Eerdmans, Commentary on the Bible, 2003, 1367.

<sup>322</sup> Dunn in Albl, 'Whenever I Am Weak', 2007, 155.

<sup>323</sup> Deborah Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities* (New York: Oxford University, 2009), 46.

<sup>324</sup> Albl, 'Whenever I Am Weak', 2007, 155.

<sup>325</sup> Albl, 'Whenever I Am Weak', 2007, 153; Jerry McCant, 'Paul's Thorn of Rejected Apostleship', <<http://journals.cambridge.org>> [27/11/2012], and Russell, 'Redemptive Suffering and Paul's Thorn in the Flesh' Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology*, 2009, 48.

<sup>326</sup> Larson, 'Paul's Masculinity', 2004, 85.

who aspired to a position of leadership in the first-century Roman world would have been subject to an almost continuous evaluation of his virility by his auditors and rivals.<sup>327</sup> In other words, Larson's statement indicates that Paul's opponents and critics focused on specifically the fact that physical presence and rhetorical ability played crucial roles in the performance of gender. Therefore, the failure to display sustained virility was considered as a disability.

However, the participants in the Bible study responded to this question on the basis of their experience within their own context as follows.

*"The text shows that Paul was strong inside himself (spiritually) but weak physically";*

*"Paul says his body is a burden (that is why he prayed for God to remove the pain)";*

*"Paul shows that something was missing in his body";*

*"His body's pain comes from witchcraft".*

With regard to these responses, participants in the Bible study connected Paul's body to Paul's thorn. This means that the thorn was "in the flesh" in that it afflicted the physical man. This perception is understandable in a disability discourse. One preacher states:

Often, the thorns and buffetings we endure in this life will manifest themselves in the physical realm, through sickness and other forms of physical suffering. At other times, we will endure emotional pain, such as depression [...] and heartbreak. Sometimes our thorns will be spiritual in nature, as we doubt our salvation, struggle with holiness and battle spiritual pride.<sup>328</sup>

This statement discusses that suffering manifests itself in various ways. It is linked to the theology of suffering and the theology of limitation.<sup>329</sup> Given the centrality of bodily experience, which frames the whole of human existence as explained by Dunn above, disability cannot but have a profound effect on the individual. Creamer quoting Davis, states:

Disability is not a minor issue that relates to a relatively small number of unfortunate people; it is part of a historically constructed discourse, an ideology of thinking about

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<sup>327</sup> Larson, 'Paul's Masculinity', 2004, 86.

<sup>328</sup>The Sermons Notebook: Biblical Resources for Preachers and Teachers of the Word of God, <[http://www.sermonnotebook.org/New20testament/2%.2corinthians12\\_1-10.html](http://www.sermonnotebook.org/New20testament/2%.2corinthians12_1-10.html)> [20/04/2011].

<sup>329</sup> I will discuss this in chapter 7 of this study.

the body under certain historical circumstances. Disability is not an object – a woman with a cane – but a social process that intimately involves everyone who has a body and lives in the World of the senses.<sup>330</sup>

Despite the debate around the nature of Paul's thorn and Paul's body<sup>331</sup> "whatever the identity of the thorn, the cross/resurrection paradigm governs Paul's reading of the divine response, for Christ's resurrection had shown 'power made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12, 9) to be God's characteristic design for Christian life".<sup>332</sup>

Therefore, in v. 5 of 2 Cor. 12, Paul says, "I will boast about a man like that ['the man' is referred to in the third person to distance 'him' from Paul, as discussed above], but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses", showing that Paul is conscious of his bodily weakness and very aware of the Corinthians' context that glorifies bodily strength and virility. Therefore, Paul reverses the value system in saying that he gladly boasts about of his weaknesses (11, 30 and 12, 9). This makes clear that, the weaker Paul feels in his body, the stronger he feels as a person.

### **Paul understands disability**

In v. 7-8 Paul talks about his "impairment",<sup>333</sup> calling it a "thorn in the flesh". As mentioned above, this "thorn" has been much debated resulting in many viewpoints. Clearly though, Paul had some kind of impairment, a physical limitation or weakness.<sup>334</sup> This condition was like a burden, painful and shameful to an apostle in the Corinthians' context.

It is interesting that most Biblical commentators deal with this text in an emotionally constructive way, as an emphasizing of true strength in the face of weakness. Some

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<sup>330</sup> Davis in Creamer, *'Disability and Christian Theology'* 2009, 7.

<sup>331</sup> Most exegetes explain "thorn" as related to such maladies as malaria, epilepsy, eye-trouble, neuralgia, colic, rheumatism, and leprosy; other scholars, however, suggest an alternative explanation, for example that "the thorn represented persecution". They argue that "the thorn in the flesh was not a physical sickness but referred to certain persons, most likely Christians in the Corinthian Church" (McCant, 'Paul's Thorn of Rejected Apostleship' in Creamer, *'Disability and Christian Theology'* 2009, 48; Robert M. Price, 'Punished in Paradise: An Exegetical Theory on 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10' <[http://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com/art\\_parad.html](http://www.robertmprice.mindvendor.com/art_parad.html)> [20/04/2011]).

<sup>332</sup> Creamer, *'Disability and Christian Theology'* 2009, 48.

<sup>333</sup> I prefer to use the term "impairment" rather than "disability" in this text, because there is a difference between the two. Impairment refers to the body itself which is limited in its functioning; disability is linked to the consequences of the attitudes, environment, structures and procedures of society (refer to Chapter 2 of this thesis). In this context, Paul seems to understand his impairment and accept it as part of himself, but in the meantime he struggles within himself because his social environment and his contemporaries do not accept him as he is.

<sup>334</sup> Albl, 'Whenever I Am Weak', 2007, 146; Savage, *Power through the Weakness*, 1996, 36.

commentators however, consider the text as focused on the issue of “failed healing” or “unsuccessful prayers”.<sup>335</sup> This is discussed further below.

Paul, as he expresses himself in the text, seems like a man who is depressed and confused about his situation. The tense of the verb “tormenting” indicates that his pain was either constant or recurring.<sup>336</sup> Someone in a depression can deal in many ways with the expression of his pain. Some may be led to doubt (Job’s case) and self-denial. In the African context, disease, accidents, death and disability only happen if one is cursed or has a problem with the ancestors. Problems are dealt with accordingly through trying to appease the angry spirit or the ancestor concerned. As one of the sub-groups of the Bible study said, *Paul’s thorn was caused by witchcraft*.

In this text, although the torment is on one level satanic, on another it is under the Lord’s control; Paul relates his failed prayers in which he has asked God to remove his pain (healing).<sup>337</sup>

Some commentators say that “healing is provided to believers in Christ’s crucifixion”. But Paul was not healed. Others say that God will answer any prayer “if we only believe hard enough”.<sup>338</sup> However, Paul in this text did not lack faith, but even so he was not healed. The text of Philippians 2, 25-27 reminds us that “Christians can suffer poor health and other difficulties without the cause being either sin or a lack of faith. God had a purpose in permitting Paul’s suffering”.<sup>339</sup> The same argument can be extended to 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10.

Others criticize such commentators arguing that “There are those who want us to believe that an afflicted Christian is a disgrace to God. ‘If you are obeying the Lord and claiming all that you have in Christ’ they say, ‘then you will never be sick’...”<sup>340</sup> This view is based on the disability perception in biblical times that considered disability as caused by sin.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> J. Dunn and W. Eerdeman, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* 2003),1367; The Bible Readers’ Companions, Libronix Digital Library System, 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10.

<sup>336</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Message of 2 Corinthians*. (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 177.

<sup>337</sup> J. Dunn and W. Eerdeman, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, 2003, 1368.

<sup>338</sup> The Bible Reader’s Companion, 2 Corinthians 12, Libronix Digital Library system (Logos Bible Software, <<http://www.logos.com>> [16/06/2008]

<sup>339</sup> The Bible Reader’s Companion, 2008.

<sup>340</sup> The Bible Exposition Commentary, 2 Corinthians 12, Libronix Digital Library System (Logos Bible Software, <http://www.logos.com> [16/06/2008]

<sup>341</sup> Bruce, ‘The Bible and Disability’, 2010, 5.

However, participants of Bible study did not see Paul's disability as the consequence of sin. The responses given during the Bible study to this question (see the section dealing with analysis and interpretation of Q.5), indicate that participants chose to approach the text through constructive reflection on the cause of disability, rather than from a judgmental position.<sup>342</sup>

### **God's understanding of disability**

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weaknesses” (v. 9), was an unexpected response to Paul's prayers (v. 8). The fact that Paul prayed three times, shows his insistence. He really wanted God to change his physical condition. It was clear, before God's revelation to him, that Paul felt alienated from the Corinthians and their specific disability perception. Albl says: “He [Paul] at the first stigmatized the disability as a demonic force, a ‘messenger of Satan’ and he sought to be free from it. But after his revelation from the Lord, Paul interprets the disability as a condition about which he will be content and even ‘boast’”.<sup>343</sup>

Verse 9 of 2 Corinthians 12, deals with the same problem as the verse 11 of Exodus 4. Both verses break with the stereotypical attitude of biblical times in relation to disability.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> I conducted an interview with church leaders and asked them: “How do you refer to a person with a disability in your mother tongue?” The responses given to this question revealed various concepts of disability in different African cultures and ethnicities within the DRC, such as “Buloji”, “Bondoki”, “Tshishoto”, “Botutu”. All these terms conceptualize disability as being associated with a wizard, a problem or a curse (see annexures). Such perspectives have been internalized in the minds of people with disabilities (in the DRC) in the sense that they are unable to see themselves as useful and as fully human in society.

<sup>343</sup> Albl, ‘Whenever I Am Weak’, 2007, 157.

<sup>344</sup> Disability scholars' research on the construction of “beauty” and “ugliness” finds that, in their biblical analysis of the word “defects”, the term “disability” can be applied. They argue that disability was not simply a meaningful conceptual category in the ancient world, but that its meaning, on deeper examination, turns out to depend on particular cultural and ideological significances according to the context. In Saul M. Olyan's reflection on what constitutes ‘defects’ in the biblical context, he argues that “we learn from texts such as Lev. 21, 18-19 that they include blindness, lameness, genital damage, broken or crushed limbs, limbs of uneven length... Thus, ‘defect’ is a technical term in biblical usage, referring to a specific set of negatively constructed physical characteristics inconsistent with biblical notions of beauty” (Saul M. Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 65; Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2006) 67). The researchers reveal that the biblical term “defect” has negative ramifications and the “social dynamics of defect” are explored. They reveal that some texts even convinced the biblical commentators (both then and now) that “Yhwh makes choices among humans. Texts such as these suggest that he has a preference for the beautiful” (Daniel 1, 3-4). Therefore, “‘defects’ are typically devalued in biblical discourse. Their negative construction is made manifest through the text's efforts to stigmatize and marginalize those who possess them” (Olyan, 2008, 46; Schipper, 2006, 67). Similar to the Greco-Roman era, people have more of a penchant for self-display and for personal appearance (beauty & eloquence). Thus, the

The Bible study participants' responses to the question, "How does God understand his disability?", clarifies their interpretation of the verse by putting it into their own context and indicates how they would like to hear God react to their physical condition, no matter whether it resulted from demonic force, sin or lack of faith.

This kind of insight into God's understanding of disability as reflected in the text leads the participants to increased confidence in two ways: God does have a good purpose for human suffering and when there is a weakness one should expect God's power to work in it and through it.

The way society perceives disability, and the understanding that PWDs have of their disability, finds, as mentioned above, expression in the text of 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10, where Paul responds to particular attacks by his opponents who describe his physical condition as "weak bodily presence".

In Corinth as elsewhere in the world "our lives have great emphasis on beauty, wealth and power. People with disabilities are often a symbol of the opposite - they struggle with physical or mental imperfection, powerlessness and often poverty".<sup>345</sup>

The verses 2 and 3 show Paul's reaction to his critical opponents who pointed out his unsatisfactory physical appearance, judging his speech and his whole person to be weak. As these attitudes were prevalent in the ancient Greco-Roman world, Paul expressed his appreciation of the Galatians whose attitude towards disabilities could have been the same but who, instead, reacted positively (Galatians 4, 13-14). Paul said: "you did not scorn or despise me". Paul's words are about social stigma and discrimination of the disabled. He stated: "You welcome me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself" (Gal. 4, 14). In other words, he encourages the Galatians to let their open attitude towards the disabled prevail.

All this indicates that stigma and discrimination are problems that were – and are - faced by people with disabilities and their families on a daily basis. Claydon says: "In certain regions

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Corinthians "are dismayed by his [Paul's] reticence to boast, by his unimpressive physical appearance, by his inferior speech and his refusal to take support" (Savage, *Power through weakness*, 1996, 54). Therefore, words such as "my grace is sufficient for you..." in 2 Corinthians 12, 9, and "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute...I will [be with your mouth] help you to speak..." in Exodus 4, 11-12, are a restructured social and cultural identification of the term 'disability'.

<sup>345</sup> Joni Eareckson Tada and David Claydon, *Hidden and Forgotten People - Ministry among People with Disabilities*. Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 35 B, 2004.

of the world, people with disabilities are frequently shunned or cast aside because of a society's belief in taboos and curses".<sup>346</sup>

Referring to question 7, *How does society understand disability? And how do people with disabilities understand their disability?*, most participants related how they were rejected and sometimes hidden by their families, because disability, in Africa but particularly in Congolese culture, is considered a curse or a sign of bad luck coming from the devil.<sup>347</sup>

The analysis and interpretation of the participants' testimonies reveal the way in which they understand disability through their own experience. This point was accentuated as follows. *Disability is a curse; disability is bad luck sent by the devil; a person with a disability is "bon a rien"; to educate a person with a disability is a waste of time and money.* Most PWDs referred specifically to the attitudes of their families.

V. 7 reveals the internal conflict that Paul faced with regard to his disability. He was overwhelmed by beliefs about, and by moral, religious and cultural notions of, disability in his surroundings. Indeed Paul's prayers (v. 8) begged God to remove his disability which came from a "messenger of Satan" and was a burden to him. Later however he embraces his condition as a vehicle for doing God's work.

The research shows that most people with disabilities consider their impairments as simply being part of the way they are. Disability scholars (Nancy, Charlton, Lindoewood, Molsberry, Chappell and Reinders) argue that people with disabilities do not have a problem with their condition itself; rather the idea of disability (as opposed to impairment) is based on social and functional criteria and is internalized in the mind and consciousness of PWDs.<sup>348</sup> These criteria have often led people with disabilities to think that they are inferior to non-disabled persons.

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<sup>346</sup> Tada & Claydon, *Hidden and Forgotten People*, 2004, 34

<sup>347</sup> Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, 1998, 13.

<sup>348</sup> Nancy, *The Disabled God*, 1994, 66; Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, 1998, 25; Linddoewood, 'Were Disabled People', 1989, 4; Molsberry, *Blindsided by Grace*, 2004, 112; Chappell, 'Medical and Social Model', 2006, 2; Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, 2008, 13.



## **5.7 Conclusion**

The text of 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10 was the second text chosen for a Bible study with people with disabilities and with apparently able-bodied people. From a disability perspective, I label this text as highlighting the theme of “power through weaknesses”. The Bible study based on the text raised some burning issues that people with disabilities sometimes have difficulty talking about. These issues include: “the body, suffering, weakness, social stigma and discrimination”. God understands disability as a motivating lesson for people with disabilities as well as for apparently able-bodied persons, pressing them to move forward to achieve great things, thus displaying “power through weakness”. The value of these insights for the development of a holistic educational program, lies in the realization that there is spirituality in brokenness and that there is suffering through which God demonstrates his power.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY ON ACTS 3, 1-11**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

In this chapter I will describe, analyse and interpret the Bible study conducted with Presbyterian Church leaders and lecturers on the book of Acts 3, 1-11.

The chapter is structured in six sections. The first section introduces the book of Acts in general and the selected text in particular. In the second part, I will outline aspects that formed the basis of CBS questions that are constructed. The second section concerns details of the participants in terms of numbers, gender and age. The third section is a description of the Contextual Bible Study of the text in which I comment on the way it processed. The fourth section presents an analysis and interpretation of the CBS. I will focus on convergences and divergences of the participants' responses within the framework of theories of Christian education and in view of a liberation theology of disability. The fifth section deals with my own re-reading of the text under the heading, "Autobiographical criticism", using a narrative approach in terms of existing literature viewed through psycho-spiritual lenses applying in liberation theology of disability. My findings in this respect, will then serve as a bridge in a dialogue between participants' responses and scholars' comments on various subjects related to the text which will be presented in the sixth section. The address and challenges to PWDs and church leaders will conclude this chapter.

#### **6.1 Introduction of the text of Acts 3, 1-11**

The text of Acts 3, 1-10 is the first miraculous story recorded by Luke in the book of Acts. It is connected with the preceding text, Acts 2, 43, which states, "Many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles". The heart of this story is that these wonders and miracles were done "in the name of Jesus-Christ of Nazareth" (v. 6): hence, the Lord saves human beings through Jesus, via "salvation". Salvation is thus the principal theme of Acts, its narrative being centrally concerned with the realization of God's purpose to bring

salvation in all of its fullness to all people.<sup>349</sup> God so loved the world that he sent his only beloved son into the world so that, “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3, 16). This links to the “programme speech” of Jesus, “the Kingdom of God come to the earth, so that those who are poor, marginalized, prisoners and oppressed must be free and recover the light of joy (Luke 4, 18-19)”. Jesus encountered people with disabilities through his healing and miracles, because he preferred to spend time with the ‘least’ rather than with people of wealth, influence, power or even those in the religious hierarchy” (John 9, Mark 2, 17).<sup>350</sup>

Therefore, the book of Acts is a continuation of Jesus’ action through and by the power of the Holy Spirit. The connection between Acts 2, 43, and Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2, 28-32) demonstrated “the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Jesus’ disciples and announces the Good News with healing and miracles”.<sup>351</sup> In other words, the healing and miracles in the Gospels and in the book of Acts show how the excluded have been integrated into society by Jesus’ ministry, emulated by the apostles.<sup>352</sup>

The re-reading of this text with its picture of healing will lead to an understanding of inclusive healing, in the sense that the marginalized are included in this healing, but also in the sense that the healing is “holistic healing”, rather than focusing on either physical or spiritual healing only.

The next part I will explain how I constructed the CBS questions and the relevance of my theoretical framework of this study, which are liberation theology of disability, the psycho-spiritual aspect of personality and Christian education, in each question of this current passage.

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<sup>349</sup> Ralph P. Martin & Peter H. Davids, *Salvation in Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*. (England: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 19; William R. Farmer, *Acts 3, 1-11: The Cure of the Lame man* in *The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for Twenty-First Century* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 1514.

<sup>350</sup> Joni Eareckson <<http://www.lausaneworldpulse.com/811-207?pig=all>> [J] 22/05/2011.

<sup>351</sup> R. E. Brown et al, *Acts 3, 1-11, The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1948) ; 735.

<sup>352</sup> Matt Desmonds states that the “divine healings” are commonplace in the Old and New Testaments and the Gospels record over forty healing miracles in the ministry of Jesus (Matt Desmonds, *A Theological Diagnosis: A New Direction on Genetic Therapy, ‘Disability’ and the Ethics of Healing*. (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011), 141).

### 6.1.1 Construction of Contextual Bible Study

It should be remembered that the CBS questions were the result of a workshop held with Patricia Bruce, Gerald West and I held in November 2008. Our individual experiences and expertise related to disability informed this workshop.<sup>353</sup>

The time-frame for the Bible study was one hour. This Bible study was held two weeks after the previous two Bible studies.

The questions on the text were as follows:

1. Re-tell the story to each other beginning with “once upon a time”.
2. What is this text about?
3. Who are the principal characters and what are their relationships?
4. Why does the disabled man sit outside the temple?
5. Do people notice the disabled man? If yes, how do they see him?
6. What are the different ways in which the disabled man is healed?
7. What are the normal ways in which we respond to people with disabilities and how does this text challenge us to respond differently?
8. What is your action plan after reading this text?

I will next explain how each CBS question is constructed with reference to my theories and methods.

The first question, “*Re-tell the story to each other beginning with “once upon a time”*”, gives the participants the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the text by retelling it in their own words. This question leads participants into the process, and helps the facilitator to understand different versions of the story.

The second question, “*What is this text about?*” assists the participants to connect the text with their context, which CBS calls, “community consciousness”. This question is an open question which allows participants to express what they do think about the text. However, the

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<sup>353</sup> See detailed information in chapter 1, section on Methodology.

intention behind this is to see whether participants can discover other themes related to diverse healing than what it is clearly expressed in the text.

The third question, “*Who are the principal characters and what are their relationships?*” leads the participants to the text which in CBS is called, “critical consciousness”, meaning it offers resources from biblical scholarship, by drawing on literary analysis. This question is supported by a liberation theology of disability, which deals with recognition of identity and relationship with God and people, and is intended to help participants to understand the character like the “crippled man”, why he does not have a name and his relationship to God and to people.

The fourth question, “*Why does the disabled man sit outside the temple?*” again invites the participants to focus on the text. The themes which come out of the text such as “temple”, and “Beautiful Gate” in v.3 might require a socio-historical and cultural viewpoint for a richer understanding of the text. The theories of a liberation theology of disability which deals with inclusion, and also Christian education, which focuses on liberation and empowerment, motivated the question in order to make participants (who were church leaders) aware of the situation of people with disabilities in the church.

The fifth question, “*Do people notice the disabled man? If yes, how do they see him?*” invites participants into the text. The theory of Christian education was applied to construct this question, which involves an awareness and empowerment of church leaders of the situation of PWDs in church and society.

The sixth question, “*What are the different ways in which the disabled man is healed?*” retains attention on the text, especially on v. 4-10. It shows the basis of this Bible study in the sense that through this question, participants would discover that there is more than one way of healing in this passage. The theory of Christian education as a basis in this Bible study, led participants to understand the disability issue and could form part of the training programme for church leaders; it could also empower PWDs who have received prayer for healing without a “successful response”<sup>354</sup>.

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<sup>354</sup> I mention “successful response” in showing that most people think that healing should be spectacular and physical. The concept of healing has affected many PWDs who have been prayed for without success of their healing miracle; and some of them even think that healing texts in the Bible are legendary.

The seventh question, “*What are the normal ways in which we respond to people with disabilities? And how does this text challenge us to respond differently?*” returns the participants to the first question by focusing on their context. This is called, “community consciousness” in CBS, and it invites participants to link the text to their context. This is a challenging question for PWDs. Here again, the theory of Christian education motivated the question for conscientization and empowerment of church leaders.

The eighth question, “*What is your action plan after reading this text?*” is the last question in this Bible study. It brings the participants back to their context. The intention behind this question is to challenge church leaders to make concrete action plans for the programme of disability.

## **6.2 Participants**

I conducted the Bible study on Acts 3, 1-11 with Presbyterian Church leaders and with religion lecturers. The intention was to include more people with disabilities in this Bible study session, along with church leaders and lecturers, as they had already been introduced to CBS, but only two people with disabilities were able to attend. The group had 73 participants, 33 of whom were male pastors and 40 were women (7 pastors, 31 pastors’ wives and 2 persons with disabilities) aged 34 to 73 years old.

The venue was at one of the Presbyterian parishes, “CPK Lemba”.

## **6.3 A description of Contextual Bible Study on Acts 3, 1-11**

### **Step 1**

Before starting the Bible study with Presbyterian Church leaders and religion lecturers, I thanked them for accepting the invitation to attend the session. Thereafter I invited the Church President to open with a prayer.

I took a few minutes to explain the process of Contextual Bible Study, which I defined as a method of reading the Bible with input from poor and marginalized people. In this particular

context, the CBS session involved a re-reading of biblical texts from a disability perspective. I showed how the process of CBS is not very different from other Bible studies, such as those of “Scripture Union” (I mentioned this because most ministers were engaged in Scripture Union DRC). Be that as it may, CBS questions are carefully constructed with a logical progression from the beginning to the end of the Bible study and I encouraged participants to engage in discussion as make the CBS into a dynamic process.

The first two questions were discussed in the plenary.

**Question 1: *Re-tell the story to each other beginning with “once upon a time”.***

The participants found the question both familiar and interesting, because they had used this phrase in other contexts, but not in the context of a Bible text.

The participants were asked to re-tell the Bible story to the person sitting next to them. Out of 73 participants, five persons volunteered to share what they had understood from the story, beginning with “once upon time”. Here are their versions:

Kande Tshamala (Presbyterian minister and moderator):

*“Once upon a time, there was a man, unable to walk. He was put at the gate (the sacred place) to beg for money. One day Peter and John passed by and saw the man. Then they prayed for him and the man was completely healed. He entered into the temple with celebration and thanks to God”.*

Benda Ditu (Lecturer and academic at the Presbyterian School of Theology):

*“The story talks about a disabled man who was instructed to stay at the gate (called Beautiful) to beg for money. One day Peter and John decided to stop by where the man was sitting and they responded to this man, ‘We do not have silver and gold, but in the name of Jesus, stand up and walk’. Suddenly, the man was healed and started to jump around and praise his God. The people who were inside the temple did not recognize him at first, but after they realized who he was, they praised the Lord together with this man for what God had done for him”.*

Eulalie Kitenga (Presbyterian woman pastor, lecturer and chaplain of the Presbyterian School of Theology):

*“Once upon a time, there was a lame man, who was a beggar. He was taught to stay at the gate for his survival. The man was expecting something, like money from Peter and John, but on that occasion Peter and John had decided to stop and talked to the man and prayed for him. Suddenly, the man was miraculously healed and he stood up and jumped, praising God”.*

Astride Ntumba Mayamba (Presbyterian woman pastor and the Presbyterian’s primary school principal):

*“Once upon a time, there was a disabled beggar, who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate, as all knew that entry into the temple was conditional on being pure, thus this man, as a disabled person was considered a sinner. One day when Peter and John prayed for him he was healed and had access to enter into the temple”.*

Serge Lumu (Presbyterian minister and youth’s coordinator):

*“The story is about a disabled man who was a beggar; he was being carried to the gate to beg for money. Peter and John saw him and approached him and spoke to the man, saying ‘We do not have silver and gold, but in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk’. The man was healed spontaneously and entered into the temple praising the Lord. The people who were there recognized him and praised the Lord with him”.*

### **Question 2: What is this text about?**

Participants gave the following responses

*“-Healing; - A crippled beggar; – Expectation; - The surprise; - The work of Peter and John; – The unnamed person; - Social integration; – Inclusion; - A new person; - Holistic healing; - The exterior-interior; - Physical healing; - Spiritual healing; – Compassion; - Sharing resources; – and –Exploitation”.*

In responding to this question the participants were very active and excited and they began to treat this Bible study as a competition, arguing with one another. I repeated to them that there was no wrong answer to the questions.

### **Step 2**

I asked the participants to divide into six sub-groups. As they were 73 in number, each sub-group comprised 12 persons and the last sub-group of 13 persons. The two people with disabilities were inserted into two of the sub-groups. I labelled the sub-groups according to



the persons who led the discussion, but in this report I have changed the sub-groups' names. As the participants were from the group of church leaders (of the Presbyterian Church), the group as a whole is labelled CL, while the sub-groups are indicated with CL plus a number (1 to 6).

Questions 3 to 6 were given to the sub-groups for discussion:

**Question 3: *Who are the principal characters and what are their relationships?***

Sub-group CL1 reported back on question 3 in this way:

*“The crippled beggar, an un-named person, who has been crippled from birth and who is carried to the temple every day to beg; and Peter and John, who are entering the temple at the time of prayer”.*

Sub-group CL2 answered as follows:

*“The crippled beggar, a person, who was sitting at the temple, begging for money; and Peter and John, Jesus’ apostles who were entering the temple at the time of prayers; and those who carried the crippled beggar (they could have been family or friends)”*

Sub-group CL3 responded:

*“The crippled beggar, an un-named person, who has been crippled from birth and whose parents carried him to the temple to beg; and Peter and John, Jesus’ apostles; and the temple members”.*

Sub-group CL4 responded as follows:

*“Crippled beggar: Un-named person, who was sitting by the temple, begging for money; and Peter and John, Jesus’ apostles, who were entering the temple and who healed this beggar”.*

Sub-group CL5 reported in this way:

*“The crippled beggar, an un-named person who was sitting at the temple to beg for money; Peter and John, Jesus’ apostles; and those who carried the crippled beggar (who are also un-named)”.*

Sub-group CL5 argued that the reason why the “crippled beggar” and those who carried him are un-named is that the purpose of the author of this book is to show the acts of the apostles, hence its title “Acts of the Apostles”.

Sub-group CL6 responded as follows:

*“The crippled beggar, an un-named person who was sitting at the temple to beg; and Peter and John, Jesus’ apostles”.*

#### **Question 4: Why does the disabled man sit outside the temple?**

The replies to question 4 of sub-group CL1 were expressed as follows:

*“He sits outside to beg because if he does not sit outside begging, then “who will care for him?”*

Here sub-group CL1 employed a local expression in Lingala, “soki nalombi te nani akosunga ngai?” (If I do not beg, who will care about me?). This is a phrase commonly used by “street children” and the poor, in response to attempts by others to stop them from begging on the street.

Sub-group CL2 replied that:

*“He sits outside because he is a disabled person (according to the Jews’ perception, this crippled man was impure and his place was with the gentiles); and he wants to beg as he is disabled”.*

This sub-group spent time discussing what lay “behind the text”, namely the Jews’ perception of disability. They wanted to know how a person with disability was perceived by the ancient Jews.

Sub-group CL3 reported that:

*“He sits outside, because he is being used by those who carried him for their own gain”.*

The participants of this sub-group linked this question to the current reality in Kinshasa where people with disabilities are made to beg in shops and markets by other able-bodied people. These able-bodied people threaten the disabled if they do not give them, “commission”. Other participants argued that certain international/ and local organizations who deal with disability are profiting as well.

Sub-group CL4 stated that:

*“He sits outside to beg; and he sits outside because at that time a disabled person was considered impure”.*

Sub-group CL5’s answers were expressed as follows:

*“He sits outside because he wants to beg for money; and he is neither informed nor educated about the importance of being in the temple”.*

Sub-group CL6 reported:

*“He sits outside because he is ignorant of who he is; and those (family, friends) who carried him do not know who he is”.*

**Question 5: Do people notice the disabled man? If yes, how do they see him?**

Sub-group CL1 expressed their responses as follows:

*“Yes, they see him as a “muntu tshanana” (a useless person); and they see him as a poor person”.*

This sub-group used a common Ciluba expression, “muntu tshanana” (a useless person), because 70% of participants present came from the central region of DRC, Kasai, where the Ciluba language is spoken, and where this expression is well understood and is used to denigrate someone.

Sub-group CL2 answer was expressed as follows:

*“Yes, they see him as beggar, and they view him with pity, thus some people give him money. But Peter and John show compassion to the beggar and that is why they approached him”.*

Here in this sub-group, participants discussed the words “pity” and “compassion”. They stated that temple members, who gave the beggar money, do not care for the money but and donated it simply as a “religious act”. However, the act of Peter and John was a sign of “compassion”.

Sub-group CL3’s answer was expressed as follows:

*“Yes, they (Peter and John) saw him with compassion and approached him and prayed for him: Peter and John were different from the others. Other people saw the man but they did*

*not care about him. Yet, Peter and John approached the man, spoke to him and prayed for healing so that he would not have to stay at the door begging”.*

In this sub-group, one of the participants with a disability shared her experience in church where sometimes people do not greet or approach her. She concluded that this might be because of her physical condition.

Sub-group CL4 reported their responses in this way:

*“Peter and John see him as a poor person who needs something more than money. They see him through God’s spirit and heal him”.*

This sub-group explained their last response by saying that God’s will is to see a disabled man physically healed. Therefore, the disciples were inspired by God to heal this man.

Sub-group CL5 responded that:

*“No, they do not see him because, as a person with a disability, he was not attractive and some people think that it is normal for such people to beg”.*

Sub-group CL6 stated:

*“They see him as a beggar and as a useless person”.*

**Question 6: *What are the different ways in which the disabled man is healed?***

Sub-group CL1 responded to question 6 that:

*“It is a physical healing due to the fact he was only able to sit since he was born and suddenly he could stand and walk”.*

Sub-group CL2 reported that,

*“It is physical and spiritual healing because he stands up and enters the temple to praise God”*

Sub-group CL3 responded that,

*“It is an emotional healing because he has never seen people approach and talk to him”.*

Sub-group CL4 expressed their responses in this way:

*“It is mental and spiritual healing: the ‘mental’ aspect being that this man learned not to beg anymore; and the ‘spiritual’ aspect being the fact that this man entered the temple praising God”.*

Sub-group CL5 answered as follows:

*“It is a physical healing. His body was weak, thus they were carrying him every day and when Peter prayed for him then he felt strength in his feet and was healed”.*

Sub-group CL6 reported their responses as follows:

*“It is a holistic healing. It is ‘physical’ in that he is healed and stands up; ‘social’ as he joins the people in the temple; and ‘spiritual’ because he enters the temple to praise God”.*

### **Step 3**

After discussion in the plenary I sent the participants back into their sub-groups to discuss the final two questions.

**Question 7: *What are the normal ways in which we respond to people with disabilities and how does this text challenge us to respond differently?***

The responses to question 7 of sub-group CL1 were expressed as follows:

*“As a church, we should love people with disabilities and we should train them for their empowerment”.*

The replies of sub-group CL2 were reported in this way:

*“As a church, we should listen to them and give them a job according to their abilities”.*

Sub-group CL3 reported that:

*“As a church, we should approach them and take care of their families; and, as a church, we need to help them identify their own problems and needs within the church. For example a person with a disability comes into the church not only for physical healing but for spiritual healing also”.*

This sub-group raised its input in the plenary. The participants argued that the church should not assume to know what people with disabilities need, but rather to help them to recognize their own problems and needs within the church. For example, they said that when a person with a disability comes to church, the pastor may assume that that person is in need of physical healing whereas they may in fact desire to receive emotional healing.

Sub-group CL4 reported that,

*“As a Church, we should love them, pray for their healing; and consider them as full members of the Church”.*

This sub-group, emphasized physical healing by saying that, it is very important for the church to experience God’s power through miracles.

Sub-group CL5 reported that:

*“As a Church we should have a dialogue with people with disabilities, to help develop an understanding of their real needs and concerns, so that they may be integrated into society”.*

This sub-group agreed with sub-group CL4 and, adding that the need for dialogue is very important, because people with disabilities are not all the same and many church members are confused about their needs. They supported their statement with an example given by one of the members of the sub-group has people with different types of disabilities in his parish.<sup>355</sup>

The responses of sub-group CL6 were expressed as follows:

*“As a school, we should not distinguish between children with disabilities and non-disabled children; and the school’s chaplains should take time to have a dialogue with children with disabilities and encourage them to be effective in the school”.*

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<sup>355</sup> The participant’s experience was that in his church there are three persons with disabilities (an elderly blind man, a young girl with a mental disability and himself, who uses a wheelchair). He said that able-bodied people do not like to mix with the disabled, or to be involved with them via church groupings. Thus, while the “Departement de diaconie” (Diakonia department), is dealing with the problem of poor people, PWDs would like to have the same advantages (clothes, meals and money) as those who benefit from this department.

This sub-group was composed of pastors who are also religion lecturers. In their discussion they recognized that although they have pupils with disabilities in their schools, they have never made time to talk to them.

**Question 8: *What is your action plan after reading this text?***<sup>356</sup>

Sub-group CL1 reported:

*“To introduce this kind of Bible study as one of the church’s activities; and to address the need for training in different fields (computer, reading and writing and sewing)”.*

Sub-group CL2 gave as its view that:

*“As a church we need to introduce a Bible study with the text focusing on disability; and the church needs to help families to take care of their members with disabilities”.*

Sub-group CL3 replied:

*“To introduce a programme on disability issues into one of the groups in church; to provide spiritual care for people with disabilities; to supply them with helpful devices (wheelchairs, crutches, walking frames, orthotics, callipers and special shoes); and to introduce communication devices (provide a projector during the sermon, a sign language interpreter and a specialized computer)”.*

Sub-group CL4 reported:

*“We need to educate people with disabilities to understand their worth so that they may be considered and respected more highly than the manner in which they view themselves; and to introduce Bible study for the purpose of empowering people with disabilities in church”.*

Sub-group CL5 responded that

*“As a church, we need to provide for out- reach to people with disabilities so that they may join us in church”.*

Sub-group CL6 reported:

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<sup>356</sup> I took the opportunity to add this question as I noticed that participants were extremely interested in the Bible study. As some of them were board members of the Presbyterian Church in Kinshasa, I realized that they could effect changes for the greater inclusion of people with disabilities in the church. By adding the question, it makes overt what was implicit in the previous question.

*“To introduce a disability programme in church and make churches accessible so that people with disabilities feel comfortable; and to help families take care of their disabled members”.*

The interesting point in the responses to this question is that church leaders and lecturers came up with concrete propositions for the effective integration of people with disabilities in the church.

## **6.4 Analysis and Interpretation**

The analysis and the interpretation of the responses focuses on where the points of views reflected in the participants’ responses differ and where they coincide within theoretical framework of this study (Christian education and personality theories) which framed to a liberation theory of disability.

It should be reiterated here that this Bible study session included two people with disabilities as participants. They were placed in different sub-groups (CL1 and CL3).

The first two questions on the text of Acts 3, 1-11, *Re-tell the story to each other beginning with ‘once upon time’* and *“What is the text about?”* engaged the participants in the process of the Bible study. The first question allowed the participants to better understand the biblical text. Five persons volunteered to tell the story according to their understanding. Their summaries revealed the richness and diversity of the different versions of this text, but also showed their shared understanding.

These are some of the interesting points found in their stories:

Firstly, they said that the text describes the man. Some Bible versions title this text, “The lame beggar healed”. This implies that a person with a physical challenge is named by his status and by his physical condition. However, in this study some of the storytellers in their summaries tried to describe the man in a more dignified way such as, there was *a man who was unable to walk...* Others said that *The story talks about a disabled man....* Or *...there*



*was a lame man...* The focus here is on bringing the person to the fore, rather than to merely state his physical and social condition.<sup>357</sup>

Secondly, storytellers mentioned in their summaries how the man was a beggar who was treated without consideration. They expressed this in the following way: “...*he was put at the gate*”; “...*who was instructed to stay at the gate*”; “...*he was taught to stay at the gate*”; “...*he used to sit at the Beautiful gate*”; and “...*he was being carried every time to the gate...*” These details reveal that the participants understood the text from a disability perspective and they were familiar with the text of Acts 3, 1-11.

Lastly, some storytellers, like Ditu and Kitenga, stated with regard to John and Peter: “*One day Peter and John decided to stop by*” and “...*but [that time] Peter and John had decided to stop and talk to the man...*” This indicates that John and Peter were used to seeing the man at the gate but on this particular occasion they decided to stop by where the man was sitting and to talk to him”.

The second question, “*What is the text about?*” required quick responses and these reflected the participants’ resources.

-“*Healing*” (the type of healing was not specified);

-“*A crippled beggar*” (the object of the story);

- “*Expectation*” (the disabled man was expecting something other than physical healing from Peter and John);

-“*The surprise*” (the disabled man was surprised to receive something that he did not expect);

-“*The work of Peter and John*” (they said that as Jesus’ apostles, they had received a mission to announce the Good News);

- “*The unnamed person*” (there is no mention of his name, only of his physical status)’;

-“*Social integration*” (healing helped him to become integrated into society);

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<sup>357</sup> The Presbyterian Church leaders, who were the participants in this Bible study, were aware of my activism in promoting the issue of disability as a social transformation objective, an awareness which was reflected in their careful use of language.

-“*Inclusion*” (the disabled man was left outside, but after the healing prayer he was able to enter the temple);

-“*A new person*” (the people inside the temple did not recognize the man at first, because he had become a ‘new’ person);

-“*Holistic healing*” (the man was healed physically, socially and spiritually);

-“*From the outside to the inside*” (in French, ‘*de l’exterieure a l’interieure*’ a metaphoric use of language which illustrate that outer physical healing led him to connect internally with God);

-“*Physical healing*” (the man was healed physically);

-“*Spiritual healing*” (physical healing helped the man to connect with God);

-“*Compassion*” (they mentioned that Peter and John had-given the lame man support and hence transformed his situation);

-“*Sharing resources*” (Peter and John shared resources, namely – Jesus- with the man);

-“*Exploitation*” (the people who carried the man to the temple gate to beg for money might have done this to serve their own interests).

The participants’ responses to this question, together with their explanations revealed that participants had extended their views to embrace a liberation reading that takes the concerns of disability into account. This means, that although the question was opened to the participants to say whatever they wanted to say, the participants connected this text to their context.

From questions 3 to 6, participants were asked to focus on the text and some questions prompted participants to read “behind the text”.

Most responses to the third question, “***Who are the principal characters and what are their relationships?***” stated that the main characters were Peter and John, the “crippled beggar” and those who carried him (these could have been parents or friends) and the members of the temple. The sub-group CL5 noted that the last two categories (the crippled beggar and those who carried him) are unnamed as the author of this text focused on the work of Peter and

John. They argued that for this reason, the text is called Acts of the Apostles, placing the focus of this book on these apostles.

The fourth question, “*Why does the disabled man sit outside the temple?*” resulted in a number of issues relating to the lives of PWDs being raised by participants:

Sub-group CL1, said:

*“He sits outside to beg [because] if he does not sit outside ‘who will care for him?’”*

This answer shows the stereotypical opinions and the social stigma attached to people with disabilities. The assumption is that PWD’s have no other way to survive than through begging.

The second issue that sub-groups CL2 and CL4 raised was the socio- historical construction of the entity “temple” in the first century and the Jewish perception of disability. In attempting to respond to question 4, some argued that, in the first century, people with disabilities were grouped with the impure gentiles who had to remain outside the temple. Others highlighted that this man was viewed as a sinner and as impure, and for that reason he could not enter the temple.

The dimension of “temple”, seen in a socio-historical perspective was not explored more deeply by those sub-groups who had raised the issue. An application of resources dealing with how the temple was structured and of the man’s place, could have contributed to a better understanding of the question.

Interestingly, participants did not limit their reflections to the past, but brought them to bear upon the present as well. They compared the realities of the past and the present. As an example, sub-group CL3 stated in relation to the man that:

*“He sits outside because he is being used by those who carried him”.*

In other words, participants linked the lame man’s situation to their perception that today there are some NGOs and international organizations, and some individuals/family members, who profit from people with disabilities and take advantage of their vulnerability.

The third issue that sub-group CL5 raised, centred on the man sitting and begging outside the temple:

- *“He is neither informed nor educated about the importance of being in the temple”.*

This shows the lack of education of being in the temple, but also lack of respect for the Jewish religious traditions. Freire states, “the content of education is conscientisation”.<sup>358</sup> In the context of this study, education implies making people with disabilities conscious of their condition. And conscientisation is the way forward to liberation and empowerment. Once a person knows who he is and what his weakness is, he can move on and stand up for himself. There is a need for liberating education for those who are marginalized. Hence Brueggemann in his article, “The Bible as an educational Resource”, poses a crucial question, “How can the Bible be served in education?”<sup>359</sup> This is the way that church leaders discover that those who are marginalized stated that people with disabilities need to be empowered for their relationship to God.

The fourth issue brought up by sub-group CL6 was,

*“He sits outside because he is ignorant himself of who he is; and those (family, friends) who carried him are also ignorant in this regard”.*

Here a lack of disability awareness indicates a lack of recognition of the individual character of the man himself (rather than just seeing him as a crippled beggar). This lack of recognition exists on both sides: among people with disabilities, as well as among apparently able-bodied people.

In this question sub-groups which included people with disabilities responded according to the realities of PWDs (CL1 & CL3). Whereas other sub-groups which did not have PWDs were limited in their interpretation which only focused on the context of the text itself. This confirms what I stated above as regards CBS being a space for sharing resources between socially engaged and ordinary readers.<sup>360</sup>

Question 5 asked, **“Do people notice the disabled man? If yes, how do they see him?”** This was responded to by sub-groups CL2, CL5 and CL6 together with sub-group CL1 as follows:

*Yes, they see him as a “muntu tshanana (a useless person)” and “they see him as a poor person”*

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<sup>358</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Oppressed*, 2000, 45; Kumalo, ‘Theology and Education’, 2005, 37.

<sup>359</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of Oppressed*, 2000, 45; Kumalo, ‘Theology and Education’, 2005, 37.

<sup>360</sup> West, *The Academy of the Poor*, 2003, 8.

The expression “muntu tshanana” was very well understood by most participants from their Congolese context. For the respondents, this text highlighted that a person with a disability is seen as useless person, a person who is not attractive and who is doomed to beg.

Sub-group CL2 and CL3 pointed out that Peter’s and John’s perspective was different from that of others. They argued that while the man was viewed as a beggar and people gave him money out of pity or out of religious duty, Peter and John showed compassion to the beggar and interacted with him

The responses of CL2 and CL3 reflect two common attitudes that apparently able-bodied people display towards people with disabilities: pity and compassion. Pity is a feeling of sadness caused by the suffering of a person, but it is a self-centered emotion. Compassion however, is a strong feeling of sympathy for people who are suffering and involves a desire to help them. In other words, in this story, John and Peter went beyond that which other people did, because they did not see this man as a poor cripple, but as God’s creature. Hence, they approached him and had time to talk to him.

Sub-group CL4 added that,

*“Peter and John see him as a poor person who needs something more than money; they see him with God’s Spirit and heal him”.*

The participants of this sub-group emphasized the last part of the statement pertaining to God’s Spirit. However, they linked this to God’s will that every person who is sick or disabled must find physical healing, due to a traditional non-liberationist interpretation common in today’s church environment. And indeed, in their discussion, they presented the supposition that ‘*God’s will*’ meant miracle-healing, and that this healing must necessarily be “spectacular”.

Question 6, ***What are the different ways in which the disabled man is healed?*** was intended to discover whether the church leaders would be able to identify ways of healing other than those which are clearly mentioned (physical healing). The responses show that most sub-groups were aware that there are more ways than one of healing. They said the disabled man was healed physically and spiritually; with sub-group CL6 reporting that the text is about “a holistic healing”.

By holistic healing they meant, firstly, physical healing. The man was crippled since birth, unable to walk and now, suddenly, he was healed and could stand up. Secondly, social healing is included in holistic healing. The man could now join now the others in the temple after having been excluded for many years. Thirdly, they referred to spiritual healing, as the first thing this man did was to enter the temple to give thanks to God. He had received a ‘new’ lease on life in the fullest sense of the word. This response reflects the results of re-reading the text in a CBS setting.

Some sub-groups however focused exclusively on physical healing and did not mention holistic healing. They seemed to adhere strictly to the superficial meaning of the story’s text.<sup>361</sup>This was interested in sense that some participants (church leaders) raised this question and believed that physical healing is an important for the church. This will lead the discussion about healing in the next section.

The second part of Bible study from question 3 to 6, as discussed above, involved participants on both sides (church leaders and people with disabilities) using their resources to examine the text – for church leaders, their critical tools, and for PWD - with their experiences. This involved all participants to understand the text from disability perspective. As Brueggeman states, “one of the importance of the Bible study into education is to empower Israel to care for those without social value and power. It can give people ‘hope’”.<sup>362</sup>

The last two questions turned the participants back to their own realities and was aimed at helping them to become engaged and geared for action.

The responses given to question 7, **What are the normal ways in which we respond to people with disabilities and how does this text challenge us to respond differently?** revealed the conversion of church leaders in the sense of changing their attitudes and manners towards people with disabilities; and also encouraging people with disabilities to take account of their own needs and concerns.

The question was intended to elicit a list of the ways in which people commonly behave towards PWDs, but the answers focused rather on what these “normal” ways should be (in

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<sup>361</sup> The core of this text (Acts 3, 1-11) is in v. 6, “in the name of Jesus-Christ the Nazarene”, highlighting that the Lord saves. The healing and miracles were a sign that a new age has begun in which God saves human beings through Jesus. Farmer, *The International Bible Commentary*, 1998, 1514.

<sup>362</sup> Brueggemann, ‘Passion and Perspective’, 1985, 34.

their view) as opposed to what they are. They thus highlighted the following: showing PWDs love, approaching them, talking with them (dialogue), and helping them with self-identification of their own problems, rather than to just assume what these problems are.

These are their responses:

*“As a church, we should love people with disabilities and we should train them for their empowerment”;*

*“As a church, we should love them, pray for their healing (if this is needed, and consider them as full members of the church”;*

*“As a church, we should approach them and take care of their families, and we need to help them to identify their own problems and needs within the church”.*

The participants, in their “positive approach used the terms “*as a church we should*”. This would imply that the help would flow in one direction; there is no exchange in this process of conversion. The idea remains that people with disabilities are incapable of deciding or acting for themselves. The conversion process nevertheless seems to be positive in the sense that it can be applied to education via the Bible. It also recognizes that “Bible study is not simply something someone does to the Bible. It is also something that has an impact on the interpreters. Serious scripture study calls one to repentance and invites one to a changed perceptual world”.<sup>363</sup> However, considering the exclusivity implied in the participants’ language, this process of change remains one-sided.

In relation to the theoretical framework of this study, namely Christian education, advocacy for the use of education as an act of conscientization and empowerment means that people with disabilities can become free and able to be conscious of who they are and what possibilities they have by encountering others.<sup>364</sup>

Question 8 “***What are your action plans after reading this text?***” was added to push the participants (considering the presence of a number of church and educational staff) to come up with concrete and practical contributions for the uplifting and holistic healing of people with disabilities. This question elicited a number of action plans from participants for

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<sup>363</sup> Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense*, 2001, 85.

<sup>364</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart*, 2006, 30; Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 2000, 66.

transformation with regard to PWDs in their parishes. The action plans were expressed in the different sub-groups as follows:

Firstly, one plan of action was to introduce Contextual Bible Study into the church's programmes. This was supported by the following sub-groups:

Sub-group CL1 reported that - *the Church needs to introduce CBS as one of the Church's activities*;

Sub-group CL2 added that - *Bible studies should be introduced with a focus on disability*; while sub-group CL3 argued that *Bible study should be introduced with the purpose of empowering people with disabilities*

This refers to that which I stated above regarding Contextual Bible Study being an instrument for enabling local Christians to "articulate" and "own" their understanding of God and enable them to change their world.<sup>365</sup>

Secondly sub-group CL1 argued for the training of people with disabilities in different fields, like computers, reading/writing and sewing.

Thirdly, disability empowerment through education was advocated. Sub-group CL2 reported that the church should help families to take care of their members with disabilities; while sub-group CL3 argued that the Church needs to educate people with disabilities to assist them to perceive their own value to a greater degree than is currently the case with many of them, which can help provide emotional healing.

Fourthly, the need for spiritual care was stressed. Sub-group CL4 reported that the church needs to create an environment of spiritual care, praying for the healing (both physical and spiritual) of people with disabilities.

Fifthly, assistive devices should be provided. In this regard, Sub-group CL4 reported that the church should supply assistive devices to disabled parishioners (wheelchairs, crutches, walking frames, orthotics, calipers and special shoes).

Sixthly, in order to enable the inclusion of PWDs in church life, communication devices and accessibility need to be acquired. Sub-group CL4 and CL6 reported that the church should

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<sup>365</sup>West, 'Articulating, Owning and Mainstream', 2005, 23; West, 'Doing Contextual Bible Study', 2007, 10.



promote accessibility for PWDs in the church and/parish, for example by using a projector during the sermon, as well as making available a sign language interpreter and specialized computer. In addition, churches should build ramps or widen doorways to welcome people with disabilities into their building.

Seventhly and finally, out-reach programs to people with disabilities need to be engaged in. Sub-group CL5 argued that the Church should go further afield to actively seek out people with disabilities who are unable or unwilling (due to negative experiences) to attend church, so that they may be welcomed and encouraged to be full and engaged members of congregations.

## 6.5 Autobiographical Criticism

This section focuses on my personal re-reading in view of my own disability experience and on my experience with participants of Bible study, whereby I use narrative interpretation of existing literature, and I interpret from a psycho-spiritual perspective framed by a liberation theology of disability. The material in the next section will serve to support the dialogue between Bible study participants' responses to and scholarly points of views on the text. I interpret the verses according to the way they are interlinked.

The text of Acts 3, 1-10 gives body to the first two chapters, which portray the origin and growth of the community. It also provides details of the overview of the miracles and signs of the Apostles (Acts 2, 43).<sup>366</sup>

The text is a healing story of a traditional type and shows that "healing and miracles" are an essential part of the Gospel message.<sup>367</sup> However, the aim of this section is to explore aspects of healing other than those that become apparent in an initial reading of the text. I will broaden the concept of healing for the sake of social transformation of PWDs.

The first two verses (v.1-2) introduce the characters of the story. These are John and Peter, known as Jesus' apostles (Peter: is the famous apostle who took the lead in addressing the crowd on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2, 14-28). The story begins with information about John

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<sup>366</sup> Richard I. Prego, Acts 3, 1-10 in *Acts: A Commentary*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 97-98

<sup>367</sup> Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 2009, 98; Theo Schmidt, *Yes, You are healed*, 2007, IX; William H. Willimon, *Acts Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 42.

and Peter, and about the prayers in the temple. As for the man who has a physical impairment, he is unnamed, and he is identified only by his handicap.

The anonymity of people with disabilities in the Gospel reveals that people with disabilities were ignored and stereotyped. To name people is a sign of identification and recognition in their home, community or society, but people with disabilities are commonly excluded from such identification and recognition.

V. 2 portrays the unnamed physically impaired man as a man of great infirmity; a useless man. The description of the man being carried by other unknown (unidentified) people emphasizes the hopelessness of his situation. As Fontaine says, “concepts of purity, [the] divine [of] origin disability, and objectification [of PWDs] for theological and literary purposes all work together to paint a negative picture of the possibilities and the powers of the disabled”.<sup>368</sup>

V.2b says, the man “...was carried to the temple gate called Beautiful”. The “Beautiful gate” was likely the Corinthian Gate which led from the Court of Gentiles to the Court of Women.<sup>369</sup> According to the rules safeguarding the holiness of the temple, people with disabilities were separated and placed apart because they were “impure” and hence forbidden to enter in (Leviticus 21, 18; 2 Samuel 5, 8).

The mention of the “time of prayer” indicates that there were several times for prayer at the Jerusalem temple (early in the morning at - 9 am; afternoon at - 12.00 and 3 pm; and in evening).<sup>370</sup> It may be that the afternoon service was crowded and this could explain the fact that the “Lame Beggar” was being carried to the temple because of the density of the crowds. In any case the “giving of alms was an important part of the Jewish faith and so beggars found it profitable to be near the temple”.<sup>371</sup>

In dealing with v. 3 – 7, I argue that the man saw Peter and John enter the temple and asked for money but Peter and John stopped and shared with him what they had found to be a far more precious thing, “the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth”. The name of Jesus Christ was

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<sup>368</sup> Fontaine in Bruce, “A Daughter of Abraham”, 2005, 3

<sup>369</sup> Mikeal C. Parsons, “The Character of the Lame Man in Acts 3-4, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 124,, 2005, 295-312 <<http://www.shaddaibaptist.com/actsfiles/acts07.pdf>>’the Lame shall walk Again’> [22/19/2008]

<sup>370</sup> The Bible Readers Companion, Libronix Digital Library System.

<sup>371</sup>The Bible Exposition Commentary, Libronix Digital Library System

the focal point that the apostles wanted to raise up and glorify to the men of Israel (Acts 3, 11 - 20).

I see in this text, “Silver and gold” are a temporary help, a short term need. Introducing Jesus into the life of this man was a timeless gift, and an unexpected one.

The words of v. 3, “when he saw Peter and John ....he asked them for money”, indicate that this man was taught to beg for money so that he could buy food at the end of the day. He could do nothing to support himself except begging. He was helpless from the moment he was born, and he was made to believe that PWDs cannot go anywhere or do anything without external help: all his life he has had to rely on someone. This leads to an understanding of why this man did not ask to be healed. He was certainly likely to have heard of the Apostles’ healing miracles but he did not ask to be healed – he asked for money instead. The temporary assistance of money was preferred over the permanent help of healing, revealing the “Lame Beggar’s” acceptance of his hopeless situation. This picture reveals the portrayal of the man is stereotypical and foregrounds many of the problems face by PWDs.

The words “rise up and walk” (ESV) are an order, a command to change position, to upgrade his condition. The “Lame Beggar” had always been seated outside the temple, unable to walk. These words were aimed at transforming the situation of this man.

The act of “taking him by the right hand” and the way they “helped him up” (NIV) are linked with Peter and John’s command that the man should stand and walk. It means in a healing process it should be an achievement which requires words and action to be tied together.<sup>372</sup>

The two verses 8-9 show the facts that the man with a disability “jumped to his feet”, “began to walk” and was able to “enter into the temple” represented a “miracle-healing”. The man experienced a complete shift in his life. The two verses give an overview of the holistic healing of this text that occurred:

Firstly, there is the emotional healing. V.6 shows the “crippled beggar” expecting to receive money from Peter and John. Yet, while Peter (and John) might have money for him, a greater gift, a gift of which was much better than money was about to be given to the man: was the gift of being able to stand up and walk in the name of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>372</sup> Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, 2009, 100.

Here, “silver and gold” provide only a temporary help, since everyone who receives this will soon be needy again. Whereas, “in the name of Jesus Christ” is a permanent help, which means that whoever receives will never need to ask again (John 4, 13).

The expression “stand up and walk” contrasts with the man who spent a lifetime sitting and being carried, signs of his uselessness and hopelessness. But, when Peter (and John) told him to stand and walk, this gave him a sense of hope, and the strength to restart his life, to be independent and to be free. Hence for this man, before he could receive physical healing, his soul and mind had to be healed.

Secondly, there is the social healing which v.8 refers to when saying that once the man is cured he enters the temple. This means that he joins other people; he joins his community in the temple.

The text informs us that the man was carried all the time, but that during the prayers he was left outside alone. He was a beggar, a poor man, and an “impure” man, excluded from activities such as prayer in the temple. He may have been a beggar for a long time because those who went into the temple for worship knew and recognized him (v. 10). This means that the way they used to see him sitting was different from when they saw him standing and walking. Therefore this changed the mind of people who portrayed and discriminated him.

Thirdly, there is the physical healing, referred to in the phrase (v. 6-7): “in the name of Jesus-Christ of Nazareth, ‘walk’”; and referred to v.8, “he jumped on his feet”. This shows that through this name the power did flow, the “cripple’s” feet and ankles were strengthened and the man walked and leaped, living proof of the power of Jesus. The healing was instantaneous (a miracle), without further treatment needed. In this part I highlight the paradigm shift, the change of position of the man: he used to sit and being unable to stand and walk; but with words and action he was able to stand up and walk even to jump. This is a visible change that this man experienced. The fact this man moves forward to his life makes his life’ story different.

The physical healing from disability perspective is not only that supernatural miracle, yet, I argue that is ability to acting and doing things differently.

Fourthly then, there is the spiritual healing described in v. 8, which highlights that the first thing that this healed man did was to enter into the temple, approach the throne of God and give thanks. The text seems to imply that this man might have been taught that he must sit

outside the temple, not to pray, but to access people for begging money. He might also have been taught that he is “impure”, separated from God, and that only once healed could he enter into the temple. Thus, when he felt straightened in his feet and ankles, he entered into the temple, “walking and jumping, and praising God” (v. 8b).

#### V. 10

The verse starts with, “they recognized him” as the same man who was sitting outside and begging alms and “they were filled with wonder and amazement”. This reveals that even the people in the temple received the “miracle-healing” (v. 10 -11) in the sense that their minds were opened to know that before God everything is possible and that there is no place for discrimination or stereo-typing.

### 6.5.1 Summary

My particular reading of this text of Acts 3, 1-11, is an auto-critical reflection of the situation that PWDs experience in their daily lives.

As a person with a disability who has experienced failed physical healing,<sup>373</sup> I demonstrated in my reflection that physical healing is not the only form of healing in this text though initially, this story, in the book of Apostles, aimed to supply many signs and miracles performed by the apostles. There are other forms of healing (emotional, social and psycho-spiritual) that I stated above challenge people with disabilities as well as leaders of the Christian church, who think that when a person with a disability is not healed, he is being denied fellowship with God and fellowship with other people.

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<sup>373</sup> “My experience as a young lady with a disability influenced most of my spiritual life and my calling into the ministry. It was so difficult to be accepted as God’s creation. During my teenage years, I was wondering about my physical state. I attempted many times to commit suicide. One day my sister knew that and she came to me and said “My dear sister, what you want to do is not a solution to your problems. Pray and ask your God what life means to you as a young lady with disability. And ask God why He wants you to remain like this”. These words from my sister were very powerful and made me conscious of my situation. As Victor Frankl says, “to be conscious, take action and be responsible”. I prayed, cried, implored God to teach me the meaning of my life. My sister and I devoted three days to fasting and praying to God to help me. That time was really a healing time. Since that time I have never prayed God to heal me physically, because, I know, as Paul recognized, that “God’s grace is sufficient for you, His strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12, 10). Then I took courage and I believed in what my sister told me; she was inspired by the Holy Spirit. From that time I accepted myself as a woman with a disability and I knew that God had a good plan for me. That was in 1984. Today, I understand my vocation as that of encouraging people with disabilities to “rise up and walk” spiritually so that they can be independent in their quest for transformation of their situation, both in Church and Society.” Micheline Kamba’s testimony in *‘Toward a Theological Programme of Disability Studies in Africa – with special focus on DRC’* in African Theological Education Handbook, (Forthcoming).

In this text I argue that before this man was physically healed, Peter and John took time to talk with him to show him that silver or gold could not limit his life. Therefore, he has to move on and see further in his life. I noted that it is not the fact that this man could stand and walk which amazed people. Instead it is the way he scaled to another new life. I do not deny the supernatural healing because I do know that God is All-powerful in everything. Yet, from my disability experience I recognize another form of physical healing that I called “visible change” that PWDs experience in their life.<sup>374</sup> This is manifested through their abilities to do things differently.

My understanding of physical healing here is the fact of seeing the person shifted to another level that was not expected, because many PWDs have been alienated by the culture and tradition of their context that they cannot do anything in their lives because they are disabled. Therefore, my statement to the church leaders through liberative education could empower PWDs to revive hope and a new life.

My reading of this text is as a church leader for effective awareness of the integration of PWDs in church. I should recognize that PWDs need assistance to discover their real identities so that they can take leadership in their respective communities.

## **6.6 People with disabilities in dialogue with scholars**

In this section I foreground on the one hand, the contribution made by participants in the CBS and my own contribution in regard to disability in ancient Jewish and Greek society and the modern view in the Bible study on Acts 3, 1-11. On the other hand, the dialogue involves the discovery of different types of healing as opposed to the scholarly material which adheres to a narrow definition of healing in the Bible, specifically in the text of Acts. This section aims to reflect biblically on healing from a disability perspective; this will support the material in the next chapter, providing a theological reflection on disability in the Bible, while focusing on the issue of healing. I have selected the issues that emerged as the main themes in the Bible study.

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<sup>374</sup> I will unfold this in section of healing in chapter 7. My understanding of visible change from a liberation theology of disability is the improvement of the abilities. Therefore, I state that this can be possible only when a person has experienced an emotional and spiritual healing.

Question 4 (*Why does the disabled man sit outside the temple?*) invites the participants in the Bible study to see behind the text in order to understand the socio-historical construction of the “temple” in the first century as well as the Jews’ perception of disability. Their responses were as follows:

CL2: *-He sits outside because he is disabled person (according to the Jews’ perception, this crippled man was impure and his place was with the Gentiles), and he wants to beg as he is disabled.*

CL4: *-He sits outside to beg because at that time a disabled person was considered impure.*

The participants raised two points: the location where the man was placed in relation to the temple and the attribution by Jews of disability to “impurity” which was a social construct. The location, “Beautiful gate” was opened to all comers including all kind people of lower standing such as cattle-dealers and money-changers; and at the gate the beggars lying (mostly people with disabilities), (Luke 16, 20; John 9, 8). It was associated with the image of Jewish society as opposed to the court of Gentiles, which housed the “impure” people with disabilities. Thus this court was called the “outer” (meaning lower) court.<sup>375</sup> This highlights that, “the social construction of disability posits that if negative meanings are associated with people with disabilities, [then] behaviors, objects, and language associated with people with disabilities will be negative”.<sup>376</sup>

Scholars interpreted a “handicap” or “disability” as punishment for sins, either committed by persons with disabilities themselves or by their relatives in earlier generations, referring to the Bible to support their interpretations (Lev. 26, 16; Deut. 28, 22; John 9, 2).<sup>377</sup> Therefore, disability has been understood as signifying the absence of God.

Participants of the Bible study went beyond this and found that the text they studied did not portray disability as linked to “impurity” or “pity” only. They pointed out that this text had two kinds of responses to PWDs: firstly, society’s attitude and the secondly, “God’s view” of disability, as revealed through the apostles.

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<sup>375</sup> ‘Beautiful Gate’ in *Bible History Online*, 2012 : <http://www.bible-history.com/court-of-women>>[14/07/2012]

<sup>376</sup> Jeff McNair and Michelle Sanchez, ‘Christian Social Construction on Disability: Church Leaders’ in *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health*, Vol. 11, No 4 , 2007, 35-50.

<sup>377</sup> See further explanation in McNair and Sanchez Author, ‘Christian Social Construction on Disability’, 2007, 36; Kabue, *Interpreting Disability*, 2003, 11; Bruce, ‘Construction of Disability’, 2010, 260.

Question 7 asked, ” **What are the normal ways in which we respond to people with disabilities and how does this text challenge us to respond differently?**” Participants of the Bible study responded that people went to the temple, and saw the disabled sitting outside the Beautiful Gate, and some gave him money, but without taking him (as an individual) into consideration.

They stated that Peter and John however stopped when the man called out to them, begging for money. The two apostles took time to talk with the man who was considered as a “sinner” or as “impure”. As the author recorded, while they talked to the “crippled beggar”, they took him by the right hand. The words and act are intertwined with no interval between them.<sup>378</sup>

This approach reveals that PWDs do not need pity, or mercy, but rather compassionate understanding and opportunities to develop their self-confidence, realize their possibilities and abilities, and follow their vocation.

The apostles’ approach presents a challenge to those who claim that they stand by vulnerable persons. Firstly, Peter and John stopped and approached the place where the man was sitting; showing that they knew that as followers of Jesus, their mission was to be with those who are unwell. Secondly, Peter and John took time to talk with the man. In the context of disability dialogue and interaction are evidently important in a profound sense: PWDs are recognized as individuals with needs, aspirations and strengths, the same as able-bodied people. Thirdly, they took him by the right hand, which is sign of love, welcome, support, encouragement, and integration. The apostles, “...take sides with the victims of stigma and discrimination against the institutions and their leaders who promulgate stigmatization and discrimination forms of theology”.<sup>379</sup> This leads to the second part of this section, the discovering of different ways of healing by the participants of the Bible study.

### **Different ways of healing**

Healing and miracles in the New Testament, especially in the book of Acts, serve as a sign of the Holy Spirit to the apostolic company (2 Cor. 12, 12) in order to confirm the new message which they were preaching (Heb. 2, 3-4).<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> Bruce, ‘A Daughter of Abraham’, 2005, 14.

<sup>379</sup> Gerald West and Bongzi Zengele, ‘Reading Job ‘positively’, 2003, 53.

<sup>380</sup> The Gift of Miracles & Healing <<http://www.biblicalstudies.com/bstudy/spiritualgifts/Ch17.htm> [16/02/2010].



The re-reading of this text from the perspective of disability shows that there is more than one way of healing in this story.

Scholars argue that a person with a disability was excluded from the society, because of their physical condition. Disability had been seen as a consequence of sin or of the disabled person's parents' sin. For these reasons the laws aimed to separate such people from others who were "pure". Only the person who is healed is invited into the community to pray in the temple.<sup>381</sup>

Healing in this text concerns the inclusion and the respect of a human being, treating him/her with equality. Reinders says, "Every human being has an interest in being treated with equal respect, including the mentally disabled, inasmuch as everyone has an interest in being included as a respected member of society".<sup>382</sup>

However, the healing recorded in this passage was unexpected. This man had not asked to be healed, meaning that he had no faith, and that he had resigned to his situation. Both Peter and John did not set out to heal or to operate miracles: they healed not "by might nor by power", but by the God's spirit and will.<sup>383</sup>

A "Western scientific world-view might argue that the medical conditions described in the biblical narrative could not be physiologically cured by divine intervention. Some theologians would even argue that the dispensation of such types of healing ended with the advent of Western scientific medicine".<sup>384</sup>

Despite these opinions, it is important to note that the Gospel healing of Jesus includes restoration and integration in the physical as well as the spiritual realm in the community. As the participants of Bible study expressed that healing in this text is holistic: emotional, physical, social and spiritual.

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<sup>381</sup> Bruce, 'John 5, 1-18 The Healing at the Pool', 2003, 2; Albl, 'Whenever I Am Weak', 2007, 148.

<sup>382</sup> Hans S. Reinders, *The Future of Disabled in Liberal Society: An Ethical Analysis* (Indian: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 73

<sup>383</sup> I have compared this story with the story of Paul, who was not healed of his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12, 7-10); also Trophimus was not healed of his illness (2 Tim 4, 20). Timothy too, was not cured of his stomach problem. This is to point out to those who today are called "divine healers" and who state that when a person with a disability is not healed, it is because of lack of faith, that on the contrary, "faith on the part of the one healed was not a requirement or condition. Faith was often rewarded, but it was never stated to be a condition of a person's healing, nor was it ever used as an excuse for a failed attempt to heal". Therefore, theologically, a miracle is God's sign through the Holy Spirit. –Biblicalstudies.com, *The Gift of Miracles and Healing today* <[http://www.biblicalstudies.com/bstudy/spiritualgift/ch\\_17.htm](http://www.biblicalstudies.com/bstudy/spiritualgift/ch_17.htm)> [2010/02/16]; Emmaus (ed). *Miracle, Nouveau Dictionnaire Biblique*, (Suisse: Publisher, 1961), 498

<sup>384</sup> Kabue, *A Church of All and for All*, 2003, 20-21.

In today's context, people with disabilities have felt hurt by events in the church or in crusades during the healing prayers. As Theo Schmidt says, “we have a healing ministry and not a hurting ministry”.<sup>385</sup> The use of a wheelchair, white cane or walker for campaigning and attracting people to attend the “healing services” or “healing crusades”, is a sign of humiliation of and the disrespect for people with disabilities.<sup>386</sup> Claydon notes that, “People with disabilities become deeply disappointed over having been denied healing by God or being abandoned by Him (Jesus) to intervene in their pain, loss and disability. As a result, a root of bitterness and scepticism about the Christian faith often takes hold”.<sup>387</sup>

The challenge posed by the text of Acts 3, 1-11, then is to reconstruct the relationship between people with disabilities and God by developing their awareness of the love of God in their lives, whatever their physical condition, and affecting spiritual healing. The text highlights that healing is also emotional and social in nature since it involves PWDs experiencing the compassion, empowering support and love of others and also the inclusion in their community as full and productive members of society.

## 6.7 Conclusion

The text of Acts 3, 1-10 was at the centre of Bible study with church leaders. I view this text as a source of “holistic healing”, because it reveals different ways of healing: emotional, social, physical and spiritual. The text challenges the church to deal with the issue of disability holistically.

The participants came to understand their attitudes toward PWDs and through the Bible study they opted for change. Their propositions reflected that the church needs to adopt the aspect of holistic healing in order to become “A Church of All and for All”.

The re-reading of the text focused on a reconstructed view of people with disabilities to be realized with the support of church leaders. The support is understood as involving the use of education which will serve as a source of empowerment and as the means of liberation for people with disabilities.

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<sup>385</sup> Schmidt, *Yes, You are Healed*, 2007,7.

<sup>386</sup> EDAN Newsletter July-September, 2005, 2; Claydon, ‘Hidden and forgotten People’, 2004.

<sup>387</sup> Claydon, ‘Hidden and Forgotten People’, 2004.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### INTERVIEWS

#### 7.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present interviews that I conducted with Protestant Church leaders and Catholic high school pupils. Firstly, I describe the participants, as well as the methodology I used for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires. Secondly, I present details for each group, and thirdly, I conclude the chapter.

Interview questionnaires facilitated my research, helping me to gain more information from two group discussions (between Protestant Church leaders and religion lecturers, and Catholic high school students) about their perceptions of disability and their personal experiences as people with disabilities or as able-bodied persons side by side in the discussion group. This in turn revealed to what degree, and in what form, churches and schools have provided educational programmes for people with disabilities.

#### 7.1 Description of the population

Participants in the interviews were involved in two group discussions: they were “Protestant Church leaders and religion lecturers” and “Catholic high school pupils”.

As I stated in chapter one of this thesis, “Protestant Church leaders and religion lecturers” are members of different denominations belonging to one national Protestant federation, called, *Eglise du Christ au Congo*, or ECC (Church in Christ of Congo, CCC). The participants were 20 in total. The Church leaders represented different parts of the DRC.

The Catholic High school pupils came from the third level of the *Institut National pour Aveugles* (INAV) (National Institute for Blind People). This institute was founded by the Catholic Church with the purpose of rehabilitating children who have visual impairment. It is located in Huileries Road, in Gombe suburb in Kinshasa, DRC. After many years, this school has opened its doors to non-disabled children who are now in the majority. The total number of participants in this discussion group was 5.

## 7.2 Methodology for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires

The methodology I used for distributing and collecting the questionnaires was a dynamic one and differed from one group to another.

Protestant church leaders and religion lecturers (PCR) (including the Presbyterian Church leaders) were interviewed collectively. As I stated in chapter 1, this group was a discussion group, with the members selected according to the availability. I used the opportunity of their annual meeting which was held in “Centre Shaumba” (a Protestant Conference Centre) in Kinshasa, DRC to discuss the procedure of the interview with them; they first wrote down their responses and then discussed them. This interview was done one week before Bible studies with Presbyterian Church leaders taken place. We spent 30 minutes for this process.

With the Catholic high school students, I conducted individual interviews at their school, the “*National Institute for Blind People*” in Kinshasa, DRC. The process involved questions and responses, recording of their responses and discussion of these.<sup>388</sup> This happened two weeks after the Bible studies sessions with IMAN’ENDA members.

### 7.2.1 Interview with Protestant Church leaders and religion lecturers

I printed out and distributed 20 questionnaires and all of these were returned to me. Thus, I worked with 20 respondents, namely 15 male and 5 female pastors.

I present the responses as a percentage (20 respondents represent 100%).

**Question 1.** *What do you understand by disability? Or what do you think when you meet a person with a disability?* Twelve male pastors or 60% of respondents indicated their negative perception of disability in the following terms:

“*Pity*” – “*suffering*” – “*difficult*” – “*useless person*” – “*forsaken person*” – “*problematic*” – “*sick person and killjoy person*”.

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<sup>388</sup> To ensure the consistently accurate recording of the sessions I used a tape recorder for all interviews whether conducted collectively or individually. I was assisted by one person who transcribed the responses.

Three female and two male pastors, in total five persons or 25% of the respondents, expressed their positive perception as follows:

*-Feel compassion – see God’s creation – feel like giving assistance– need to help – touched to see PWDs.*

Two women pastors and one male pastor, a total of three persons or 15 % of the respondents did not respond to this question.

Question 2, *How do you refer to a person with a disability in your mother tongue?* The responses given to this question revealed different concepts of disability in different African cultures and ethnicities within the DRC. The question was posed to church leaders because they represented different ethnic groups in the DRC. These are some of their reactions (the full reports see in annexure No 1):

*From the western DRC come the terms:*

*-Nkiadi*, which means suffering and relates to all kinds of disability;

*-Bandoki*, wizards, meaning disability as a problem or a curse.

*From the capital, Kinshasa the following terminology was reported:*

*-Kizengi, zoba*, means a mad person, relation to a person with an intellectual disability;

*-baba*, refers to a person who is deaf, it implies a person who is unable to speak or a person who does not exist;

*-Koka*, denotes a person who is crawling on the ground, and implies that this person is not valuable.

*Among the Swahili people in the eastern and north-eastern DRC, the following terms are used*

*-Muntu ya kitshwa*, a phrase that relates to a person with mental disability, it means an unreasonable person;

*\_Muntu ya kilema*, this includes all kinds of disability; it means a person who is nothing.

*From the northern DRC come the following expressions:*

*-Ngaka*, referring to a person in a wheelchair, means a person who is unable to walk;

-*Moleme*, is someone who is incomplete.

*From the central of DRC the following terminology was reported:*

-*Tshilemenda*, someone who has a stain on his body, in other words he was bad created or he was destroyed by the devil;

- *Tshibombo*, these words refer to a person who is not able to work, he is a burden or a spot on society; a person who is haunted by bad spirits or cursed.

All their responses reflected a negative image of disability (see question 2 in Annexure No 1).

Question 3, ***How many of you are related to a person with a disability? (This could be your child, sister, brother, cousin or parents)***

In answer to this question (see question 3 in annexure No 1), 18 respondents or 90% stated that they had family members with disabilities. However, 2 respondents or 10% did not have people with disabilities among their relatives.

Question 4, ***How many people with disabilities attend your churches/schools?*** Responses revealed that most of the participating church leaders were also chaplains or religion lecturers in Protestant schools in Kinshasa. Out of 20 pastors, 16 were teachers as well.

Fourteen pastors (WP & MP), or 70% of respondents, did receive PWDs in their parishes. 6 pastors (WP & MP), or 30% of respondents, did not have people with disabilities in their parishes.

Among 16 pastors and lecturers, 6 respondents or 30% did not have children with disabilities in their schools; whereas 10 respondents or 50% of the group did have children with disabilities (most of them physically disabled) among their pupils.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Here, I wanted to go further and find out the types of disabilities these children had because I knew that the DRC Education system does not yet incorporate children with sensory and mental impairment in formal education.

Question 5, ***How do others (society) react to these people with disabilities?*** In answer to this question, 10 respondents or 50% spoke of the negative reaction of society to PWDs. The following are some of the responses:

*- PWDs are seen as incomplete persons – PWDs have been mocked – PWDs are among poor people – PWDs are considered as beggars–PWDs are seen as suffering people or people.*

Four other respondents or 20% expressed their answers as follows:

*- Church has a supportive role to play in regard to PWDs – church has to pray for physical as well as spiritual healing – The Catholic church takes care of PWDs but not the Protestant church – and - The Church has a responsibility to help and recuperate PWDs.*

Some of them mentioned my experience in the Church: 2 respondents or 10% who stated:

*- Your experience as a pastor in church encourages us – The church considers people with disabilities as persons like others and uses them depending on their capacities; your testimony encourages everybody.*

My experience led the interviewees to believe that PWDs can do anything they want to do.

The last 4 respondents, or 20% of the group, commented on families as part of society. Their responses were given in this way:

*- Some families have hidden their relatives with disabilities;*

*- Some families have neglected their disabled members;*

*-Certain families think that to have a child with a disability is a curse or punishment from God;*

*-Other families are disoriented; sometimes they are confused regarding their situation as being a family with members who have disabilities.*

Question 6, ***Do you have a programme available for people with disabilities in your church/school? Comment on this.***

Out of 20 participants, 17 or 85% of the group affirmed that they had no programme for PWDs. The following reasons were given:

*- Ignorance – lack of information– lack of financial support – PWDs are a minority – and – the initiative should come from PWDs.*

However, 3 of the respondents, representing 15% stated that they did have a programme for PWDs.

*-We support people with disabilities financially, we give them 1000 Fr<sup>390</sup> a month and we supply food and clothing;*

*-People with disabilities are classed in my church among poor people and each month we provide food and medication;*

*-We teach them sewing and we teach writing and reading to those who do not have a chance to go to school.*

The interview with Protestant church leaders and religion lecturers provided useful information that will help to answer the question central of this study, “How can Bible studies from a disability perspective be integrated into a Christian educational programme? The findings from the research show clearly the negative perceptions of disability in African culture, or to be precise in the DRC. However, 90% of respondents claimed to count PWDs among their families. This confirms what Mark Sherry says: “we all experience disability in one or many ways, indicating that, disability is a matter concerning everybody”.<sup>391</sup>

Contrary to what has been said, namely that PWDs do not attend church or school, this research makes clear that some PWDs do go to church; and some of them attend schools, but these are only the physically impaired pupils. A challenging question remains: how they are treated in schools and churches? A considerable number or 85% of respondents confirmed that they had no programme for PWDs. So, what do these schools do for the Christian education of PWDs? Others respondents, representing 15% of the group, stated that they did

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<sup>390</sup> 1000 Fr is 1000 Congolese Francs which is the equivalent of US \$ 1.5.

<sup>391</sup> Sherry, *Disability and Diversity*, 2008, 3.



offer a programme, which lead to the question, “what kind of programme do they follow and does it nurture the abilities of PWDs?”

The next section will deal with individual interviews, conducted with Catholic high school pupils, in order to better determine the challenges involved in establishment of Christian education programme for children with disabilities at school and in church.

### **7.2.2 Interviews with Catholic high school pupils**

I conducted the individual interviews with Catholic high school pupils from the third level at the *Institut National pour Aveugles*, INAV (National Institute for the Blind People).

I interacted with these pupils through their school principal who is a friend, an apparently able-bodied person and the one who changed the school to include able-bodied pupils. I was allowed to interview only 5 pupils of the third level, to fit in with their time table that day.

The selection of 5 pupils (4 girls and 1 boy, all between 14 and 16 years old; two with visual impairment and three able-bodied pupils), was carried out by the principal who claimed to know his pupils best.

Afterwards the principal explained the importance of the interview to the pupils. I assured them that they should feel free to choose not to participate. They agreed to be interviewed and made themselves available for this process.

In this report I do not use their real names. Others details will be found in the annexure section.

I will present findings, based on the summaries of each category’s responses (blind and non-blind pupils), and subsequently compare these.<sup>392</sup>For the purpose of the discussion, interview questions were broken up into four parts:

1 What do you feel when you are with your peers with disabilities in school or in the classroom?

2 What do you think the attitudes of blind pupils are toward themselves and toward well-sighted pupils?<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> See all reports in Annexure No 1.

3 What do you think about the religion course in your class? Do you enjoy it, yes or no? Say why.

4 How do you think the Bible speaks to disability? And do you think that the Bible can redress the issue of disability?

#### **7.2.2.1 Blind pupils' responses**

*What do you feel when you are with your peers with disabilities in school or in the classroom?*

Both blind pupils, Obianga (Ob.) and Bilendo (Bil.), said they feel normal, but they expressed a need to be considered the same as everybody else (as a human being).

*What do you think the attitudes of blind pupils towards themselves and towards well-sighted pupils are?*

Ob and Bil, stated that they felt more comfortable when they were among themselves. They find that the attitude of pupils who are not visually impaired disappointing. They felt they are not accepted by their peers.

*What do you think about the religion course in your class? Do you enjoy it, yes or no? Say why.*

Ob and Bil, did enjoy the religion course because they learnt about Jesus' story and they were taught how to pray. In relation to this question one of them expressed the wish to have supplementary courses on Braille and the hearing development course.

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<sup>393</sup>In this context I use "blind pupils" instead of "people with disabilities" because the pupils involved seemed to understand "disabled" as referring specifically to physical disability. They used the term "well-sighted pupils" to distinguish between blind people who can "see" (here they mean "see" in the sense of perceiving) and non-visually impaired people, who can see well.

***How do you think the Bible speaks to disability? And do you think that the Bible can redress the issue of disability?***

The understanding of Ob and Bil of disability in the Bible related to “physical healing” or “miracles”. However, Ob thought that a person with a disability who is “pastor” could better interpret the issue of disability in the Bible.

#### **7.2.2.2 Responses of non-visually impaired pupils**

***What do you feel when you are with your peers with disabilities in school or in the classroom?***

Myla, Bely and Sako, stated that they felt “pity”, “pain” to see blind pupils the way they were. They saw them as “sick persons”, because of the fact that they cannot see. Myla said, “*They do not have a chance to see like us*”; Bely stated, “*They are not like us ‘valid’ [this means able-body person]*” and Sako said, “*I notice they suffer from the fact that they cannot see*”.

***What do you think the attitudes of blind pupils toward themselves and toward well-sighted pupils are?***

The pupils had noticed that blind pupils understand each other, but that they are not open to non-visually impaired pupils. Bely and Sako said that blind pupils are choleric, unkind and not cooperative. All three thought that their presence in the school is for the purpose of helping and guiding blind pupils.

***What do you think about the religion course in your class? Do you enjoy it? If yes or no say why.***

The three pupils did enjoy the religion course. Myla and Bely stated that the religion course taught them to love one another and to help their peers with disabilities.

***How do you think the Bible speaks to disability? And do you think that the Bible can redress the issue of disability?***

Myla, Bely and Sako, thought that the Bible could convert the disabled, especially blind people. They meant that the Bible is for “sick persons” or “disabled people”. Their understanding of “How can the Bible redress the issue of disability” is that the blind people can receive healing and experience miracles leading to their recovery.

I chose to include the catholic high school pupils as a sample in my research, because in the DRC, the Catholic Church promotes an inclusive education for all categories of disability and, like some other denominations, they have established religion courses in their schools from primary to high school level.

In the DRC Education system, there are what is called “Ecoles conventionnées” (conventional schools) which respect denominational or religious education.<sup>394</sup> It means that, even if the DRC is a secular country, it recognizes religious schools. These are public or state schools but they belong to a specific religion or denominations (Catholic, Protestant, Kimbanguist and Islam). Thus, religion courses are established in the curriculum of these schools with considerable marks.

Another reason to select these pupils was obviously to gain an impression of what young people think about the issue of disability and the Bible. From the responses collected during the interviews, there appears to be confusion about what PWDs and apparently able-bodied people feel about each other. They accused each other of having deceptive attitudes, and a lack of openness to each other. In other words, there is a lack of acceptance of difference.

When asked about their attitudes toward PWDs, all of the non-disabled youngsters stated that they felt pity and pain, because their peers are blind. In addition, three of them thought that they were in that particular school to help the blind, but not in order to get the same education as the blind people. These responses reveal a lack of awareness of “disability” and imply that a “person with disability” is not seen as a human being like others.

There were no objections against the religion course: everybody enjoyed being taught about love and how to pray, and to learn many stories. However, the responses given might indicate

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<sup>394</sup> *Enseignement en RDC* <<http://www.bcneep.org/enseignement/historique.htm>> [[2012/01/15]

that the course was not inclusive or contextualized. For example, the course taught the non-visually impaired pupils to help blind pupils. This suggests that only people with disabilities are in need of help and that they do not have anything to offer to able-bodied people.

The last question was if the Bible can redress the issue of disability and how pupils think about disability in relation to the Bible. All interviewees, blind and non-blind pupils associated the concept of disability to “healing” and “miracle”. This shows that the issue of disability in the Bible is not addressed accurately in religion courses.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

I stated at the beginning of this chapter that the purpose of the interviews was to supplement the findings of the Bible studies, in order to provide some wider evidence of the attitudes and beliefs of people in DRC about disability. The interviews were semi-structured interviews. I have cited excerpts from the interviews in the chapter. Annexure 1 contains more detailed information about the interviews.

The next chapter will provide an intersection of the findings from the Bible studies and from the interviews. These findings will provide the themes for my theological reflection on disability in the Bible, and will form the basis of the holistic educational programme that has been proposed in this study and that is a key objective of my research.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

# **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON DISABILITY IN THE BIBLE: THE PROVISION OF A HOLISTIC EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

### **8.0 Introduction**

In this chapter I will present the findings of the Bible studies and their implications in relation to disability concerns. I will interpret the findings of the Bible studies and the information emerging from the interviews in response to the objectives of this study. Finally I will outline a theological reflection on disability in the Bible, based on the above findings, and from there, I will develop particular theologies to underpin a programme of holistic education for PWDs. These theologies include a theology of the body, a theology of suffering, a theology of acceptance and a theology of healing. The central focus of this chapter therefore is to provide a holistic educational programme for PWDs which will serve - as will be revealed in the next chapter- as a challenge to Christian Education.

### **8.1 Assessment of the findings**

#### **8.1.1 Bible studies**

I have used Contextual Bible Study as the methodology for reading and conducting Bible studies in the context of IMAN'ENDA's teaching programme. Two of the three texts (2 Corinthians 12, 1-10 and Acts 3, 1-11) selected for this study are also the basis for IMAN'ENDA's teaching. The teaching of IMAN'ENDA has used the traditional method of "reading to" or reading the Bible for participants. Therefore, the interaction between CBS and the praxis of IMAN'ENDA implied a shift from the traditional Bible reading method of IMAN'ENDA to a liberative method of reading with the participants.

The three texts mentioned above thus became “familiar texts” read in an “unfamiliar way”. This statement serves to rectify my claim above – based on an incorrect assumption that these texts were “unfamiliar”. Yet, after conducting Bible studies with the participants, I realized that although most participants knew the texts, they had never read them from a disability perspective.

The reasons why I employed CBS in the Bible studies, were, on the one hand, to collect information which would allow the objectives of the study to be fulfilled, and on the other hand, to provide an educational resource to empower PWDs and Church leaders.

Following the CBS process, the re-reading of the Bible starts and ends with the experience, reality and resources of the community. I used the CBS steps defined by Ujamaa: the first two questions allowed participants in the Bible study to connect their realities to the text; the next three questions connected the biblical texts with the resources of biblical scholarship; the last two questions referred back to the beginning so that the reality or the lived experience of participants was embodied in the development of an action plan, underpinned by new theological understandings.

Most of the conclusions drawn from the Bible study are found in the chapters dealing with the last two questions where, with the “action plan” question, we reach the final step of the CBS process.<sup>395</sup> Meanwhile, in the current section I will isolate the key findings of each CBS as seen from my perspective in relation to the focus of my study. These will be presented chapter by chapter, each with its main focus, followed by the two last questions and related findings. Finally, the overall findings of the Bible study sessions will be assessed in conjunction with the additional information gleaned from the interviews.

#### **8.1.1.1 Chapter 4: The Bible study on Exodus 4, 1-17**

This Bible study session was designed for people with disabilities within IMAN’ENDA, although the organization has among its members PWDs as well as apparently able-bodied and women pastors. As I mentioned previously, many apparently able-bodied members of IMAN’ENDA identify with people with disabilities, often because of family ties. Thus, it was difficult to separate their views from those of PWDs. However, for the purpose of this study,

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<sup>395</sup>See these details in chapter 3 of this study

I recorded all the various responses to question 9 (using the acronyms PWDs, ABP and WP to indicate each category) , in which the findings of the Bible study were revealed.

### *Main focus of Bible study*

The main focus of the Bible study is on helping people with disabilities to find meaning in their physical condition through Bible study so that they may live positively. As the basis is v.11 of Exodus 4, “How God views disability”, apparently able-bodied people as well as people with disabilities are challenged.

### *Questions and findings*

Before presenting question 9 and its results, I note here the participants’ discussion with regard to question 4, *What problems/difficulties does Moses think that he will face in dealing with the Israelites?* Participants tried to identify personal experiences similar to that of Moses. They mentioned feelings such as: -fear of disability, lack of confidence, - self-doubt and fear of not being able to be oneself (lack of identity).

The answers to question 9, *How does this text challenge us?* have been classified into 3 themes based on the answers from group MW which was composed of PWDs, ABP and WP. These themes are related to the experiences identified in response to question 4 (as stated above):

(1) Discovery of a new meaning of self (PWDs): I realized that the answers given to question 9 complement those given to question 4. In other words, although difficulties and problems bring feelings of uncertainty, fear, doubt and so on, through struggling with troubles, a person can discover him/herself.<sup>396</sup>

(2) Development of a new attitude towards disability (ABP, WP): for this theme the challenge was aimed at able-bodied people in regard to how they view disability. Their responses show that, through the Bible study, they learned to change a negative perception of PWDs into a more positive view.

(3) Challenge directed by able-bodied people to PWDs: their responses were noteworthy in that they came from persons close to PWDs (spouse, siblings and guides). Even these needed

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<sup>396</sup> Molsberry, *Blindsided by Grace*, 2004 Viii; Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 92.



to go through the CBS process in order to transform their attitudes toward and their understanding of PWDs. Their responses reveal how able-bodied people view disability and the difficulties faced by PWDs.

#### **8.1.1.2 Chapter 5: Bible Study on 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10**

This Bible study session centred on the second text selected for IMAN'ENDA members. The text deals with the notion of “Power through a weak body”.

##### *Main focus of Bible study*

Verse 9 of the passage 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10, highlights that God’s understanding of disability can serve as a lesson to motivate PWDs who realize that God has a purpose in permitting suffering. Therefore, PWDs will need to identify the meaning of the suffering in their lives.

##### *Questions and findings*

Question 7 was *How does society understand disability and how do people with disabilities understand their disability? Share your experience if possible.* The responses given to this question show how society’s perceptions compare with God’s understanding of disability and, in addition, participants expressed their own views of their suffering. Four different narrative threads or stories emerged. And these reflect, first, the society’s attitude, next, the stereotypes that underpin societal attitudes; and finally, the repercussions of these attitudes for PWDs.

#### **8.1.1.3 Chapter 6: Bible study on Acts 3, 1-11**

This particular Bible study session was designed for church leaders from the Presbyterian Church in Kinshasa. The text deals with healing and miracles as a continuation of Jesus’ action through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### *Main focus of Bible study*

The re-reading of this text focuses on an understanding of inclusive healing-what I call “holistic healing”- involving not only physical, but also emotional, social, and spiritual healing.

The Bible study session was aimed at stimulating church leaders to support PWDs holistically in their integration into the church and into society.

### *Questions and findings*

Question 7, *What are the normal ways in which we respond to people with disabilities and how does this text challenge us to respond differently?*, was conceived in order to gain information from church leaders with regard to how PWDs have been perceived in the church and in the wider society.

During the process of the Bible study, the participants, church leaders, modified their attitude towards disability in a positive sense. Their responses are concerned with three main themes: love, -approach (dialogue) and help for self-identification.

In response to question 8, *What are your action plans after reading this text?* participants presented a number of possible action plans for the transformation of churches with regards to PWDs. These are as follows: Contextual Bible study, Training PWDs in various fields, Disability empowerment through education, Spiritual care; Supply assistive devices; Communication devices and accessibility; and Reaching out to PWDs

## **8. 2 Intersection of findings**

This section combines the findings from Bible studies conducted with IMAN’ENDA members and (specify which) church leaders with those from interviews with Protestant church leaders and Catholic high school pupils. The aim is to confirm the hypotheses/assumptions of this study and to realize its intended objective which is to design a model for a Christian education programme.

I present joint findings according to the main points that characterized the Bible studies and interviews. On one hand, there is the self-projection of people with disabilities. On the other hand, there is the society’s view of PWDs and a programme for PWDs.

### ***The self-image of PWDs***

In chapter 4 the findings responses to question 4 reveal the feelings experienced by PWDs, namely: - *fear of disability - lack of confidence - self-doubt*; and *lack of identity*.

Responses to question 4 in chapter 5 indicate that PWDs, suffering pain and physical weakness, are led to think that they are cursed or punished by God.

The responses given by blind pupils to the question of how they feel about being with their non-disabled peers in school and in the classroom show that they felt accepted by their peers; but that they are not considered the same as others.

These responses show that PWDs constantly question their bodies, because of pain and suffering, and as a consequence they lack self-acceptance as well as acceptance by others.

### ***Society's view of disability***

The main questions came from three texts used in the Bible study: “*How does God view disability?*” (question 7 in chapter 4); and “*What does God say to Paul about his disability?*” challenge apparently able-bodied people to change their image of PWDs as lesser human beings.

In chapter 5, question 7, participants told their stories, revealing how apparently able-bodied people tend to stereotype people with disabilities by using expressions such as: *bad luck sent by God, disability is caused by the devil and sending a child with a disability to school is a misuse of money*.

I link these stereotypical viewpoints to the reactions of Protestant church leaders and religion lecturers when asked about their understanding of disability. Sixty percent of the group expressed these responses: *pity, suffering, difficult, useless person, forsaken person, problematic, sick person, killjoy person*.

Along these same lines, question 5 (posed again to Protestant church leaders and religion lecturers) concerned the reactions of society to people with disabilities. Fifty percent spoke of the negative attitude of society towards people with a disability. People with disabilities were

seen as: *incomplete persons, mocked, living among poor people, beggars, suffering people.* Twenty percent of the group responded to this question by mentioning families' views as an example of attitudes in society, for example: *some families have neglected their disabled members, some families have hidden their relatives with disabilities, some families have neglected their disabled members, certain families think that to have a child with a disability is a curse or punishment from God ,other families are disoriented or confused regarding the situation of their members with disabilities.*

Non-visually impaired pupils in answer to the question, "*What do you feel when you are with our peers with disabilities in school or in the classroom?*" associated blind pupils with: *pity, sadness, pain, sickness.* They advanced as possible reasons for these perceptions that: *they do not have a chance like us- they are suffering.*

In society able-bodied people are expected to help people with disabilities, but their help is often experienced by PWDs as patronizing. This was demonstrated by the Presbyterian Church leaders' responses in chapter 6, to question 7. They started their statement with "*As a church we should...*" This way of speaking hints at exclusion. PWDs are seen as being constantly in need and it implies that nothing is expected from them.

These reactions are similar to those of the non-visually impaired pupils in response to the question "*What do you think the attitudes of blind pupils toward themselves and toward well-sighted pupils are?*" They thought that their presence in the school was to help blind people. I state that this is a denial of the fact that people with disabilities can contribute to society.

As regards these responses, it is noted that "disability" remains something of a "mystery" to apparently able-bodied people (or society in general). Protestant Church leaders, when asked, "*How do you refer to PWD in your mother tongue?*" all (100 percent of responses) painted a very negative image of disability in African culture , especially in the DRC. These responses justify the assumptions stated above that attitudes towards disability in society should be understood as the result of socio-culturally determined perceptions and beliefs, which imply that PWDs differ from apparently able-bodied people. Therefore, a programme that educates able-bodied persons on the subject of disability is important for the social integration of PWDs.

### ***A programme for PWDs***

In referring to question 6 with PCR, who were asked whether they had a programme for PWDs in their churches and schools, 85% stated that they did not have such a programme. However, in answer to question 4, “*How many people with disabilities attend your churches/schools?*”, 70% of PCR affirmed that PWDs were present in their parishes; and 50% claimed that they did admit pupils with disabilities into their schools. Some of the reasons put forward for not having a programme for PWDs do not reflect reality, such as the statement that “*people with disabilities are a minority*”; other reasons given were: *lack of financial support*; and *the initiative should come from PWDs*. These are problems that could be overcome if there was love for PWDs and the will act.

Nevertheless, 15% of the respondents confirmed that they had pupils with disabilities. The programme listed, however, is a far cry from what could be called a good programme for PWDs (see question 6 with PCR). The programmes, as they are, could reinforce stigma and discrimination because they perpetuate the conception of PWDs as ‘poor people’.

As regards the religion course offered in the Catholic school for blind pupils, responses indicate that the course is limited and not adapted to the particular context of the school.

Referring back to question 6 with PCR, some of the responses advanced are valid and need to be taken into consideration, such as ignorance and lack of information on the topic of disability.

I will now list the themes proposed for an educational programme for PWDs on the basis of the most essential findings from the Bible studies.

In chapter 4, participants in the Bible study expressed a wish for *self-discovery*, *new attitudes towards disability* and for *a challenge for PWDs to reconstruct themselves*.

In chapter 5, participants in Bible study proposed that a consideration of certain themes may help PWDs to apply their gifts and to develop leadership. The themes are: *acceptance*, *healing prayer*, *access to facilities and education (training)*.

Chapter 6 reports on suggestions by participants in the Bible study for a number of action plans, which can empower and transform church members' perceptions of PWDs. These are : *the introduction of CBS (as one of the church's activities), training PWDs in various fields, disability empowerment through education, spiritual care, supply of devices for assistance, communication devices, accessibility and reaching out to PWDs.*

These findings will contribute to the planning of a holistic educational programme for PWDs. The CBS will provide a methodology for developing such a programme. It will be designed and contextualized for people with disabilities.

All the findings can be summarized into four basic themes, based on the theological reflection on disability in the Bible, which will thus become the foundation of a Christian educational programme for people with disabilities. These themes are body, suffering, acceptance and healing.

### **8. 3. Theological reflection on the four themes (body, suffering, acceptance and healing) in the Bible**

This section present the basic themes mentioned above, in the context of a theological reflection on the Bible from a disability perspective.

Many themes related to disability have emerged in this study which could be reflected on theologically and biblically. However, the four themes of body, suffering, acceptance and healing have been specifically selected to form the basis for a holistic educational programme for people with disabilities.

Other disability scholars' work has reflected a new understanding of and a constructive approach to these themes.<sup>397</sup> Yet, the particular value of the reflection resulting from this study is that the selected themes are rooted in the experiences and views of ordinary people

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<sup>397</sup> See WCC, 'A Church of All and for All', 2003; Arne Fritzson, *Interpreting Disability*, 2004; Molsberry, *Blindsided*, 2004; Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 1994; Avalos et al, *This Abled Body*, 2007; Hryniuk, *Theology, Disability and Spiritual Transformation*, 2010; Bruce, 'John 5, 1-8 The Healing at the Pool', 2003; Bruce, 'Construction of Disability', 2010; and Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible*, 2006.

with disabilities. Therefore, the reflection is based on the participants' practical understanding of these themes that as isolated them as essential for the development of a holistic Christian education programme.

My overall objective in this section is to offer a new theological reflection on disability through these themes, in order to present disability itself as part of a diversity and richness which should be reflected in the provision of a holistic educational programme for PWDs.

I present these themes in what I call, a psycho-spiritual order, meaning that I will start the theological understanding of 'body', as "the social location of disability is the body".<sup>398</sup> This body which experiences brokenness knows pain and difficulties, or suffering. The understanding of suffering leads to acceptance and thus to the attainment of liberation which implies the healing received by the person with disability. In my reflection on the different themes, I will first, give a broad biblical overview of the theme, where after I present theological reflection focusing on the contribution by disability scholars and using my own experience of disability; and finally, I outline the implications thereof in a disability context.

### **8.3.1 Theology of the weak body**

#### ***Biblical understanding of the weak body from a disability perspective***

The Bible presents the body (Greek – soma) as the corporal or physical of aspect of the human being, which is constituted of three parts, - body, soul and spirit. The Pauline letters expose a different meaning of the body.<sup>399</sup> Controversies and debates in this regard continue among researchers.<sup>400</sup> Therefore in this section, I will focus on a theology of the weak body. In chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians, Paul describes his body in terms of weakness and as a burden because of the "thorn" (disability) he suffered. This is the focus of my reflection, out of which I develop the theology of the "weak body".

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<sup>398</sup> W. Block, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 87.

<sup>399</sup> See chapter 5 of this study in section "commentary"

<sup>400</sup> Glancy, 'Boasting of Beatings', 2009, 108-109; M. Priestly, *Disability: a Life Course Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003); Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies*, 2006; David B. Hart, 'The Anti-Theology of the Body, in *The New Atlantis*, Summer 2005 <<http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/the-anti-theology-of-the-body>> [ 20/01/2012].

Biblical researchers investigate the term “defect” in the biblical context, and state that in biblical usage it is a technical term referring to a specific set of negatively constructed physical characteristics inconsistent with the biblical notion of “beauty”.<sup>401</sup> Therefore, issues such as blindness, lameness, genital damage and broken or crushed limbs are related to the term “defect”. J. Schipper, in describing disability as a conceptual category in the Ancient Near East, finds that “...[in] many modern novels, biblical prose appears very sparse when it comes to physical description. As with almost all languages, however, Biblical Hebrew has words that describe physical traits [blindness, lameness etc]”.<sup>402</sup> Hence, since biblical times at least, the disabled body has been an object of rejection and led to a distancing from society.

There is a tendency to presume that all creatures should be perfect since they are made in God’s image. Falling short of this notion of perfection becomes problematic and vulnerable persons such as PWDs become subject to questions such as “How can this person, who apparently has a physical or mental defect, be made in God’s image?”<sup>403</sup> This thinking raises a critique of normalcy: Who is created in the image of God? Who is perfect and who is normal and who is not? The research for this study shows that PWDs are automatically assumed to be abnormal.<sup>404</sup> This is because “the medical model understands disability as a biological defect located within a person’s body that needs to be cured”<sup>405</sup> and “the social location of disability is the body”<sup>406</sup>. This seems to be the reason for the barrier that excludes people with disabilities from full participation in society.

### ***Theological reflection on the weak body***

However, theologically, “...being made in God’s image needs to be countered with sensitivity to the corporate nature of that image, and the fact that all have fallen short of the glory (image) of God (Rom.3:23)”.<sup>407</sup> Therefore, in today’s world, Weiss states,

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<sup>401</sup> Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible*, 2008, 18; Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible*, 2006, 65.

<sup>402</sup> For example, texts which describe physical aspects of characters (Daniel 1, 3-4: “young men without any physical defect”; Genesis 29, 7: “Rachel was lonely in form and beautiful and Genesis 39, 7: “...Now Joseph was well-built) have made God into a point of reference of physical like he has well-being (Schipper 2006, 64-65; Olyan 2008, 41.

<sup>403</sup> WCC, ‘A Church of All for All’, 2003, 17.

<sup>404</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 85

<sup>405</sup> Schipper, *Disability Studies*, 2006, 7.

<sup>406</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 87.

<sup>407</sup> WCC, ‘A Church of All and for All’, 2003, 17.



Body shame is neither a new thing nor confined only to people with disabilities. We live in a society where almost everyone hates his or her body. We live in a society where teenage girls are paid millions literally to starve themselves to death, and are idolized for doing so. We live in a culture where middle-aged, otherwise intelligent people are plunged into despair as they begin to age. Almost everyone wishes they looked different. An inclusive theology of embodiment stands against these things and stands for acceptance.<sup>408</sup>

This statement exposes how the body is socially perceived, namely through the “body image”. It is associated with societal experiences, the media and culture. Everyone experiences the impact of this body image.<sup>409</sup> Along the same line, Robert Molsberry, in his book titled, *Blindsided by Grace*, explains how people search for the perfect image. He says, “We’re so oppressed by media images of the ideal human type that we are driven to buy into crash diets and expensive beauty products, to work out compulsively, and to pay surgeons to suck hunks of fat from our bodies. It’s all a vain pursuit of an unattainable and fleeting image”.<sup>410</sup> In this context women are particularly impacted as there is always a connection between body and gender.<sup>411</sup> Thus, women with disabilities are double-losers.

For example, in Kasai culture (in the central part of the DRC), a woman with big legs is considered eligible for marriage, which leads to the exclusion of women who are disabled. In African culture, a woman “is” her “body”. There is an expression in the DRC, “mwana muke njo mwili” (in Swahili), “muasi nde nzoto” (in Lingala), which means, “Woman is the body”. This is linked also to the issue of genital mutilation in Africa.<sup>412</sup> In addition, in the African setting, a “woman’s body” is above all a producer of children. This means that a valued body is a body that which “produces children”. Therefore, women who have been raped, and had their genital parts damaged, are no longer considered as full members of society.

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<sup>408</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 87.

<sup>409</sup> Sylvia K. Blood, *Body Work: The Social Construction of Women’s body Image*. (London: Routledge, 2005), 35.

<sup>410</sup> Molsberry, *Blindsided by Grace*, 2004.

<sup>411</sup> There has long been an awareness of the danger in linking gender centrally to bodily differences. Rather, the body alone is not the focus of feminist scholarship, which also places attention on issues such as “women’s health, representation and construction of the female body and sexuality”. Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>412</sup> The research shows that “woman’s body” (especially the genital parts) is like a “man’s property” which needs to be controlled, kept- in sealing it or cutting it to deny women pleasures that are only meant for men to enjoy.

Saul M. Olyan, in his book titled, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences*, states, “The ‘defects’ mentioned in these texts [Lev. 21, 16-23] include both those visible to the eye and those not normally seen [e.g. genital damage]. Some ‘defects’ are presumably congenital, whereas others are clearly acquired in one way or another (Lev. 24, 19-20)... Thus, these texts... bear witness to a variety of approaches to person with ‘defects’ and even to debate over their inclusion or exclusion from [the most important social institutions, namely] the cult and its familial and communal dimension”.<sup>413</sup>

In the DRC context, a woman with visible disability and one who has been damaged or mutilated in less visible ways (for example genitally) share the same burdens. These women are excluded from society, and, though they may hide their feelings, they often no longer want to live, believing that God has abandoned them and that they are cursed.<sup>414</sup>

All of the above means that PWDs (many of whom are women) are less than perfect in terms of their “body image”. However, beyond their imperfect body (image) there is spirituality that is born from suffering, leading to a new understanding and an acceptance of limits and difference.

With regard, to the two main texts of this study (Exodus 4, 11 and 2 Corinthians 12, 9): in the midst of the confusion, fear, uncertainty and challenges that Paul and Moses faced, the Lord said to each of them, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (to Paul); and “Who gave man this mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, I will help you and [will be with your mouth] (to Moses).”

The discussion in the Bible studies ended with participants taking two positions. Some participants’ responses seemed to indicate that God does not care about the physical condition of a person with disability; on the contrary, he is only concerned

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<sup>413</sup> Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible*, 2008, 28.

<sup>414</sup> Micheline Kamba, ‘Women with Disabilities in Violent Situation: In Seeking Peace and Reconciliation (Africa/DRC case)’. A paper presented in a workshop on Ecumenical International Peace Convocation/WCC. Jamaica, May 2011. The phenomenon in the eastern Congo goes beyond the common violence against women. During the civil war (1996-2002) to date, rape and sexual abuse have been used as cheap weapons. This shows how in eastern DRC, the bodies of women have been destroyed.

with spiritual aspects. Responses to question 7 of the Bible study on Exodus 4, 1-17 went as follows: “*God sees what is inside of Moses instead of his handicap; God does not see Moses’ disability*”.

This kind of thinking is what Weiss argues against, “Disability theology must stand against the temptation toward disembodiment, and the idea that the spirit is superior to the physical body, instead, it must encourage an interpretation of the body and spirit”.<sup>415</sup> The other participants’ responses mentioned that God do care about physical condition; they say that God works with our weaknesses so that his power be manifested.

### ***Some implications from a disability perspective***

Following up on this statement, I would argue that a theology of the body from a disability perspective must take a stand against the religious thinking that encourages people with disabilities to put their hope in an eschatological future (a future beyond the physical here-and-now) alone.<sup>416</sup> Rather, such a disability theology should encourage PWDs to accept the way they are and to be aware that God has a purpose through their body.

The second position taken during Bible study sessions is that, through the physical condition of disability, God can realize his purposes. Participants, choosing this position, responded in a way that gave rise to a new line of thought or a theology of the “weak body”. They stated, “*God wanted to tell us that through the weaknesses, God can be glorified (2 Corinthians 12, 10); the text tells us that God can raise the weak people to shame the strong people (1Corinthians 1, 26-28); and God wanted to show us that through disability something amazing can happen*”.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 82.

<sup>416</sup> Bruce, ‘Construction of Disability’, 2010, 269. Regarding this issue, one Sunday, when I was in church waiting to start the service, a blind woman arrived. She was accompanied by her friend who is a regular member of this church and whom I had met many times. They approached me and the blind woman’s friend introduced me and saying, “X, this is Micheline Kamba, she is also disabled like you, shame! But I know that in heaven both of you will not be the same and will have other bodies”. I replied directly, “Please, I won’t wait to go to heaven to be happy. I am on this earth, I am happy the way I am”. I unfold this conversation further, later in the section dealing with healing.

<sup>417</sup> See Chapter 5 of this thesis, under the section “Analysis and Interpretation”.

As regards this argument, I argue that the theology of the body is based on the requirement to find the meaning of the body's weakness, and suffering leading to an acceptance of the disability.

### 8.3.2 Theology of Suffering

#### *Biblical understanding of suffering from a disability perspective*

The Bible gives a significant attention to the issue of suffering. In the Old Testament, there are books which deal with suffering, such as, the books of Job, Jeremiah and Habakkuk. In the Psalms, there are many prayers expressing doubt, disappointment, pain and sorrow. The OT describes suffering as a consequence of sin, disobedience and in some cases death is provoked.<sup>418</sup> Yet, there are some difficult texts which are dealing with the sovereignty of God in the case of evil actions.<sup>419</sup>

The NT has significant passages about suffering: Jesus was a man of sorrow and he was familiar with suffering. Yet suffering, in many ways, remains a mystery that most of the times we will not fully understand. In a dark and a confused situation, a question that frequently arises is, "Does God care?" Some might think, "If I were God, I'd end the pain, so why doesn't he? Is he powerless? Is he not interested in us? Or is he just plain not there?"<sup>420</sup>

In my study I focus mainly on selected biblical texts (Exodus 4, 1-17; 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10 and Acts 3, 1-11) and from these texts I distil that suffering is associated with weakness, brokenness, pain, powerlessness, and with challenges, self-denial and self-alienation.

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<sup>418</sup> Jewish citizens were afflicted by such things as disease and chronic pain but some lived longer and stayed healthy. Thus sickness and death were seen as signs of punishment from God. "The Lord had declared to Israel that he would punish the Jews because of their unfaithfulness and as a consequence they suffered from tumors, festering sores, madness, blindness and confusion in their mind" (Lev. 28, 27; 26, 16; Deut. 28, 60-61). This explains the fact that in Semitic religion, particularly in the OT, any disease or infirmity was related to "purity". Therefore, being impure was seen in relation to divinity. This means that any disease or infirmity was also linked to divinity. It implies that disease and impurity were obstacles preventing a person from being in a relationship with God. This reveals that in the Jewish perception, physical pain or disability is the consequence of moral impurity. (F. Vigouroux, *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, (Paris: Ed. Brepolis, 1995), 134).

<sup>419</sup> D.A. Carson, *How Long, o Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 42.

<sup>420</sup> John Dickson, *If I were God, I'd end all the PAIN: Struggling with Evil, Suffering and Faith* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2001), 14; Joni Eareckson Tada, *A Place of Healing*, 2010, 84.

The text of 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10, shows Paul in despair about his situation. In chapter 5 of this thesis I explained a “thorn in one’s flesh” as indicating an “object or a person who continuously annoys or hinders its victim”. That is how Paul was tormented and pained and thus he pleaded with God many times to remove his thorn. Eareckson and Weiss, recognize that disability often brings suffering. “Physical pain and weakness, exclusion from mainstream society, significantly increased family responsibilities, blatant discrimination, and economic injustice are examples of some of the common experiences that cause suffering within the lives of people with disabilities”.<sup>421</sup> Certainly, during his prayers, Paul used a word that regularly is uttered by people in a state of depression, “WHY?” It is understandable that, when we approach God, we bring to him our doubts, our burdens and that which ails us, because “The God of the Bible bids us to approach him with our doubts, our fears and our frustrations”.<sup>422</sup>

In relation to this, during the Bible study on Exodus 4, 1-17, one of the participants of the sub-groups was shocked by God’s response to Moses, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?”(v. 11) Participants asked, “*Does this mean that God created disability?*” The question leads to a new understanding of suffering in a disability perspective.

### ***Theological reflection on suffering***

Participants in the Bible study reflected on this point with regard to disability. Their reflection remind of what A. Plantinga says in *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*, quoted by Dickson, in, “*If I were God*”. It is reasoned that if God were all-loving and all-powerful he would be willing and able to put an end to suffering. The fact that suffering continues in the world is given as proof that an all-loving, all-powerful God does not exist”.<sup>423</sup> However, suffering does not disprove the existence of “all-powerful and all-loving God”. Christians

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<sup>421</sup>Weiss, *Copious Hosting*, 2002, 91-92; Eareckson, *A Place of Healing*, 2010, 84.

<sup>422</sup> Dickson, *If I were God*, 2001, 36.

<sup>423</sup> Dickson, *If I were God*, 2001, 14.

have, “brief theological answers that satisfy them: suffering is the result of sin; free will means that God has to leave people to make their own mistakes; heaven and hell will set the record straight. Or perhaps they have not really had to think about these matters much at all. They know God loves them, and that is enough...”<sup>424</sup>

Therefore, in a theological reflection on suffering, the real point is to find the meaning of suffering. Hence the question is not “Could God co-exist with a suffering world?” but rather “Why would God allow it?” and “What has he done about it?”<sup>425</sup>

Coming back to the participants’ preoccupation with v. 11 of Exodus 4, using other biblical references as a resource they did begin to realize that God’s intention was to work through Moses’ weakness.

### ***Some implications from disability***

When considering a theology of suffering seen from a disability perspective, one has to keep in mind that people with a disability are living with suffering. One psychologist says, “To live is to suffer; to survive is to find the meaning of suffering”. Frankl quotes Nietzsche, “He who has a Why to live can bear with almost anything”.<sup>426</sup> In other words, the theology of suffering requires one to find the meaning of what has happened to one’s body in order to give meaning to one’s suffering.

This approach may seem weird, especially to those who shrink from questioning an all-knowing God. They reason, “Who am I to question God?” These people end up believing in what people say, rather than what God says. For example, the “lame beggar” of Acts 3, 1-10, was alienated by society’s attitude and made to think that he could not do anything, except beg. As stated in my comment in chapter 6 of my thesis, this man might well have heard about Jesus’ apostles and their healing miracles, but since he had been taught that he was good for nothing but begging, he

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<sup>424</sup> Carson, *How long, O Lord?*, 2006, 17, 64.

<sup>425</sup> Dickson, *If I were God*, 2001, 16.

<sup>426</sup> See chapter 1 of this thesis, section “Theories of Personality”.

did not look for spiritual help but just asked for money to satisfy his worldly needs.<sup>427</sup>

In other words, there are people with disabilities who appear to accept their condition, because they have become alienated in their minds, and have been conditioned not even to consider that there may be other roads open to them. Here, I would argue that suffering has to be faced and transcended in situations of alienation and hostility.

A theology of suffering should take a strong stand against the attribution of disability to sin as this is what causes shame and hurt to people with disabilities and their families.<sup>428</sup>

On the contrary, a theology of suffering ought to create a sense of happiness and build self-confidence. Eareckson argues,

“...or whether I continue smiling in my chair, not in spite of my pain but because of it, knowing I’ve got lessons to learn, a character to be honed, other wounded people to identify with, a hurting world to reach with the gospel, and a suffering Savior with whom I can enjoy greater intimacy. And every bit of it genuine evidence of God’s love and grace”.<sup>429</sup>

This statement reminds me how one Sunday I went, for nostalgic reasons, to visit a church near my place. I had heard that in that church they sometimes sang songs in my local languages (Lingala, Ciluba, Kikongo and Swahili). The service was wonderful and after the sermon, there was a time for healing prayer. The pastor called sick people to the front of the church. Almost the whole congregation collected there. One of the staff approached me and asked me why I did not go to the front, I said, “I am not sick, I am fine”. He asked me if I wanted him to pray for

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<sup>427</sup> See Chapter 6 of this thesis, section “commentary”.

<sup>428</sup> Bruce, ‘The Bible and Disability’, 2010, 5.

<sup>429</sup> In her book, *A Place of Healing*, Joni Eareckson poses a question, “*What Benefit is there to my Pain?*” She finds 5 benefits that one could gain by accepting one’s situation as it is. These are: Suffering can turn us from a Dangerous Direction (1); Suffering reminds us where our true strength lies (2); Suffering restores a costly beauty in Christ (3); Suffering can heighten our thirst for Christ (4); Suffering can Increase our fruitfulness (5). See details in Eareckson, *A Place of Healing*, 2010, 19, 79-91.

me. I replied “Thanks, but for what?” He said, “For your legs”. I answer, “No, thanks, I do not need this kind of prayers because I know God loves me as I am”. The man was astonished and said, “I’ve been in this ministry fifteen years, I have never seen a person being happy in suffering”. I smiled inside myself. I said, like Eareckson, “I have learned the secret of being content [in suffering] in any and every situation”.<sup>430</sup>

The following section will deal with this ‘being content’ and what it means in a theology of acceptance.

### **8. 3.3 Theology of Acceptance**

#### *Biblical overview of acceptance from a disability perspective*

The principal theme of the Bible is love, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3, 16-17). These verses describe God’s love for the world, the “world” in which there are different kinds of people, different races, cultures, nations and ethnicities, but God loves them. In other words, “God accepts them as they are”.<sup>431</sup>

The verse, “For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world...” (v.7) shows that acceptance is to receive without judging. Acceptance is not to condemn or proclaim difference. In other words, acceptance is an expression of love.<sup>432</sup>

Edward H. Schroeder in his article, ‘A Theology of Acceptance’ states, “The focal point for this insight into the character of God’s love, whereby unacceptable men are accepted and thereby become intrinsically acceptable, is, of course, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>430</sup> Eareckson, *A Place of Healing*, 2010, 51.

<sup>431</sup> Although love encompasses more than acceptance, in this context acceptance is understood as love.

<sup>432</sup> Terry D. Cooper, *Sin, Pride & Self-Acceptance: The Problem of Identity in Theological & Psychology* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 8.



This beloved son is God's love in action, loving the unlovable and unacceptable and making them attractive and acceptable".<sup>433</sup>

Schroeder, though, is talking of the sin which is common to everyone, and this is not to be confused with the stigma and beliefs that attach to disability: people with disabilities are not unlovable and unacceptable because of their disabilities. However his statement highlights the culminant point of God's character which is love.

God's chose as his servants people who were inexperienced and who felt that they were not worthy of their mission (e.g. Jeremiah, Isaiah, David and Mary, Jesus' mother). But as inexperienced as they were, God chose them and accepted them as such. Taking examples from my main biblical texts for this thesis, Exodus 4, 1-17 and Corinthians 12, 10 it is clear that God challenged Paul and Moses and that he accepted them as they were. To reach the standard of being accepted was at first suffering; then after finding the meaning of who they are there were no need to change who they are. The following is a particular story of acceptance of each of them is attached:

In Exodus 4, 1-10: God said to Moses, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gave him sight or makes him blind? Is not I, the Lord?" (v. 11). In this verse, God sums up different types of afflictions, while showing that he is in control of everything. Hence, a theology of acceptance, from a biblical perspective, deals with acceptance of difference.

In verses 12 and 14-16, the phrase, "Now go, I will help you speak (NIV)" (another Bible version says, "I will be with your mouth and I will help you to speak (KJV)", implies that God is all-powerful and all-sufficient, and is willing to work with those whose speech is limited and, in general, with imperfect human beings to achieve his mission.

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<sup>433</sup> Edward H. Schroeder, 'A Theology of Acceptance'. Presentation at the Lutheran Human Relations Association of America Conference, Valparaise, in Proceedings of the 1964 Workshop.

In 2 Corinthians 12, God said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”, v.9, indicating that God works through weakness to demonstrate his power.

In sum, the biblical understanding of acceptance deals with difference, limitation, weakness and imperfection.

### *Theological reflection on acceptance from disability perspective*

A discussion on ‘Theology of Acceptance’ has been put forward by Rev. Jay Hobson in his discourse titled “Justification rules: My heart and conscience: Thought and Happiness”.<sup>434</sup>

He states:

God accepts you for who you are. This type of acceptance theology is creeping into the church and has the potential to be a severe attack on the Gospel. This acceptance theology is a subtle and dangerous shift away from the forgiveness of sins ... Acceptance excuses sin and is self-justifying. Forgiveness destroys sin, and God justifies man. Acceptance overlooks sin. Forgiveness takes care of it.

The reactions from his statement are the following:

Firstly, acceptance is not forgiveness. Forgiveness brings about change, whereas acceptance supports the status quo;

Secondly, Jesus doesn’t accept you, He forgives you and bids you go and sin no more;

Thirdly, with forgiveness, there is first repentance, which recognizes that sin need to be turned away from. And with acceptance, there is no repentance. There is simply that’s alright attitude.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Rev. Jay Hobson, ‘Justification Rules’, <<http://justificationrules.blogspot.com/2009/08/acceptance-theology.html>> [29/01/2012]. My use of this “popular discourse” is to enlighten the confusion between forgiveness and acceptance which seems to link sin and disability. However, in this discussion I bring a positive meaning of theology of acceptance from a disability perspective.

<sup>435</sup> Hebson, ‘Justification Rules’, 2012.

In this discussion the theology of acceptance was based on an understanding of acceptance as self-justification. What was emphasized was the difference between forgiveness and acceptance, in which acceptance maintains the status quo, whereas forgiveness brings about change (repentance).

As I stated earlier in my second chapter, many African Christians believe that, if you are sick or have a disability, your condition is caused by sin or by God's punishment. Therefore, you should confess your sin otherwise you will not receive the God's forgiveness.

However, the theology of acceptance in this study is not about accepting sin. Sin is not a cause of disability. Instead the theology of acceptance in this study is associated with self-discovery in order to determine one's personal value. Terry D. Cooper states, "...We are dependent on God for our self-understanding. The reason for this dependence is that we are "designed" for relationship; first with God and then with each other. Because, we are created, we can only know ourselves most deeply in relationship to our Creator".<sup>436</sup>

Thus the theology of acceptance from a disability perspective entails fundamentally an understanding of oneself. Most people with disabilities experience a denial of their disability condition. Usually they are compared to non-disabled people. Thus they do not value what they have, but despise themselves for what they lack. Therefore, theologies of acceptance from a disability perspective can be linked to Molsberry's statement:

Acceptance is getting to the place where you can value your current condition, whatever it may be, in spite of its limitations. It means incorporating into your self-understanding an honest image of yourself as person with a disability. Having a disability may be a damned nuisance, it may be embarrassing or painful, but it's your life whatever its features, it is a gift from God. Acceptance is being able to say "Thank you. It's enough."<sup>437</sup>

This statement reflects that PWDs often experience a lack of self-understanding. In chapter 4 of this thesis we have seen that PWDs experience fear of disability, lack of

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<sup>436</sup> Cooper, *Sin, Pride & Self-Acceptance*, 2003, 35.

<sup>437</sup> Molsberry, *Blindsided by Grace*, 2004, 75.

confidence, self-doubt and lack of identity. As a consequence, these express significance problems of low self-esteem or even self-contempt in PWDs. This manifests itself, for example, in destructive, hurtful behaviour toward others which is basically a reflection of a negative view of the self. A lack of self-esteem should be transformed into self-acceptance<sup>438</sup>. Therefore, from a disability perspective, a theology of acceptance implies an understanding of one's weakness, and thus one's limits.

Moreover, a theology of acceptance is to acknowledge difference. One of the central reasons why people with a physical impairment in the UK for example still prefer to be called, "disabled", is because society has labeled them as "other". Understanding the concept of "other" (the lack of accepting difference), "involves two essential processes: When we make people "other", we group them together as the objects of our experience instead of regarding them as subjects of experience with whom we might identify, and we see them primarily as symbolic of something else usually, but not always, something we reject and fear and project onto them".<sup>439</sup>

Thus people with disabilities are struggling to effect integration because society does not accept them as they are. Today, people with disabilities still get are wounded by God's ministers who, during healing prayers, fail to show an acceptance of difference.

Therefore, the theology of acceptance involves recognition of the need to value difference which is a process of liberation and hence a source of healing for people with disabilities. I will elaborate on this in the following section.

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<sup>438</sup> Cooper, *Sin, Pride & Self-Acceptance*, 2003, 8.

<sup>439</sup> Wendell, *The Rejected Body*, 1996, 60.

### 8. 3.4. Theology of Healing

#### *A Biblical understanding of healing from a disability perspective*

The Biblical understanding of healing is based on what the Bible says about healing. Whether it concerns, physical, mental or spiritual healing, what matters is to understand how the Holy Scriptures (OT and NT) deal with this issue and what Christians' responses are.

In many passages in the OT God hears the prayers of the Israelites, or enters in to a contract with them, and grants them healing (Exodus 15, 26; 2 King 20, 5). In the NT, some passages enthusiastically promise that prayers will always result in healing, especially for those who believe (Mathew 7, 7-11; Mathew 21, 22; John 15, 7; James 5, 14-15).

However, some passages in the Bible show a failure of healing (Exodus 4, 1-11; 2 Corinthians 12, 8-10). Although these texts appear to describe a failure of physical healing, in reality they are about liberation as self-identities were rebuilt.<sup>440</sup>

Bruce in her article, 'Constructions of Disability (Ancient and Modern): The Impact of Religious Beliefs on the Experience of Disability', refers to Gilbert *et al*, by way of illustrating the difference between "disease", "illness" and "sickness". She notes,

For instance, health professionals use the term "disease" to refer to objective physical conditions with biological causes which are the domain of licensed health care professionals whose aim is to "cure" the disease. "Illness" refers to an individual's experience of disease; it is a subjective, psychological phenomenon in which the individual's perception is one of not feeling well..."Sickness" is the social condition applying to those deemed by others to be ill or diseased."<sup>441</sup>

However, Bruce's understanding of healing in a biblical context is that it was much more holistic, as was the case in ancient Greek and Hebrew contexts where

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<sup>440</sup> Self-identity is to have confidence, a culture of self-acceptance. This refers to the two biblical texts of this study (Exodus 4, 1-17 and 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10) explored in chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>441</sup> Bruce, 'Construction of Disability', 2010.

“healing” was used in relation to personal and social values that are denied in the way that the term “disease” is used in the above quote.

However, the traditional definitions of healing, which Christians adopted, centred on wholeness and holiness, and were based on the image of God through the body of Christ, together with the culture of perfection of body and beauty. These notions have however been contested by some disability scholars, on the ground that they are exclusive and “victimizing ways to people with disabilities”.<sup>442</sup>

In this study, the understanding of healing focuses on Acts 3, 1-11, where the re-reading of this text reveals the inclusion of marginalized people. This healing is holistic, meaning that it goes beyond physical healing.

### ***Theological reflection of healing from disability perspective***

The understanding of healing in the Bible is controversial, as it leads some to think along the lines: Does God heal all disease? How can we explain that God has such unimaginably great power that he can regulate natural events?<sup>443</sup> “Is it always a given that he will say yes to our request for healing? Is it a sure thing, a slam-dunk that miraculous healing is always His first and best option?”<sup>444</sup>

In response to such questions, Eareckson states, “God reserves the right to heal or not – as He sees fit”.<sup>445</sup> This statement reflects the common perception that healing is only physical in nature.<sup>446</sup> Yet, some scholars state that “Jesus ministry was one of healing and not curing”,<sup>447</sup> because the theological definition of healing distinguishes between healing and curing. It says, “Healing refers to the removal of oppressive systems, whereas curing has to do with the physiological reconstruction of the physical body”.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> WCC, ‘A Church of All and for All’, 2003, 20.

<sup>443</sup> Carson, *How Long O Lord*, 2006, 17-18.

<sup>444</sup> Eareckson, *A Place of Healing*, 2010, 41; Schmidt, *Yes, You are healed*, 2007, 8-9; Carson, *How Long O Lord*, 2006, 17-18.

<sup>445</sup> Eareckson, *A Place of Healing*, 2010, 42.

<sup>446</sup> Edmonds, *A Theological Diagnosis*, 2011, 159.

<sup>447</sup> WCC, *A Church of All and for All*, 2003, 40.

<sup>448</sup> Edmonds, *A Theological Diagnosis*, 2011, 159.

According to this reflection, healing would entail liberation from an oppressive system, a restoration of persons who are crushed in their communities.<sup>449</sup>

The re-reading of Acts 3, 1-11 in this study, concurs with a theology of healing as providing liberation and restoration in the sense that the subject, in this case the “lame beggar”, was excluded from society because of his physical condition. This was attributed by the Jews as “impurity”, a social construct. The healing, performed through the apostles, effects the man’s inclusion in society and brings him respect as a human being.

However, the apostles’ approach was twofold. On the one hand, they dealt with this man emotionally by giving him a sense of self-realization and recovery. Doing so, they stimulated his understanding of the situation of oppression which undermined him. They gave him a sense of hope that through physical healing, he could reconstruct himself.

On the other hand, the apostles’ healing gave this man the possibility to join the community, to be connected to his people, who now accepted him as healed and as full human being deserving, a place in society.

I would therefore argue that theology of healing consists in the liberation from self-alienation, and results from mutual social-acceptance.

The implications of the theology of healing, interpreted from a disability perspective, require a holistic understanding, as expressed in the theological statement of healing: “Healing then is an act, event, system and structure which encourages, facilitates God’s empowering, renewing, reconciling and liberating processes in order to reverse the negation of God’s intended good for God’s creation”.<sup>450</sup>

This statement corrects the common narrow understanding that healing must be physical, an understanding that has done much emotional damage to people with

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<sup>449</sup> WCC, *A Church for All and All*, 2003, 20.

<sup>450</sup> WCC, *A Church of All and for All*, 2003, 23.

disabilities. Joni Eareckson, Samuel Kabue, Micheline Kamba and others, would agree with Eiesland “I, like many people with disabilities, [sic] have experienced the negative effects of healing rituals. Healing has been the churchly parallel to rehabilitative medicine”.<sup>451</sup>

Matt Edmonds argues, from the same perspective, “When healing is not treated foremost as an act of inclusion, a diagnosis can quite easily appear to be a more general attitude of negativity towards difference. This, of course is further isolating for the person who already feels that they exist on the margins of society”.<sup>452</sup> Therefore, a theology of healing from a disability perspective has to refer to social inclusion and mutual acceptance.

Many people with disabilities have been hurt and lost their trust in their relationship with God because, in the healing ministry, they were made to expect that healing has to be spectacular and instantaneous. Healing, however, is under God’s management, as Schmidt says, “The healing may be what we prayed for, but on the other hand it may not be what we prayed for. The person is not rejected, but begins a journey of discovery of healing”.<sup>453</sup> This concurs with the commentary of Acts 3, 6, “The expression ‘stand up and walk’ contrasts with the man’s lifetime of sitting and being carried, signs of his uselessness. But, Peter (and John) telling him to stand and walk, gives him hope, and the strength to restart his life as an independent and free human being. Hence, before he could receive physical healing, this man’s soul and mind had to be healed”.<sup>454</sup>

More so, the act of “taking him by the right hand, he helped him (NIV)” shows that healing is a process toward stability. This means that healing is a journey of discovery.

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<sup>451</sup> Eiesland, *Disabled God*, 1994, 17; Edmonds, *A Theological Diagnosis*, 2011, 159; Fritzson and S. Kabue, *Interpreting Disability*, 2004, 89; Eareckson, *A Place of Healing*, 2010, 1 & 23; Kamba, ‘Toward a Theological Programme of Disability Studies in Africa – with special focus on DRC’, in *African Theological Education Handbook*, 2012 (Forthcoming).

<sup>452</sup> Edmonds, *A Theological Diagnosis*, 2011, 160.

<sup>453</sup> Schmidt, *Yes, You are healed*, 2007, 9.

<sup>454</sup> Micheline Kamba, ‘A Church of All and for All: An Invitation to a Round Table, Acts 3, 1-10’, Bible study paper presented at the Methodist Church of Southern Africa’s Annual Conference, 2011, at Lesotho Sun, Maseru.



With regard to this, I would argue that the theology of healing, from a disability perspective, is a theology of hope and discovery.

## **8.4 Conclusion**

Theological reflection on disability in the Bible as presented in this chapter, is aimed at the provision of building stones for a holistic education for people with disabilities.

The reflection focused on four theological themes as mentioned above, drawn from the findings of Bible studies and from interviews conducted with Protestant church leaders, religion lecturers, and Catholic High School pupils at the third level. These theological themes will serve as the basis for the development of a Christian educational programme aimed at people with disabilities.

The four theological themes, based on three main biblical texts (Exodus 4, 1-17; 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10; Acts 3, 1-10), offer new approaches to an understanding of disability and these in turn open the door for self-discovery and recovery, mutual acceptance in the community and liberation for social transformation through education.

The next chapter will conclude this study by making suggestions and recommendations, which could function as instruments for church leaders, teachers and scholars who are involved in working with people with disabilities. The chapter will also provide guidelines for of a curriculum proposed for this programme, called “Diploma in Social Transformation”.

## CHAPTER NINE

### HOLISTIC EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: A CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

#### 9.0 Introduction

This concluding chapter is a challenge to Christian education that provides suggestions and recommendations to respond to the research question of this study: *How can the Bible be used as resource to contribute to a holistic education of people with disabilities?* Through the situation of people with disabilities experienced in DRC, I argued that the image of PWDs has been negatively portrayed because of cultural beliefs about disability. Therefore, I stated those socio-cultural aspects of disability and its effects on PWDs, their families and environment, called for a re-reading of the Bible in a constructive way with the aim of developing a holistic education programme for PWDs. I then analysed and interpreted the Bible studies of the three texts (Exodus 4, 1-17; 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10 and Acts 3, 1-10) conducted with the participants in ways which serve as a source of empowerment and as the means of liberation for PWDs.

The methodology that I have used in this study, “Contextual Bible Study” from a disability perspective, “provides a safe place where people with disabilities can be empowered with resources to resist against oppressive interpretation of the Bible”.<sup>455</sup> I have suggested to Church leaders and religion lecturers as well as to the scholars who have been engaged to work with PWDs that Contextual Bible Study can be used as an instrument for transformation, for the sake of empowering, equipping with resources and enabling PWDs; and as a means to change attitudes so that PWDs are considered human beings like others.

Therefore, this study was guided by the following objectives: a) to contribute to the provision of a holistic education for PWDs; b) to develop a Christian educational programme for PWDs through CBS; and c) to attempt to design and contextualized a programme for PWDs. In

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<sup>455</sup> Micheline Kamba, ‘Exodus 4, 1-17: People with Disabilities in Dialogue with Biblical Scholars’, *New Life Theological Journal*. Vol. 1, No 3 (December, 2011), 53-74.

concluding this study, I will propose recommendations and suggestions for efficiency of the holistic educational programme for people with disabilities. And I will outline a programme in which I set about trying to bring these recommendations to fruition.

## 9.1 Recommendations and suggestions

The key point in this section is to raise the voice of people with disabilities, because the issue of disability in churches has been silent and even scholars do not have much interest to conduct research on it. As Ezamo Murry states, “The Church did not have much agenda of disability either. If the church takes up such mission for the persons with disabilities I am sure it will be centered round sympathy and charity at most...”<sup>456</sup>

Hence, the recommendations and suggestions that I present are addressed to both sides (PWDs and non – disabled church leaders and religion lecturers) in order to correct the ideas that church leaders expressed during the Bible study with them on Acts 3, 1-10. In response to one of the questions, “*What are the normal ways in which we respond to people with disabilities and how does this text challenge us to respond differently?*” They were using terms like “As church we should”, I argued that this kind of language would mean that “dialogue or help would flow only in one direction; there is no exchange in this process of conversion”.<sup>457</sup> Ken Dodgson mentions how Jesus’ attitude was inclusive by nature. He says, “Exclusion is human weakness and inclusion is Christ’s practice”.<sup>458</sup>

Therefore, I strongly believe that “Holistic Education for PWDs” is not only a challenge to church leaders and religion lecturers as it is known that they are Christian education actors, yet it is also and should start with people with disabilities first. This allows me to reiterate my mother’s precious lesson that I mentioned in a footnote in chapter 1, and which reinforces the liberation theology of disability (Eiesland’s statement). The lesson is “Your problem is yours, you have to defend yourself and then the others can support you” (in my mother tongue, Ciluba means, bualu bweba bamba bikole badi hanshi baku kwambuluisha). This goes to the Disability Civil Rights movement’s slogan in the US, “When others speak for

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<sup>456</sup> Ezamo Murry, ‘The Issue of Disability Come of Age’, *New Life Theological Journal*. Vol. 1, No 3 (December, 2011), 35 – 43.

<sup>457</sup> See chapter 6 in the “Analysis and interpretation” section.

<sup>458</sup> Ken Dodgson in Ezamo Murry, ‘The issue of Disability’, 2011, 39.

you, you lose”.<sup>459</sup> This means, liberation must start first with PWDs themselves; and the issue of disability should be discussed inclusively with PWDs as the disability motto says, “Nothing about us without us”.<sup>460</sup>

I should note here that the recommendations and suggestions addressed below are of a preliminary nature, which in future will require more detailed work. However, my research at this point offers a clear indication of what kind of programme is required.

### **9.1.1 Recommendations and suggestions regarding people with disabilities**

The recommendations and suggestions to people with disabilities are addressed in this way: (1) PWDs need to take responsibility for the way they respond to their situations; (2) the recognition of God should lead them to know that they are loved as they are; (3) this acceptance would help them to accept that God is in control of their lives; (4) and this will allow them to accept any help which is provided with dignity.

### **9.1.2 Recommendations and suggestions regarding church leaders**

The recommendations and suggestions are presented as follows: (1) there is a need to introduce CBS as a church programme to do Bible study together with people with disabilities; (2) non-disabled people should see beyond disability and understand that PWDs are human like others; (3) Church leaders should consider that disability is part of God’s creation of diversity; (4) the initiative of training in different fields such computers, reading, writing and sewing is required for PWDs; (5) there is a great need for liberative education for PWDs, which consists of empowering them so that they can perceive their own value and this can help providing emotional healing; (6) spiritual care is needed; church leaders can create an environment of spiritual care, prayer and counseling; (7) in order to promote the spirit of “togetherness” and the inclusion of PWDs in church life, churches could supply assistive devices (wheelchairs, crutches, walking frames, orthotic calipers and special shoes and improved communication devices and accessibility (projector during the sermon, sign

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<sup>459</sup> Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, 1998, 2.

<sup>460</sup> Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, 1998, 2.

language interpreter and specialized computers); and (8) outreach programmes for PWDs should be initiated.

### **9.1.3 Recommendations and suggestions addressed to religion lecturers**

The recommendations and suggestions are presented as follows: (1) schools should not distinguish between children with disabilities and non-disabled children; (2) there should be dialogue between a school's chaplain and children with disabilities in order to encourage them to be effective at school; (3) schools should provide friendly accessibility in their all areas; (4) children with disabilities should be involved in different school activities; (5) the school's chaplain or religion lecturer should approach and learn from people with disabilities, to help PWDs to express themselves and to exercise their gifts and capacities at school; (6) the facilitation of Braille and sign language is required at school; and (7) the issue of disability should not be taboo, it needs to be discussed openly instead.

The participants made the above recommendations and suggestions in order to establish a good relationship between people with disabilities and non-disabled church leaders and religion lecturers.

IMAN'ENDA's teaching, traditional training (see annexure 3) and the model of Contextual Bible study in disability perspective could serve as a model to develop Christian Education holistically. I will now outline an educational programme for a holistic approach that could develop human beings in general, but particularly PWDs. I call this programme "Diplome en Transformation Sociale", in English, "Diploma in Social Transformation" (DST). This would assist in the inclusion and liberation of People with disabilities.

## **9.2 Educational Programme (DST curriculum)**

This section is a follow up of the programme that I have called the Diploma in Social Transformation, DST. The DST programme is an outcome of my research, which responds to one of the questions of this study, namely "How does this study attempt to design and contextualize a programme for PWDs?" The process of conducting CBS from the perspective of PWDs has shaped the curriculum of the diploma. This section gives an outline of a programme that will require further refinement as it is implemented.

### **9.2.1 Governance and Administration**

The DST would constitute a new department, “Department of Social Transformation” in IMAN’ENDA Ministries. It will be led by a Head of Department (HOD), assisted by a department Secretary, who will be in charge of administration and registration. This programme would be governed by IMAN’ENDA Ministries and would be offered in collaboration with Protestant University of Congo, UPC.<sup>461</sup>

### **9.2.2 Length and Weight of the programme**

The “Diploma in Social Transformation” (DST) would be a training-programme of three months. Its workload would consist of 84 hours of class per month (252 hours in three months). Students would be required to: (a) attend classes, (b) do assignments for each course; (c) carry out an internship of 3 weeks in the area of their specialization; and (d) at the end of the programme, submit and defend a dissertation reflecting the breadth and depth of knowledge acquired in class, during research and internship.

### **9.2.3 Programme Integration & Balance**

The DST curriculum (see annexure 5) is made up of eleven (11) core courses. This curriculum is an integration of courses drawn from six different areas of training, namely: (a) Bible and Disability; (b) Law; (c) Management and Development; (d) Public Health; (e) Psycho-sociology; (f) Research and methodology. It seeks to provide a holistic approach to the study of disability in particular and social transformation in general.

### **9.2.4 Academic Requirements for Admission**

Admission in the DST programme would be granted to people holding at least the six years of Secondary School (we call it in DRC Education system “Diplomed’Etat”). Candidates would be subjected to an entry examination and selection. The entry examination would be on the following subjects: French grammar and composition, and general knowledge.

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<sup>461</sup>The DST programme is a component programme of the « Licence en Transformation Sociale » (in English, « Master in Social Transformation, MST) that Rev. Philippe L.J. Emedi and I proposed to UPC as a new department in the School of Theology, with the support of EDAN, ETE and UPC (see the Second Report workshop of LTS).

### **9.2.5. Programme Objective**

The objective of the DST is to help learners to acquire, through a holistic approach, a balanced training that can foster the development of the whole person in general and the person with disability in particular. This objective would be reflected in each course. It will also seek to educate and empower the learners to become agents of social change.

### **9.2.6 Guided Practical Experience**

The DST would incorporate guided practical experience, for example, internship programmes, in order to respond to the vocational needs of the students.

### **9.2.7 Methodology**

The methodology proposed for use in this programme is Contextualization.<sup>462</sup> From a disability perspective, the Contextual Theology will engage in dialogue, an encounter between able-bodied people and people with disabilities for the social inclusion and equality of both groups. In other words, this methodology would engage students of this programme to approach the issue of disability not as a “case” to study, but as a challenge for social transformation.

## **9.3 Conclusion**

This is the starting point of a journey toward in establishing a Disability Studies Programme in a broader way to open a space for experiencing and exploring different capacities for building a just world. The relevance of this programme in general and each individual course in particular have been carefully conceived, designed and planned in such a way that at the end of the training, learners can serve as agents of social transformation and able to respond

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<sup>462</sup> Sarojini Nadar’s statement about the “understanding of intercontextuality in Theological Education” inspired the methodology of this programme. “The process of contextualization must encourage ‘responsible specifying of experience; analyzing context with attention to social, historical, and other relational particularities of ...existence; and shaping theological images and visions appropriate to the context’. This ‘specifying of experience’ is what then gets built not only into the content of contextual theological education, but also into the methods of teaching and the theorizing of such theologies” (Nadar, ‘Contextuality and Intercontextuality’, 129-137, 210).

to the cultural and contextual needs of specific of people with disabilities and the communities.



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## Annexure 1

### INTERVIEWS

#### 1 Interview with Protestant Church leaders and religion lecturers (PCR)

I printed out and distributed 20 questionnaires, and all of these 20 were returned. Thus I worked with 20 respondents who included 15 male and 5 female pastors.

I present the results of this survey in term of percentage (20 respondents represent 100%).

***1. What do you understand by disability? Or what do you think when you meet a person with a disability?***

In their answers to this question, 12 men, or 60% of the respondents, indicated their negative perception of disability in the following expressions:

*I feel pity for him;*

*I see suffering in him;*

*I think he encounters difficulties;*

*I see him as a useless person and the disabled are not able to do anything;*

*I feel chagrin in my heart;*

*I ask myself 'what has happened to him?'*

*Sometimes we see him as a disreputable person;*

*I see him as a forsaken person;*

*I see him as a problematic person;*

*I see him as a killjoy;*

*I see him as a sick person;*

*I am afraid to see him or sit with him, I do believe that it is an accident and one day it would be me.*

Three female and two males pastors, in total 5 persons or 25% of the respondents, revealed their positive perceptions in the following ways:

*I feel compassion for him(WP);*

*I see him as God's creation (WP);*

*I feel I want to give assistance (MP);*

*I experience the need to help(MP);*

*I am touched when I see him (WP).*

Two women pastors and 1 male pastor, 3 persons in total or 15% of the respondents, expressed their neutral perception of disability as follows:

*I feel nothing (WP);*

*I feel normal as everybody (WP);*

*I have nothing to say (MP).*

### **1. How do you refer to a person with a disability in your mother tongue?**

The responses given to this question revealed different concepts of disability in different African cultures and ethnicities within the DRC. In regard to this question church leaders represented different ethnic groups in the DRC.

From the western DRC come the terms:

-“*Nkiadi*”, which means suffering and relates to all kinds of disability;

-“*Bandoki*”, wizards, meaning disability as a problem or a curse;

-“*Nkita*”, a person who is not able to do anything when it concerns a person with physical disability; he does not merit to have been born and presents a problem to his family;

-“*Wabelo, Mbevo*”, meaning a sick person, when it concerns a blind person.



From the capital, Kinshasa the following terminology was reported:

-“*Kizengi, zoba*”, means a mad person, relation to a person with an intellectual disability;

-“*baba*”, refers to a person who is deaf, it implies a person who is unable to speak or a person who does not exist;

-“*Koka*”, denotes a person who is crawling on the ground, and implies that this person is not valuable.

Among the Swahili people in the eastern and north-eastern DRC, the following terms are used:

-“*Muntu ya kitshwa*”, a phrase that relates to a person with mental disability, it means an unreasonable person;

-“*Muntu ya kilema*”, this includes all kinds of disability; it means a person who is nothing.

From the northern DRC come the following expressions:

-“*Ngaka*”, referring to a person in a wheelchair, means a person who is unable to walk;

-“*Moleme*”, is someone who is incomplete.

From the central of DRC the following terminology was reported:

-“*Tshilemenda*”, someone who has a stain on his body, in other words he was bad created or he was destroyed by the devil;

- “*Tshibombo*”, these words refer to a person who is not able to work, he is a burden or a spot on society; a person who is haunted by bad spirits or cursed;

-“*Tshikalaba*”, literally a person who is crawling on the ground, and who is not valuable;

-“*Muntu udine tshitupa thiamubidi*”: a person with disability is like a half person or an incomplete person

**2. How many of you are related to a person with a disability? (This could be your child, sister, brother, cousin or parents)**

In answering this questions, 18 respondents out of 20, or 90%, indicated that they are related to a person with a disability; whereas 2 respondents, or 10% , were not.

**3. How many people with disabilities attend your churches/schools?**

Out of 20 pastors and lecturers, responsible for 14 parishes (women and men) or 70% do receive PWDs in their parishes; whereas, 6 pastors (WP & MP) or 30% they do not have people with disabilities in their parishes. Of 16 respondents (are pastors & lecturers), 6 respondents or 30%, indicated that they do not receive children with disabilities in their schools. However, 10 respondents or 50% do receive children with disabilities in their school (most children were with physical disability).<sup>463</sup>

#### ***4. How do others (society) react to these people with disabilities?***

Out of 20, 10 respondents, representing 50%, revealed the negative reaction of society toward people with disabilities. These are their responses:

- The society sees them as uncompleted persons (MP);*
- People with disabilities have been seen as forsaken people and sometimes they have been mocked (MP);*
- Some people think that they are unwanted persons in the community, that they should not be born (WP);*
- They are rejected and mistrusted by the society; they are treated as bad luck and cursed people (MP);*
- They are listed among poor people (MP);*
- The society sees people with disabilities as beggar (MP);*
- “People with disabilities are scorned by the society (MP);*
- The society sees them as ‘tshanana’ (MP);*
- People with disabilities are conceived as suffering people (MP);*
- They are seen as burden (MP).*

The other 4 respondents or 20% of this group understood the term as referring to the church community. These are some of their comments:

- Church has a supportive role to play(MP);*
- Church has to pray for physical healing as well as spiritual (MP);*
- The Catholic Church takes care of them but not Protestant Church (WP);*
- The Church has a responsibility to help and recuperate people with disabilities (MP).*

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<sup>463</sup> Here I wanted to go further to know the type of disability of these children, as I know that the DRC education system has not yet planned for the inclusion of children with sensory or mental impairments in formal education.

Some of them mentioned my experience in church, 2 respondents or 10% they expressed as follows:

*-Your experience as pastor in church encourages us... (WP);*

*-The Church considers people with disabilities as persons like others and uses them depending on their capacities; your testimony encourages everybody (WP). From this experience, they believe that people with disabilities can do anything whatever they can.*

The remaining 4 respondents, or 20%, commented on the responses of families as part of the society. Their responses were as follows:

*-Some families have hidden their relatives with disabilities (WP);*

*-Some families have neglected their disabled members (MP);*

*-Certain families think that to have a child with a disability is a curse or punishment from God (MP);*

*-Other families are disoriented; sometimes they are confused regarding the situation of their members with disabilities (MP).*

**5. Do you have a programme available for people with disabilities in your church/school? Comment on this.**

Out of 290, 230 respondents, or 79% of the group confirmed that they do not have a programme for people with disabilities. They explained as follows:

*“We are ignorant of this issue, because of lack of information”;*

*“We do not have a programme for people with disabilities, because of financial support”;*

*“There is a lack of good structures in church”;*

*“We do not have a programme for people with disabilities in church/school, because they are minority”;*

*“People with disabilities themselves are not committed in church”;*

*“People with disabilities in my church they are active and involved in the church activities. Why do we do a special programme for them? This would be exclusion and they will be exclusion and they will be labeled”;*

*“We do not have a special programme for people with disabilities, we are afraid of people will label them. Meanwhile they suggested, “This initiative should come from people with disabilities themselves”.*

50 of the respondents representing 17% indicated that they do have a programme for people with disabilities in these terms:

*“Our church supports people with disabilities with our means”;*

*“We support people with disabilities financially, we give them 1000 Fr<sup>464</sup> a month and we supply food and clothes”;*

*“People with disabilities are classed in my church among poor people and each month we provided food and medication”;*

*“We have a specialized school for mental disability”;*

*“We teach them sewing and teach them writing and reading for those who have not had a chance to go to school”;*

*“We have started a project for blind people but we are still in the beginning, waiting for sponsorship”.*

10 other respondents, representing 3% did not respond to this question.

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<sup>464</sup> 1000 Fr is 1000 Congolese Francs which is 2\$

## Annexure 2

### CONSENT FORM FOR HAVING BIBLE STUDY WITH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH LEADERS IN KINSHASA, DRC

**Study Title: Developing a Holistic Educational Programme through Contextual Bible Study with People with Disabilities in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC: IMAN'ENDA as Case Study**

Investigator **Rev. Micheline Kamba Kasongo**

Affiliation **University of KwaZulu-Natal**

#### Purpose

Dear Participant

Thank you for showing interest in participating in this research designed to Church Leaders, to have Bible Study on Acts 3, 1-11, this would engage, make an awareness and empowerment of church leaders to the situation of people with disabilities in church and entire society.

#### Subject Identification

To help you decide whether or not you wish to be a part of this research study, you should know enough about its risks and benefits to make an informed judgment. This consent form gives you detailed information about the research study as follows:

#### Description of Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be involved in Bible study as participant in reading and sharing the Bible together and in small group. I will ask some questions and you will respond in a plenary or in small group. You will be required to share openly your experience and your knowledge to contribute to this research. All information will be recorded and kept for you're the purpose of this research.

## Risk and Benefits

This study involves the giving information about your private life. You will sign a form to agree to confidentiality of the contents of this research.. The Bible study will require 45 minutes to 1 hour of your time as group. During that period, 45minutes to 1 hour of your time will be disrupted. However, I will make sure that the Bible study will be done on time and within the agreed time.

## Confidentiality

As already mentioned, every effort will be made to keep your identity anonymous (if you wish). Any research materials that could provide clues on your identity or jeopardize your safety will be destroyed as soon as the study is completed. While, the research is going on all the research records will be placed in a locked up metal trunk.

As you participate in this research, you will be expected to maintain strict confidentiality about the information you encounter during the study. Under no circumstances are you to reveal to others the opinions, situations, or circumstances of particular people who are participating in this study, either by associating their specific names with such information tacitly indicating their identity to others in other ways. Failure to maintain confidentiality could jeopardize the viability of this study.

I am committed to keeping the identity and all information collected in this study confidential. I will destroy all papers, tapes and note books once the study is completed.

## Voluntary Participation

You will not receive monetary remuneration for attending in this research because the researcher does not want you to feel that she is buying information from you. Participation is a voluntary one. No information will be solicited in exchange for payment in cash or kind. For this reason, you are free to withdraw from participation whenever you feel like. There will be no prejudice held against you for withdrawing.

## Questions

I may have used words that you did not understand in this form. You are welcome to ask questions about anything that you did not understand. Consider the things mentioned in this form carefully before making a decision.

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I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and have decided to participate in the project described above. Its general purpose, the particulars of involvement and possible hazards and inconveniences has been explained to my satisfaction. My signature also indicates that I have received a copy of this consent form.

For any enquiries you may contact:

Reverend Micheline Kamba Kasongo

School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics

### Annexure 3

Kinshasa, le 6 Janvier 2009

Rev. Micheline KAMBA KASONGO  
13, rue de Busu-melo  
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République Démocratique du Congo

Au coordinateur National du  
Département de l'Education de  
L'Eglise du Christ au Congo

Concerne: **Recherche sur le programme de l'Education.**

Cher Révérend Lala,

Paix et grâce de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ vous soient accordées et vous accompagnent toute cette année 2009.

Je viens par la présente solliciter l'espace de faire mes recherches sur le programme de l'Education.

Dans le cadre de mes recherches doctorales sur comment développer un programme d'éducation intégrale a travers la contextualization de la Bible auprès des personnes vivant avec handicap, j'aimerais avoir une ou deux séances d'études bibliques avec les aumôniers de l'école secondaires et les professeurs de religion. C'est ainsi que je vous serais reconnaissante si vous pourriez insérer cette étude biblique dans votre programme de formation que vous auriez planifié ce mois de Janvier 2009.

Je voudrais vous rassure que les résultats et les implications de ces recherches auraient un grand impact et d'une importance considérable dans le programme d'éducation chrétienne ainsi que dans le programme du cours de religion.

Je vous assure que toutes les données et réponses que je récolterais seront bien gardées et ne serviraient que pour mes analyses.

Je vous serais reconnaissante si vous pourriez me confirmer votre disponibilité durant ce mois de janvier.

Veillez agréer mes vœux les meilleurs pour cette année 2009.

Rev. Micheline K. K



## Annexure 4

Kinshasa, le 20 October 2008

Rev. Micheline KAMBA KASONGO  
13, rue de Busu-melo  
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Tel. +243 814460182  
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République Démocratique du Congo

Au coordinateur National de Ministère IMAN'ENDA/Kinshasa  
Reverende Clementine Wapa Ilunga  
13, rue de Busu-melo C/Kasa-vubu

Concerne: **Recherche sur le programme de l'Education.**

Cher Révérende Clémentine,

Paix et grâce de notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ vous soient accordées et vous accompagnent dans toute vos activités.

Je viens par la présente solliciter l'espace de faire mes recherches sur le programme de l'Education.

Dans le cadre de mes recherches doctorales sur comment développer un programme d'éducation intégrale a travers la contextualisation de la Bible auprès des personnes vivant avec handicap, j'aimerais avoir une ou deux séances d'études bibliques avec les membres du Ministère IMAN'ENDA dans une retraite d'un weekend.

Je voudrais vous rassure que les résultats et les implications de ces recherches auraient un grand impact et d'une importance considérable dans le programme d'éducation chrétienne ainsi que dans le programme de la formation du Ministère.

Je vous assure que toutes les données et réponses que je récolterais seront bien gardées et ne serviraient que pour mes analyses.

Je vous serais reconnaissante si vous pourriez me confirmer votre disponibilité durant le mois de janvier.

Veillez agréer mes salutations distinguées

Rev. Micheline K. K

## Annexure 5

### Outline of IMAN'ENDA's teaching

*(Enseignement d'IMAN'ENDA)*

IMAN'ENDA uses traditional training for its members who are people with disabilities and apparently able-bodied people. This training usually takes place during weekends. The principal themes are:

#### **1"Le concept d'IMAN'ENDA" (the notion of IMAN'ENDA in English), Acts 3, 6:**

*This course raises many subjects such as the situation of PWDs in families, society, and the church. It deals with society's view of disability and the common reactions of pity and compassion.*

#### **2. "Acceptation de soi" (self-acceptance in English), 2 Corinthians 12, 8-12**

*The course raises the notion of suffering, healing, weakness and self-discovery. It helps members to a self-discovery and the recognition that they are God's creatures.*

#### **3."L'humanite de la personne avec handicap" (l'humanity of a person with disability, in English)**

*This course reveals the situation of oppression of PWDs in society and helps members to recognise their rights and duties. It helps members to know the way legal system functions.*

A special session to create awareness of disability in different churches and training centres is part of the teaching programme. Testimonies from IMAN'ENDA members are used during this activity.

## **Annexure 6**

### **A Curriculum for Diploma in Social Transformation (DST)**

#### **1. Introduction of the Bible study (OT & NT)**

##### Disability and Bible

*The Bible has been used, rightly or wrongly, to support many forms of oppression, etc. This course's aim is to help students, through a sound understanding of the Bible, to develop a re-reading which is relevant and contextual.*

##### Ministry and Counselling:

*This course will examine theological perspectives, and critical issues relating to people with disabilities and their families. It will focus on counselling both able-bodied (apparently able-bodied) people and people with disabilities.*

##### Holistic Mission

*This course will help students understand the Missio Dei in its totality, which is not only the responsibility of the church, but also that of the government. This course will address the question of Mission as both the great commission (Matthew 28: 18 – 20), the great commandment (Mark 12: 28 – 31), and as outlined in Jesus' ministry plan (Luke 4: 18 – 21).*

#### **2. Law**

##### Introduction of the Law

*This course is a general introduction to Law and legal thought, its place or importance in human society. It aims at helping students to understand how the legal system functions.*

##### Human Rights

*This course is an examination of Congolese Law of Human Rights as an instrument of protection of persons with disability, including foreseeable sanctions in the event of these rights being disregarded. One section of this course will focus on Comparative Law for People with Disabilities.*

#### **3. Management and Development**

##### Introduction to Management and Development

*Human society operates on the basis of well-defined economic principles. This course will therefore seek to introduce students to these principles: it will teach them theories and techniques of management, and introduce them to the principles of social development.*

#### **4. Psycho-sociology**

Sociology and Culture

*Differences between individuals and groups of people are often over time established into norms, traditions and cultures, which condition their social behaviour. This course will help students to understand social and cultural barriers that exist among people, and will consider theories of barriers that have been developed and their consequences.*

Disability and Social Transformation

*This course has two pre-requisites, namely: Sociology and Culture of Disability and Psycho-social Barriers. It looks at disability from a holistic perspective and teaches also the theories and principles of social transformation.*

#### **5. Public Health**

Public Health

*This course is an introduction to human anatomy and physiology. It will focus on the function of human body. It will help students to know how human body operates, networks in order to correct stereotypes of stigmatization found in human attitude of behaviour.*

#### **6. Research and Methodology**

Social Sciences and Research Methods

*This course will help students to: (1) enlarge their knowledge of research methodology; (2) evaluate existing researches; and (3) participate in the development and critique of research projects and their results. It will also seek to help students write their thesis projects. This course will encourage the 'process of contextualization' in focusing on the experience of people on the ground, and will connect to the realities of people, in order to help the student to be more effective in research.*

## Annexure 7

### Curriculum for Master in Social of Transformation

<b>FIRST YEAR (LICENCE 1)</b>	
<b>First Semester</b>	<b>Second Semester</b>
<b>Theology &amp; Ministry</b>	
<p><b>Introduction to Old Testament</b></p> <p><i>This course is not only an introduction to OT, but also a survey of OT books through its main subdivisions. It will help students to acquire the needed knowledge on the inspiration of the Bible, its authors (divine and human), its audiences and its message. It is a pre-requisite for the course Disability, Bible and Theology for non-theologian students.</i></p>	<p><b>History of Christian Thought</b></p> <p><i>Theology and Christian Thought are not fixed knowledge, but dynamic notions. This course will be a journey through the development of Christian Thought and the positive and negative influences Theology has faced beside the history.</i></p>
<p><b>Introduction to New Testament</b></p> <p><i>This course is not only an introduction to NT, but also a survey of NT books through its main subdivisions. It will help students to acquire the needed knowledge on the inspiration of the Bible, its authors (divine and human), its audiences and its message. Like Introduction to OT, it is a pre-requisite for the course Disability, Bible and Theology for non-theologian students.</i></p>	<p><b>Disability, Bible and Theology</b></p> <p><i>The Bible was used rightly or wrongly to support many forms of oppression, etc. This course's aim is to help students develop a re-reading which is relevant and contextual through a sound understanding of the Bible,. (Students with theological background will have direct access. Students without a theology background will have access only after completing both Introduction to OT and NT)</i></p>
<b>Law</b>	
<p><b>Introduction to Law</b></p> <p><i>This course is a general introduction to Law and legal thought, its place or importance in human society. It aims at helping students to understand how the legal system functions.</i></p>	<p><b>Human Rights</b></p> <p><i>This course is an examination of Congolese Law of Human Rights as an instrument of protection of persons with disability, including foreseeable sanctions in the event of these rights being disregarded. One section of this course will focus on</i></p>

	<i>Comparative Law for People with Disabilities.</i>
<p>Ethics and Social Law</p> <p><i>This course introduces ethical and legal concepts and the challenges of disability. It aims at understanding the attitude (feelings and behaviour) of people with disability. Students will look not only into principles that guide the ethical and legal choices, but also the practical implications of those principles and choices. Subjects to be treated include: personal responsibility, assisted suicide, proposed directives, educational inclusion, parenting, marriage, medical and ethical issues, etc.</i></p>	
<b>Management &amp; Development</b>	
	<p>Introduction to Management &amp; Development</p> <p><i>Human society operates on the basis of well-defined economic principles. This course will therefore seek to introduce students to these principles: it will teach them theories and techniques of management and introduce them to the principles of social development.</i></p>
<b>Public Health</b>	
<p>Public Health</p> <p><i>This course is an introduction to human anatomy and physiology. It will focus on the functioning of the human body. It will help students to know how human body operates, connects itself, in order to correct stereotypes of stigmatization found in human attitude of behavior.</i></p>	
<b>Psycho-sociology</b>	
Sociology and Culture of Disability	Psycho-social Barriers

<p><i>Differences between individuals and groups of people are often established over time into norms, traditions and cultures, which condition their social behavior. This course will help students to understand social and cultural barriers that exist among people, theories of barriers that have been developed and their consequences.</i></p>	<p><i>In this course, students will pursue an in-depth study on how value is added to social roles. An emphasis will be put on issues of “wounds” and healing of wounds, the impact of the theory of social roles, understanding the impact of intervention, and on the attitudes, as well as the perceptions of devalued people.</i></p>
<p><b>Research</b></p>	
<p><b>Social Science Research Methods</b></p> <p><i>This course will help students to: (1) enlarge their knowledge of research methodology; (2) evaluate existing researches; and (3) participate in the development and critique of research projects and their results. It will also seek to help students write their thesis projects.</i></p>	
<p><b>SECOND YEAR (LICENCE 2)</b></p>	
<p><b>First Semester</b></p>	<p><b>Second Semester</b></p>
<p><b>Theology &amp; Ministry</b></p>	
<p><b>Ministry and Counseling</b></p> <p><i>This course will examine theological perspectives, and critical issues relating to people with disabilities and their families. It will focus on counseling of both able-bodied (apparently able-bodied) people and people with disabilities.</i></p>	
<p><b>Holistic Mission</b></p> <p><i>This course will help students understand the Missio Dei in its totality, which is not only the responsibility of the church, but also that of the government. This course will address the question of Mission as both the great commission (Matthew 28: 18 – 20), the great commandment (Mark 12: 28 – 31), and as</i></p>	

<p><i>outlined in Jesus' ministry plan (Luke 4: 18 – 21).</i></p>	
<p><b>Law</b></p>	
<p><b>Policies and Disability</b></p> <p><i>This course will help students acquire knowledge in measures of social accompaniment. It will have three emphases: (1) theoretical questions (how societies understand and create social barriers or handicaps); (2) individual and corporate responsibilities; and (3) government policies dealing with people with disabilities and their rights and obligations.</i></p>	
<p><b>Management &amp; Development</b></p>	
<p><b>Development Projects</b></p> <p><i>Students are required to complete the course Introduction to Management and Development before taking this one. This course is an in-depth study of theories and techniques of development. It helps students know how to identify social problem, and to conceive, implement, manage and evaluate a social development project.</i></p>	
<p><b>Psycho-sociology</b></p>	
<p><b>Disability and Social Transformation</b></p> <p><i>This course has two pre-requisites, namely: Sociology and Culture of Disability and Psycho-social Barriers. It looks at disability from a holistic perspective and teaches the theories and principles of social transformation.</i></p>	
<p><b>Research</b></p>	
<p><b>Theories and Techniques of Publication</b></p> <p><i>Knowledge acquired is dead if it is not well conceived, elaborate, articulated and transmitted. In this course, students are</i></p>	<p><b>Thesis</b></p> <p><i>The written dissertation must demonstrate the depth of knowledge the student has acquired throughout his/her training. The</i></p>



<p><i>exposed to theories, techniques and procedures of publication of scientific works. This course culminates in helping students transform their dissertation into a publishable work (book or article).</i></p>	<p><i>dissertation must be an original work, done individually, but under the guidance of a supervisor. The thesis is submitted, evaluated and defended before a jury.</i></p>
<p><b>Practicum</b></p>	
	<p><b>Internship or Project</b>  <i>Every student will do a professional internship evidenced by a report of this internship, which includes the approach taken throughout the trainee's professional practicum, the knowledge acquired both in school and during the internship.</i></p>