

The 'Disabled God':

An exploration and critique of the image of Jesus Christ as the 'disabled God' as presented by Nancy Eiesland



Jennifer Anne Cox

(BSc, Grad Dip Ed, BTh)

This thesis is presented as part of the requirement for the Degree Bachelor of Theology with Honours at Murdoch University.

Submitted July 2009

COPYRIGHT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I acknowledge that a copy of this thesis will be held at the Murdoch University Library.

I understand that, under the provisions of s51.2 of the Copyright Act 1968, all or part of this thesis may be copied without infringement of copyright where such a reproduction is for the purposes of study and research.

This statement does not signal any transfer of copyright away from the author.

Signed:

Full Name of Degree: Bachelor of Theology with Honours

Thesis Title: 'The 'Disabled God': an exploration and critique of the image of Jesus Christ as the 'disabled God' as presented by Nancy Eiesland'

Author: Jennifer Anne Cox (Cert IV TAA, BSc, Grad Dip Ed, BTh).

Year: 2009

Declaration

I declare that the material in this thesis is my own account of the research carried out by myself during the Honours year.

Signed:.....

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my supervisor, Dr Alexander Jensen who has helped me throughout the last twelve months, and who has been both as encouraging and as pedantic as necessary.

Thanks to my husband, Peter who has allowed me to spend so much time studying and writing. Thanks also to my children Isobel, Anastasia, David and Wesley who have learned to ignore my ramblings while I write.

Lastly, thanks to my colleagues and friends: Dr John Yates who helped me to choose a topic that was personal to me, and Chris Johnstone whose encouragement has enabled me to get this far.

Abstract:

This thesis expands on and critiques the image of the ‘disabled God’ as presented by Nancy Eiesland in *The Disabled God*. Eiesland posits that the risen Jesus is the ‘disabled God’ because he still bears the wounds of crucifixion. This thesis takes a different approach to Eiesland by utilising evangelical theology in conversation with writers of theology of disability. It contains four chapters based around the kenosis, life, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Triune God is not essentially disabled but has chosen to take on disability, in Christ. The second person of the Trinity freely became incarnate and, in taking on human frailty, he subjected himself to the possibility of experiencing disability. Jesus did not experience disability during his ministry but he did minister to persons with disabilities. Jesus brought healing in its various forms – physical, emotional, social, and spiritual - to persons with disabilities. This healing was within the context of the kingdom of God and, therefore, will not be completed until the *eschaton*. It is on the cross where Jesus fully identified with persons with disabilities by taking on physical disability and by sharing some of the experiences of persons with intellectual disabilities – loss of personhood, poverty, loneliness, shame, and stigma. The fact that Jesus is the ‘disabled God’ brings a change in the Godhead in that disability is now part of “the history of God”. It provides a theodic function and changes the meaning of weakness. It also gives dignity, status, healing, comfort, and hope to persons with disabilities. The final chapter explains why the resurrected Christ is not disabled by exploring the meaning of his wounds and the nature of the resurrection body. Jesus Christ as the ‘disabled God’ has radically identified with person with disabilities, both physical and intellectual.

Contents

Introduction	7
Introduction	7
Literature Review	8
<i>Eiesland</i>	8
<i>Cooper</i>	9
Aims of This Thesis	10
Epistemology and Methodology	12
Terminology	13
Limitations on the Breadth of This Discussion	14
Structure	15
Chapter 1 Kenosis	17
Introduction	17
Does God Suffer by Necessity?	18
The Incarnation Results from the Free Decision of God	20
What Does it Mean for God to Empty Himself?	22
The First Step towards Becoming the ‘Disabled God’	25
The Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever	26
Conclusion	27
Chapter 2 Life of Jesus	29
Introduction	29
The Kingdom of God	30
The Nature of Healing	33
The Healings of Jesus	35
Connections to the Cross and the Resurrection	40
Conclusion	44

Chapter 3 The Cross	45
Introduction	45
Divine Freedom and the Intentionality of the Cross	45
Jesus Took on Disability on the Cross	48
Intellectual Disability and the Cross	55
Consequences of the Disabled God	59
The Cross and the Trinity	60
Theodicy	63
Ability in Weakness	65
The Effect of the ‘Disabled God’ on Persons with Disabilities	68
Conclusion	72
Chapter 4 Resurrection	74
Introduction	74
Eiesland	74
The Wounds of the Resurrected Christ	75
The Resurrection Body	77
Jesus’ Resurrection Body	80
The Exalted State of the Resurrected Christ	82
Is the Risen Jesus the ‘Disabled God’?	83
Implications for Hope	84
Conclusion	85
Conclusion	87
Conclusions of This Thesis	87
Questions Raised by This Thesis	88
Implications of This Thesis	89
Bibliography	92

Introduction

Introduction

This thesis aims to develop the image of the ‘disabled God’ and to give this a solid theological underpinning in order to provide a contextualised Christology, specifically to benefit persons with disabilities. My interest in theology of disability was sparked by the fact that two of my children have (different) disabilities. My search for a theology of disability led me to a book by Nancy Eiesland entitled *The Disabled God: A Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Nancy Eiesland presents the idea of the risen Jesus as the ‘disabled God’, an image which she believes can be liberating for persons with disabilities. Eiesland’s image of the ‘disabled God’ is both valuable and problematic. My aim is utilise evangelical theology, in critical interaction with Eiesland, to extend the image of the ‘disabled God’ and to provide it with a stronger theological underpinning than Eiesland provides.

To provide the preliminaries to the discussion of the ‘disabled God’ this introduction will begin with an overview of the literature which expounds the image of the ‘disabled God’. The two key writers are Nancy Eiesland and Burton Cooper, both of whose ideas are summarised below. Following the literature review I set forth the aims of this thesis, the epistemology and methodology, relevant terminology and the limitations I have set on the present discussion. Lastly, the structure of the thesis is outlined.

Literature Review

Eiesland

Nancy Eiesland wrote *The Disabled God: A Liberatory Theology of Disability* (1994) as her masters thesis in theology. As a person with a physical disability, Eiesland was heavily involved in the disability rights movement and *The Disabled God* is her attempt to construct a Liberation Theology of disability in order to bring a change to the way in which persons with disabilities are treated within the Church.

Eiesland's goal in *The Disabled God* is to change the Church's perceptions of persons with disabilities and to offer transforming theology and practices for relating to persons with disabilities. She contends that the best model for understanding disability is the minority group model. The problem is not individual impairment but societal stigmatisation and marginalisation of persons with disabilities. Even the Church has denied access and inclusion to persons with disabilities.

The central chapter of *The Disabled God* contains Eiesland's image of the 'disabled God'. This image of Jesus as the 'disabled God' is intended to be liberatory because symbol provides both a basis for identity and a way to change people's thinking. Eiesland contends that this new symbol must replace other Christian symbols, which are oppressive to persons with disabilities. Eiesland (1994:99-100) gives her understanding of the 'disabled God':

In the resurrected Jesus Christ, [the disciples] saw not the suffering servant for whom the last and most important word was tragedy and sin, but the disabled God who embodied both impaired hands and feet and pierced side and imago Dei.

This image is drawn from the appearance of the resurrected Jesus in Luke 24:36-39, in which he shows the disciples his wounds. The ‘disabled God’ incorporates “ordinary life into God”.

In presenting his impaired hands and feet to his startled friends, the resurrected Jesus is revealed as the disabled God....The disabled God is not only the One from heaven but the revelation of true personhood, underscoring the reality that full personhood is fully compatible with the experience of disability (100).

Eiesland’s work is commendable in its attempt to bring about justice, inclusion, and dignity for persons with disabilities. However, *The Disabled God* suffers from an epistemology which takes the experiences of persons with disabilities as the primary source for theology of disability. Eiesland also regards the Bible in an ambivalent light, contending that both Christian theology and the Bible “have often been dangerous for persons with disabilities”. These assumptions are liable to result in flawed conclusions. Indeed Eiesland’s placement of the ‘disabled God’ within the resurrection of Jesus poses some problems as we will see.

Cooper

Burton Cooper has also put forward a version of the ‘disabled God’ in his 1992 article ‘The Disabled God’. Cooper begins with defining God’s perfections, not in terms of metaphysics, but christologically. The perfection of Jesus was expressed in his life of justice, compassion, and forgiveness, and in the cross. This suffering love can be articulated in the term ‘disabled God’. Cooper then constructs a theodicy using some ideas from Process Theology. Accordingly, God should not be seen as all powerful. Instead, God seeks to draw out of evil “consequences which are

compassionate, creative, and redemptive”. He needs to suffer in order understand the reality of those who suffer.

Cooper goes on to envisage the hope which is possible for persons with disabilities. He likens eternal life to being metaphorically part of God’s spiritual body. People are shaped by their experiences and persons with disabilities will not be disconnected, in eternity, from the history of disability in their lives. Cooper concludes that when persons with disabilities enter into God’s eternal life they add to the divine richness of God’s being and that of all other beings.

Cooper helpfully attempts to look at God in a christological fashion and presents hope for persons with disabilities within his conception of the kingdom of God. His statement that “God could not be God without suffering” raises the question of whether God suffers by necessity or by free choice. Cooper’s conception of the ‘disabled God’ is weakened by his insistence that God is metaphorically disabled.

Aims of This Thesis

The image of the ‘disabled God’ is a very significant image and one which should be pursued to a greater degree than has been done so far. Eiesland’s idea is presented in only two pages and Cooper’s article is only short. Much more can and should be said about Jesus Christ crucified as the ‘disabled God’. I aim to consider the image of the ‘disabled God’ in greater depth than either Eiesland or Cooper. I will attempt to build a biblical understanding of this idea, through the use of

evangelical theology in conversation with theology of disability, by examining the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

The primary aim of this thesis is to give a theological underpinning to Eiesland's image of the 'disabled God'. I will interact with Cooper's theology also, but I choose to work primarily with Eiesland because her work is more based on the work of Jesus than is Cooper's.

A theological underpinning of the 'disabled God' must include the whole incarnation. I have chosen to include the kenosis, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as a basis for understanding the 'disabled God' because, according to T.F. Torrance (1998:47-48), Jesus did not begin the redemption of humanity on the cross. His entire life, from the outset of the incarnation, is redemptive as he engaged the forces of darkness and transformed human nature by his adoption of that nature in himself. The person and work of Christ are inseparable.

Eiesland is explicit in saying that her work only deals with physical disability. Cooper sees the 'disabled God' as largely metaphorical. I have attempted to demonstrate that Jesus was literally the 'disabled God'. I have also attempted to expand the framework of the 'disabled God' to include intellectual disability.

The image of the 'disabled God' needs to be centred on the cross rather than the resurrection, where Eiesland has located it. Putting the centre of the 'disabled God' in the resurrection leaves no hope for healing for persons with disabilities. Placing the locus of the 'disabled God' at the cross means that there is not only hope for the future but comfort and empowering in the present for persons with disabilities.

Epistemology and Methodology

This thesis aims to explore the image of the ‘disabled God’ in a way which is consistent with the biblical record. The epistemology which I utilise is different to both Cooper and Eiesland. An evangelical approach begins with the assumption that scripture is true in its entirety. I have assumed that the scripture faithfully records the life and teachings of Jesus. As a result there is no need to justify the use of scripture in forming a theology of disability. My approach is to take the experience of persons with disabilities seriously while attempting to interpret those experiences in the light of scripture.

Evangelical theology does not usually engage with ideas of social justice so authors who write theology of disability are frequently not evangelical. What this means for my methodology is that I have needed to read and adapt common themes of evangelical theology relating to the life of Christ and apply this to disability, while interacting with authors of theology of disability plus others who have interpreted suffering theologically.

Throughout this thesis I have assumed several things about disability. Firstly, I have assumed that having a disability involves some kind of suffering, whether this is discrimination, pain, frustration due to inability, or shame and stigma. Frequently disability writers try to downplay the issue of personal suffering for persons with disabilities, preferring to see disability as a matter of discrimination or lack of accessibility. While not denying that many difficulties for persons with disabilities

are socially imposed, having a disability also involves some personal suffering, which could not be removed even if no discrimination or access issues existed.

Like Moltmann (1974:7) I have taken the cross as the centre from which Christian theology must unfold. Although Jesus' suffering on the cross lasted only approximately six hours it is considered to have eternal significance for humanity. I will argue that Jesus is the 'disabled God' because of his taking on disability during his passion. Although Jesus only experienced disability for a few hours I aim to demonstrate that this experience has eternal significance.

Terminology

I will utilise the disability terminology employed by Eiesland (1994:27). "Persons with disabilities" is the term most often used by the disability rights movement to designate those who have disabilities. I have followed this practice because this term is beneficial in that it means that people who have a disability are not defined solely by that disability. Also, Political Correctness aside, there is no value in offending people needlessly. "Persons with intellectual disabilities" is used to designate people who have an intellectual rather than a physical disability.

Eiesland (1994:27) defines impairment as "an abnormality or loss of physical form or function... 'Disability' describes the consequences of the impairment, that is, an inability to perform some task or activity considered necessary." Hudson and Radler (2009) write that intellectual disability is characterised by "low cognitive functioning and associated deficiencies in adaptive behaviour (skills of daily living)".

Limitations on the Breadth of This Discussion

There is much more that could be said than I am able to say within the parameters of this thesis. Firstly, although mental illness is often considered to be a form of disability¹, I will not be attempting to include mental illness within the framework of the ‘disabled God’. Mental illness as disability needs to be given due consideration in a larger research paper. Secondly, sin can be considered a disabling condition for all people in that it causes dysfunction in relationships and in people’s capacity to live whole and holy lives. This topic has been adequately covered by others (e.g. M. Jenson 2006; Pannenberg 1985). Thirdly, the relationship between sin and disability will not be explored because this relationship is too complex and broad to be dealt with in any adequate fashion within the space available.

The ‘disabled God’ is a small part of the whole picture of the redemption which was wrought by Jesus Christ for the whole of humanity. The major focus of the New Testament is salvation from sin and reconciliation with God. The image of Jesus as the ‘disabled God’ is intended to demonstrate the way in which God has identified with persons with disabilities because such people face a particular set of difficulties which other people do not. The title ‘disabled God’ is in no way intended to dominate or displace the existing evangelical understanding of God. Instead it is intended as an extension of evangelical theology which is particularly applicable to disability. This is in contrast to Eiesland (1994:91-92), who contends that the symbol

¹ For example the World Health Organisation notes that “depression is among the leading causes of disability worldwide” (WHO 2009).

of the 'disabled God' must replace all other symbols of Christ in order to be truly liberating for person with disabilities.

Structure

The thesis is structured into four chapters. Chapter one speaks of the freedom of God and the kenosis of the Son of God. Suffering is not an eternal part of God's nature but is possible only because of the kenosis. God freely chose to become incarnate and thereby to enter into a state in which disability is a real possibility. Jesus Christ, as true God and true man, took upon himself the human condition, including the possibility of experiencing disability, and thus began the journey to becoming the 'disabled God'.

Chapter two looks at the life of Jesus, his ministry to and relationship with persons with disabilities. In his ministry Jesus healed many persons with disabilities. These healings took place within the context of the coming of the kingdom of God. Healing has many facets - physical, emotional, relation and social - and Jesus healed in each of these ways. Even in his life Jesus had begun to identify with persons with disabilities. His healing of persons with disabilities pointed towards his cross and resurrection.

Chapter three is the central chapter. This chapter examines the passion of Christ. Jesus went to the cross both intentionally and in accordance with the plan of God. It was on the cross that Jesus became physically disabled and shared some of the experiences of persons with intellectual disabilities, and thus became the 'disabled God' in actuality. Chapter three also considers the implications of the 'disabled

God'. Because Jesus has become the 'disabled God' death and disability have become part of the "history of God". The image of the 'disabled God' provides a theodicy for people with disabilities and a new way of understanding weakness. The 'disabled God' can also have an effect on people with disabilities.

The final chapter examines the 'disabled God' in his resurrected state. This chapter aims to show that the resurrected Jesus is not disabled. The reasons for the resurrected Christ still having wounds are examined, then the nature of the resurrection body is explored. Lastly the matter of hope is discussed.

Kenosis

Introduction

In the Introduction I described the image of Jesus Christ as the ‘disabled God’ as presented by Nancy Eiesland. Eiesland does not provide a strong theological foundation for her concept and what she does provide is problematic from an evangelical perspective. The purpose of this thesis is to provide an appropriate biblical foundation for the concept of the ‘disabled God’. This chapter begins the process in explaining how Jesus Christ can be the ‘disabled God’. It focuses on the incarnation of the Son of God and explores five aspects of the incarnation in relation to disability: a framework for understanding the suffering of God; the freedom of God in the incarnation; what it means for the Son of God to empty himself in the incarnation; the incarnation as the first step towards becoming the ‘disabled God’; and, finally, the beginning of the ‘disabled God’ before the creation of the world.

It is not possible to begin to talk about the ‘disabled God’ without talking about the God who emptied himself and took upon himself the human condition. A God who does not embrace the totality of the human experience cannot speak as one who has shared the experience of persons with disabilities. But such a God is not hard to find because the testimony of the New Testament is that God, in Christ, did empty himself and become human, and experience the human condition, even to the extent of suffering and death.

Does God Suffer by Necessity?

While it is true that the title 'disabled God' cannot be applied to a God who has not suffered disability, it is important to take care in framing an understanding of God's suffering. The first issue which needs to be addressed is the question of whether suffering is an ontological necessity for God; that is, does God suffer eternally? This issue, according to Weinandy (2000:1-5), has only arisen over approximately the last century. Previous to this God was believed to be impassible. In the forefront to the argument for the suffering of God is Moltmann, who believes that a God who does not suffer is not worthy of being called God. In similar vein the Japanese theologian Kitamori argued that a suffering God is the only means of coming to grips with suffering in the world.

The biblical record provides good reasons for considering the possibility of God suffering. Weinandy (2000:8- 9) recounts the reasons behind this present emphasis. The Old Testament presents a God who was intimately concerned with the nation Israel, even grieving over their enslavement in Egypt. He is a God of faithful love (*hesed*) as well as wrath because of Israel's sin. Thus it is argued that as a God of love, who is involved with real people within history, he must, by necessity, suffer. Love is the basis of God's suffering. Moltmann (1974:230) argues that a God who is unable to suffer in any way is also unable to love. Love includes within itself the possibility of sharing in the suffering of the other.

The fact of the incarnation results in even stronger arguments for the suffering of God. Moltmann (1974:234) argues that the divine nature of Christ suffered and

even died on the cross. Fiddes (1988:31) claims, “God suffers on the cross in *oneness* with the person of Christ; God suffers *eternally* in the cross; God is most *Godlike* in the suffering of the cross.” Alan Torrance (1989:364-365) concurs that it is correct to begin the discussion of God’s suffering by considering the person of Christ and his suffering, but his conclusions are different.

Furthermore, Alan Torrance (1989:365-366) argues that it is valid neither to use the ‘two natures’ argument, and conclude that only the human nature of Christ suffered, nor to fuse the two natures and eternalise suffering within God, making divine suffering an ontological necessity. It is equally inappropriate to conclude that because God is love such love must participate in the suffering of the beloved. While there may be some romantic appeal in having God suffer eternally, this would require suffering to be ontologically part of God’s being just as love is. Hence, when human beings are glorified - eschatologically - they would participate in this part of God’s essential nature and as such they would forever suffer.

The notion of God suffering eternally would have been anathema to the early Church. Gavriilyuk (2004:69-70) explains that the early Church fathers, in their theology of martyrdom, did not accept that God suffered by necessity. They understood that the second person of the Trinity was impassible, suffering only during the time of his earthly ministry and death (cf. Rom 8:18). Thus the early martyrs believed that, because of participating in the suffering of the earthly Jesus, they would similarly participate in the glory of the ascended Christ, in whom all suffering comes to an end. As Alan Torrance (1989:366) concludes, rather than

suffering being seen as necessary to God, the suffering of Christ must be seen as God's "free act of love".

Therefore, in addressing the question of whether God suffers by necessity, I conclude that suffering is not eternally part of God in the way that love is essentially part of his nature. It is not necessary to deny that God suffers but only to affirm that for God any suffering is a free act of love. God is not compelled to suffer but he chooses to do so in Christ. An eternally suffering God cannot provide hope to those who suffer disability in the present.

The Incarnation Results from the Free Decision of God

It has been noted above that God does not essentially suffer but suffers by a "free act of love". This section will address the freedom of God to become a human being in order to suffer and to experience disability. The following discussion relies heavily upon Karl Barth's conception of God's freedom.

What must be emphasised, what cannot in fact be overemphasised, is that God is free. According to Holmes (2007:44-47), Barth begins his discussion on the freedom of God by noting that God is free to be himself without any need for anything which is other than himself. God is neither constrained by nor does he require anything which is external to his being. God's actions towards humanity are *free*; they are not a reaction to creaturely actions. Indeed he has no need of an object to love outside of himself because "God loves himself, (and the creature), in and through himself" (47). God is eternally love towards himself and therefore when he loves creatures this love is free.

Consequently, the incarnation, according to Barth (CD I.2:134-135, 151, 160; IV.1:179), is a free act of God, necessary only in that it is the will of God. He explains that when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14) the Word did not become flesh by the action of another upon him but by his own decision and will. There is no obligation inherent within the Trinity which requires that God become a human being. There is no 'law' to which God is subject and by which he is constrained to become flesh. "He did not become humbled; He humbled himself" (I.2:160). McKelway (1999:23-24) stresses that God's freedom must be preserved in the incarnation as without it the kenosis of the Son, expressed in Phil 2:7, "would not be so much a sacrifice as a suicide of divinity" (24).

This freedom of God includes the freedom to serve and freedom to be humble.

As Barth (CD II.1:315) so aptly says:

God is free to rule over the world in supreme majesty and likewise to serve in the world as the humblest and meanest of servants, free even to be despised in the world, and rejected by the world. God is free to clothe Himself with the life of the world in all its glory as with a garment; but free likewise Himself to die the death which symbolises the end of all things earthly in utter abandonment and darkness.

T.F Torrance (1996:239) concurs, saying that the God who in Jesus Christ shares the plight of humanity is the God who is truly free to embrace poverty in order that his creatures may become rich.

God, then, is in no way constrained to become the 'disabled God'. If he does so this is a free action on his behalf. The eternal God has chosen freely to love his creatures and to humble himself in the incarnation. In the incarnation the Son of God is still free in his actions, free to serve the world, and free to die. This freedom

includes the freedom to take upon himself disability and all that this entails – weakness, impairment, pain, and stigma – in order to enable persons with disabilities.

What Does it Mean for God to Empty Himself?

The above discussion concluded that God is free to take on human flesh and the reality which this entails. Now it is necessary to understand what it means for the Son of God to empty himself in the incarnation. This is examined in three parts: kenotic theories, the divinity of Christ, and the true humanity of Christ.

It is difficult to conceptualise what the kenosis means in terms of the person of Christ as both divine and human. Pannenberg (1968:309-311, 319-320) summarises the limitations of kenotic theories. From the 17th century onward, kenotic theologians have attempted to explain what happened to the divine properties of the Son of God when he became incarnate. There were two forms of kenotic theory in the 17th century. The Tübingen school emphasised the unity of the person of Christ by positing that Jesus concealed his divine abilities while on earth. The problem here is the potential towards a view of Christ which does not take his humanity seriously. The theory of the Giessen school involved a full renunciation of Jesus' divine attributes during his lifetime. This theory threatened the unity of his person. Nineteenth century kenotic theologians tried to overcome these problems by suggesting that the Logos, rather than the man Jesus, was humiliated in the incarnation. This theory is also problematic as it involves a “relative de-deification” of the Son.

Despite the difficulties involved in articulating what the Son of God has done in becoming a human being there are some things which can be said with clarity. Barth (CD IV.1:180) declares that according to Phil 2:7, Jesus, while being in the form of God, was free to put aside that form. Instead he took the form of a servant, a slave. Balthasar (O’Hanlon 1990:13-14) adds that instead of appearing as the God of the Old Testament, who shared his glory with no other, Christ renounced this form of glory, revealing that it is characteristic of God to give away that which is proper to himself.

In Christ, God has united himself with humanity but it must be emphasised, as Pannenberg (1968:312, 319) does, that, in doing so, he did not cease to be God. In all the kenotic theories explained above it is never suggested that the second person of the Trinity could renounce his Godhood. He could not be other than who he is even when incarnate. Hebblethwaite (1987:67) stresses that the paradox of Jesus living a human life must always be understood “from a centre of deity”.

Having affirmed that Jesus Christ cannot be other than the true God, it must also be affirmed that he is a true human being with all that this entails. As Gavrilyuk (2004:79-80, 88) explains, the early Church dealt decisively with docetic Christology. The Docetism of the second century was expressed in two forms. In the first, Christ did not have a real human body but only the appearance of one. According to the second, more subtle, view Christ was divided into two natures: the human nature and the divine nature, the latter of which had nothing to do with base human realities. In both these distortions the “heavenly saviour” had nothing to do with human experiences, the most debasing of which were birth and death. In contrast, the

Church fathers insisted that real humanity requires a real human redeemer not a counterfeit one.

Gavrilyuk (2004:6) affirms that the suffering of God is not the same as human suffering. Therefore, in order to experience human suffering, God must become a human being. This is exactly what has taken place in Christ; God has become a true human being. As Barth (CD I.2:147, 151) contends, the man Jesus Christ, in taking on flesh, has taken on the condition of disobedient humanity. He has the same fundamental human nature, the same form, and has experienced the same historical realities (Rom 1:3; Phil 2:7; Heb 2:14-15). Weinandy (2000:206) states strongly:

This is what humankind is crying out to hear, not that God experiences, in a divine manner, our anguish and suffering in the midst of a sinful and depraved world, but that he actually experienced and knew first hand, as one of us – as a man – human anguish and suffering within a sinful and depraved world.

The kenosis of the second person of the Trinity is complex to articulate without over emphasising one aspect of the nature of Christ. In all this the tension inherent in the incarnation must be maintained. Jesus cannot be truly understood as anything less than fully God and fully man. Jesus Christ cannot be conceived of as the ‘disabled God’ without continuing to be the sovereign God of creation. It is not difficult to become a disabled human being; this is a possibility for every person born. But to be the ‘disabled God’ the man Jesus Christ must remain the God-man. On the other hand, only a truly human Christ was able to truly experience disability in a human way. The ‘disabled God’ is enabled, by the taking of corrupt human flesh, to know, humanly, what it is to be a person with a disability.

The First Step towards Becoming the ‘Disabled God’

I have affirmed that it is necessary to hold the tension of Jesus Christ being both true God and true man. There can be no ‘disabled God’ without a true God who experiences disability nor can there be a ‘disabled God’ unless that God experiences disability in the exact same way as a human being would. This section will argue that the incarnation is the first step towards becoming the ‘disabled God’. As T.F. Torrance (1996:238) comments, “the Incarnation was an absolutely new event for God”.

The incarnation was the beginning of weakness that was not present in God before. The man Jesus Christ did not live as the omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent God. He took on weakness simply by becoming a human being. Bonhoeffer (1978:104) puts it well when he says:

If Jesus Christ is to be described as God, we may not speak of this divine being, nor of his omnipotence, nor his omniscience; but we must speak of this weak man among sinners, of his manger and his cross.

Becoming incarnate is the beginning of the process of dying to which all fallen humanity is subject. Bonhoeffer (1978:107) notes that as the Son freely enters into the incarnation, and his humble acceptance of all that it means to be human, he enters the world of fallen creation, with its sin and death. He enters, not as the exalted Lord, but as one who is hidden in weakness. He is “a beggar among beggars,...an outcast among outcasts,...[and] as dying among dying.” Barth (CD IV.1:174) explains that the taking of flesh involves existing as part of the people of

Israel under God's wrath. Being under wrath means that Jesus suffered as one who was perishing day by day.

In a way, therefore, the incarnation is the first step to becoming the 'disabled God'. There is, in the very fact of taking on the limitations of a human life, an impairment of divine ability. This impairment is freely taken on and it does not and cannot mean that Jesus ceases to be God, but it is a real impairment. Taking upon him a body which is subject to death is the second way in which the incarnation is the first step to becoming the 'disabled God'. Death contains within itself the dissolution of the body and this dissolution becomes more evident as the moment of death comes closer. As a human being with a corruptible body, Jesus took the chance of acquiring a physical disability from the moment of his conception. This is not all that is involved in being the 'disabled God' but it is a first and significant step.

The Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever

I have argued that the incarnation is the first step in becoming the 'disabled God'. Yet, it is the first step in actualising the decision which was made before the foundation of the world. As T.F. Torrance (1996: 237) reminds us, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8). To understand this statement it is necessary to think in terms of the self-revelation of the Trinity. "What God is towards us in the Gospel as Father, Son and Holy Spirit he is antecedently, inherently and eternally in himself." Pannenberg (1968:320) maintains that God had eternally intended that the incarnation would take place. In fact, as Balthasar (O'Hanlon 1990:17) points out, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8)

exists in both time and eternity. In some sense the actual events of Calvary are part of a reality which began before creation.

If Jesus Christ is the ‘disabled God’ then he must always have been the ‘disabled God’. Yet it is not true to say that Jesus was always disabled because, just as the cross needed to be actualised in history, there must be a historical point in time in which Jesus became a person with disabilities. Hence, while the incarnation begins the process which will inevitably lead to the cross, the incarnation is not something new in the heart of God. In the same way, the incarnation begins the process of Jesus taking on human weakness and the risks associated with this, including death and disablement, but it is not the place where the ‘disabled God’ begins in the heart of God. The intention to deal with death, disease, and disability in God’s fallen creation has been eternally in the mind of God, is actualised in the incarnation, and comes to fruition in the cross.

Conclusion

The above discussion has argued that God does not suffer inherently as part of his essence. He does not suffer by some ontological necessity but as a “free act of love”. Therefore, God need not experience disability within himself but the possibility is open as to whether he chooses to suffer disability. If God chooses, in his freedom, to experience disability this possibility can be actualised only in Christ. God is not the ‘disabled God’ unless he freely chooses to become such.

God is both free and unconstrained in his decision to become incarnate in Christ and this freedom continues within the incarnation. The act of becoming

incarnate contains within it the taking of human weakness and the possibility of disability and the total dissolution of death. Chapter three will discuss how this possibility of becoming disabled became actualised in the cross. But now it is necessary to affirm both that the incarnation sets in motion the process of becoming the 'disabled God', and that this free choice of God was made before the creation of the world.

Life of Jesus

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the incarnation of God in Christ. God, in his freedom, chose to become incarnate in Jesus Christ. Part of the reality of becoming a human being was that suffering would result but this suffering was by a free decision of God. The incarnation was the first stage in the second person of the Trinity becoming the 'disabled God' in that taking on humanity is necessary in order for God to experience disability. While Jesus did not experience disability until the cross, his attitude and his actions towards persons with disabilities are extremely important. If Jesus is to be rightly called the 'disabled God' then he must not only have experienced disability, but he must have a positive attitude towards persons with disabilities. If this were not so, the significance of Jesus becoming disabled would be considerably lessened.

In this chapter I will examine the next phase in the unveiling of the 'disabled God', that is, the relationship between Jesus and persons with disabilities. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first discusses the kingdom of God as the context of Jesus' healings. The next outlines the varied nature of healing. Then the healings of Jesus are examined. Lastly, the chapter provides some connections between the healings of Jesus and his cross and resurrection.

The Kingdom of God

Chapter one stated that it has eternally been in the heart of God to become incarnate and to liberate humanity. The healing miracles of Jesus are also part of God's eternal plan. The New Testament sees the consummation of this plan within the kingdom of God. This section discusses the healing miracles of Jesus as they fit within the kingdom of God.

Healing the sick was not Jesus' primary purpose in the world. Wilkinson notices (1998:91) that Jesus rarely took the initiative in healing. He did not seek out the sick but he healed them as they came along. This demonstrates that healing the sick, exorcising demons, and raising the dead were not the principal point of his ministry. The example of the crippled man in John 5:1-9 illustrates this point. Although there were many persons with disabilities in that place, Jesus healed only one. Teaching the people is something which Jesus always did but he did not always heal the sick.

The message of Jesus has precedence over his miracles. The miracles, as Corner (2005:88) points out, had potential to focus people's attention and this sometimes resulted in misunderstanding of Jesus' message. Jesus did not come to do magical acts or even to bring cures for the ill, but primarily to proclaim the gospel and to call sinners to repentance. It is imperative that the significance of Jesus' message is understood and not overshadowed by his miracles. The miracles need to be seen in their true light as an indicator that the kingdom of God has arrived.

The kingdom of God is first of all about the reign of God over the world and only secondarily about healing of the sick. According to Ladd (1974:212), the miracles were not the ultimate good of the kingdom. Greater than opening the eyes of the blind and unstopping deaf ears, greater than raising the dead to life, was the proclamation of the gospel to the poor. Healing of illness is merely the outer correlative to the more important spiritual salvation (c.f. Luke 17:14, 19). Thus deliverance from physical illness alone is not sufficient. The coming of the kingdom of God involves “the incoming of the power and life of God”.

Yet the healings of Jesus were nonetheless an important part of his ministry. Although the miracles were not the primary focus of Jesus’ ministry, Wilkinson (1998:65) notes that the healing ministry of Jesus is given a significant amount of space by the Gospel writers. New Testament studies have tended to discount the importance of the healing narratives and concentrate on the teaching of Jesus. Possibly this is because of the post-Enlightenment penchant for ‘demystifying’ the supernatural elements in the Bible. The miracles of Jesus are often seen as object lessons which accompanied his teaching about the kingdom rather than as evidence that the kingdom of God was “actually breaking into history in all its healing power.”

The fact that Jesus performed miracles demonstrated, according to Corner (2005:85), that the kingdom of God had arrived “in him” (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20). When the disciples of John the Baptist asked if Jesus were really the Messiah, Jesus replied, “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the good news brought to them” (Matt 11:5). Hendrickx (1987:11-12) believes that the miracles in Jesus’ ministry signified

God's ultimate intention for humanity. Luke 10:9 - "Cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" - makes a clear connection between healing and the kingdom of God. Jesus does more than proclaim the kingdom; "he is the kingdom". Jesus' miracles are signs of the power of the love of the Father for humanity.

The kingdom which Jesus inaugurates includes healing of the whole person or, in other words, salvation of the whole person. Hendrickx (1987:12, 14) notes that the establishment of the kingdom of God brings to people healing which involves the entire person. Indeed that person's physical being is given salvation by Jesus Christ. Wilkinson (1998:82) expresses this overlap of salvation and healing:

Healing of the body is never purely physical, and the salvation of the soul is never purely spiritual for both are combined in the total deliverance of the whole human being, a deliverance which is foreshadowed and illustrated in the healing miracles of Jesus in the Gospels.

But, before the *eschaton* healing is incomplete. Ladd (1974:211) explains the difference between the kingdom of God in the present and the fullness of the future kingdom. Jesus' healings were the first instalments of the *eschaton* in which the body is incorruptible. When the kingdom comes in its fullness then all who are counted worthy of entering (Luke 20:35) the kingdom will eternally be free from both sickness and death because of the resurrection of the dead. In the present only some are healed and these need to come into contact with Jesus or those he has appointed. Hendrickx (1987:15) notes that while God has not yet brought to consummation his actions in the "bodily realm" he has definitely begun the outworking of salvation for the world.

Jesus' healing of persons with disabilities was within the context of the coming kingdom of God. This healing was not Jesus' primary task as God incarnate; his first priority was proclaiming the gospel to the poor and calling for repentance and faith. However, Jesus healed many people in his ministry and these healings were part of demonstrating that the kingdom of God had arrived in Jesus Christ. Healing of persons with disabilities is strongly connected to salvation; God's ultimate plan for humanity includes the redemption of the body as well as the soul and spirit. However, it must also be remembered that the healing of disability is incomplete in the present because the kingdom of God has not yet come in its fullness.

The Nature of Healing

Thus far I have discussed the healing miracles of Jesus within the context of the coming kingdom of God. The fact that healing of disability is part of the kingdom of God means that it is God's intention to bring complete healing to persons with disabilities when the kingdom of God comes in fullness. This section will discuss the multifaceted meaning of the word 'healing'. Healing is a broad term which should not be restricted to physical cure nor should it exclude physical cure.

Several writers have pointed out that there is a difference between cure and healing. Chitando (2007:63-64) observes that the idea of healing has become controversial largely because of the post-Enlightenment notion that miraculous healing is not possible. Healing is sometimes narrowly understood as only involving cure. Cure involves only the physical dimension while healing may involve

“physical, psychical, spiritual and other dimensions”. Healing as “restoration and reintegration” can be possible without the need to believe in the miraculous.

Black (1996:51-53) also sees a distinction between healing and cure. She claims that healing involves a sense of peace and finding meaning within one’s circumstances. Defining healing in terms of physical perfection can result in alienation from the community for those who have a disability. Jesus, on the other hand, in his healing of the sick, brought about restoration to community for the person with a disability. The lepers were able to go back to worship in the temple; the woman with the issue of blood was able to go back to her community.

The sick person is restored to an appropriate mode of *being* – not of *doing*. The breaking down of those barriers allowed the *being* of the person to be affirmed again and to experience healing (53).

Grant (1998:77-78), however, displays a very negative attitude towards any kind of physical cure.

It is true that on one level the healing stories are stories of inclusion in that Jesus heals and welcomes all sorts of people into God’s reign. However, the very fact that they are physically healed by Jesus suggests that physical restoration is a necessary component of their entry into the community (77).

Her objection is that the kingdom of God is welcoming only to the able-bodied. Persons with disabilities are not acceptable as they are, and must be changed to conform to ‘the norm’.

The above approaches, to various extents, can be understood as reductionist. In 2003 the World Council of Churches (WCC) issued an interim statement on disability, ‘A Church of All and for All’ (Fritzson and Kabue 2004:64-88). In this discussion paper the WCC notes that there are different approaches to healing.

Article 42 states that Jesus did not distinguish between “social restoration and physical healing”. Therefore, to gain a full and complete theological perspective on disability requires providing an integrated view of health, salvation and healing.

Healing is not merely a matter of physical cure. Healing must be understood to include a wide range of factors affecting the whole person. Healing can involve spiritual, mental, interpersonal and social aspects. Equally, the idea that healing excludes physical cure should be rejected. The following section addresses the way in which the diverse character of healing was worked out within the ministry of Jesus.

The Healings of Jesus

During the ministry of Jesus he healed many persons with disabilities in the senses of healing discussed above - cure, restoration, acceptance, and inclusion. These different aspects of healing were not effected separately by Jesus; rather he healed the whole person. However, I will deal with each of these aspects of Jesus’ ministry in turn, beginning with physical cure.

The physical aspect of disability is sometimes ignored in favour of emphasising social barriers. Among disability writers it is common to claim that disability is a social problem. French (1993:17-21) cites Oliver’s (1983) definition of “impairment as ‘individual limitation’ and disability as ‘socially imposed restriction’”. She observes, however, that this model will not solve every problem associated with disability. It is true that society does place barriers to access for persons with disabilities as well as displaying considerable prejudice. It is,

nonetheless, not helpful to ignore the real experiences of persons with disabilities. Elimination of barriers and prejudice would not eliminate all aspects of disability.

The healings of Jesus should definitely be understood to include physical cure. Corner (2005:82) denies that the miracle stories can be read as “metaphors for overcoming prejudice or exclusion”. If Jesus’ miracles are interpreted as metaphors then the practical realities of disability are not dealt with in a practical fashion. The metaphorical scenario would imply that the lepers were sent back to their communities still having leprosy, and that Jesus healed the social rifts which excluded the demonised but they remained mentally ill. Although there is a clear connection between the healing of a sick person and the healing of society, these cannot be conflated into one. To do so is to deny that Jesus took practical measures to give the sick and disabled what was needed. What they needed included physical cure.

As well as providing physical cure Jesus had an inclusive attitude towards the outcasts of society. Boff (1987:17) points out that Jesus sided with those who were disparaged by society - because they did not or could not attain to society’s standards - including the man blind from birth, the paralytic, and other persons with disabilities. He came for those who needed a doctor (Mark 2:17) rather than for those who fitted comfortably within his society. Jesus was unafraid of the consequences of siding with outcasts. “He [was] vilified, insulted, accused of keeping bad company, labelled subversive, heretical, possessed, insane, and more.”

Jesus lived in the midst of persons with disabilities. Webb-Mitchell (1994:57-58) gives examples of parables and settings in which Jesus interacted with those who had disabilities. Luke 14:15-24 tells of a great banquet to which persons with disabilities have been invited. Mark 5:34 speaks of the woman with the haemorrhage who thought that Jesus could heal her. In John 9:1-34 Jesus healed the man born blind, who was presumed an evil sinner by the Pharisees. There are three things to observe from Jesus “keeping company” with persons with disabilities.

Firstly (Webb-Mitchell 1994:57-58), Jesus is present *with* those who have disabilities. In Luke 7:18-23 the disciples of John the Baptist came to ask Jesus if he was the Messiah. When they arrived Jesus was surrounded by persons with disabilities. He was busy healing their bodies, talking to them, and being with them. For Jesus, persons with disabilities were not objects of fear but people with whom he chose to be present. Secondly, in healing the people, Jesus was *doing* the good news; he preached and he acted out the gospel. This good news is that those who are disabled, in both literal and figurative senses, can be healed by the source of all life, that is, Jesus. Thirdly, because Jesus identified with persons with disabilities he demonstrated a radical acceptance of these people which no one else exhibited.

Jesus did more than feel pity towards the sick, he had compassion on them. As Chitando (2007:50-54) states, “Jesus was determined to ameliorate human suffering.” Compassion is often incorrectly imagined to be the same as pity. However, pity tends to be patronising to those who are pitied. Compassion is better understood as “suffering with another”. The New Testament shows that God, in Christ, is compassionate. The ministry of Jesus shows forth this compassion, not

because Jesus felt sorry for the marginalised, but in the way he restored the dignity of the sick and disabled (along with other marginalised groups).

Jesus also acted to bring about a change in the attitudes of his society. Hull (2001:165-166) explains that Mark 3:5 records one of the rare times that Jesus became angry. His anger was directed against the people's attitude towards the man with a disability – he had a withered hand. The people watched to see whether Jesus would heal on the Sabbath. Jesus did not avoid the issue by ignoring the man with a disability. Instead he asked the people: “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” The people's concern was with defending a religious dogma rather than having compassion on the man with a disability. Jesus answered his own question by saying to the man, “Stretch out your hand” and he physically restored the man.

Jesus brought about more than a changed life for a few individuals. Rotholz (2002:72) notes that Jesus challenged the actual structures of his culture. Hendrickx (1987:25-26) clarifies that Jesus' brought liberation first to the poor. The most significant part of the saying of Matt 11:4-5 is that the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Paralytics and lepers were indeed poor with no medical care and no means of support. Also as “sinners” they were socially ostracised. The kingdom of God first affects those who have no rights, the “little ones”, and “the least of my brothers” (Matt 18:6, 10, 14; 25:40, 45).

So far, the discussion has centred on people with physical disabilities. The question arises as to how Jesus treated people with intellectual disabilities. It is

difficult to find any examples of people with intellectual disabilities in the Gospels. But it is possible to see how Jesus treated those who had inferior status.

Hauerwas (1986:183-186) claims that to attribute intellectual disability to someone is to deny status to that person. 'Normal' people are afraid of and disturbed by those who have intellectual disabilities. He compares the treatment of people with intellectual disability to that of children. It is acceptable to be a child only because children grow into adults and no longer act like children. Yet people with intellectual disabilities do not grow out of acting like children.

Jesus treated children, those without status, as if they had status. Matt 18:1-5, as Smalley (2001:103) asserts, is an example of what Jesus taught regarding the treatment of persons with intellectual disabilities. As France (2007:675-679) notes, Jesus responded to the disciples' question "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" by using the example of a child to show who is the greatest in the kingdom. These verses in Matthew refer to the status of children rather than some moral characteristic. A child had a position at the bottom of the social strata as children were continually subject to the decisions and authority of adults. Yet Jesus accorded a status to children which was far beyond what his society accorded them.

Jesus brought healing to persons with disabilities in all senses of the word. Persons with disabilities experienced physical cure and in this way Jesus addressed the practical difficulties associated with disability. But Jesus did not simply cure people. The attitude of Jesus towards persons with disabilities was positive and inclusive. Jesus spent time with persons with disabilities. He accepted them as

people worthy of attention and love. He had compassion on those who had disabilities and restored their dignity. But Jesus' actions went further than change for individuals. Jesus challenged the attitudes of his culture and liberated the persons with disabilities from their poverty. Jesus gave status to those who were denied status in his society so it is possible to imagine how Jesus would value those who have intellectual disabilities.

Connections to the Cross and the Resurrection

Up to this point I have discussed Jesus' healings and his attitude towards persons with disabilities. This is important in constructing an understanding of Jesus as the 'disabled God' because such a title could not be given to anyone who failed to show love towards persons with disabilities. However, Jesus' actions and attitudes towards persons with disabilities are not sufficient in themselves to earn him this title. This section brings the argument closer to the cross, where Jesus fully entered into the experience of being disabled. Here I will discuss the next step in Jesus' identification with persons with disabilities.

Part of Jesus' identification with persons with disabilities is his living within the conditions which are frequent causes of disability worldwide. Oliver (2006:27-28) notes that two out of three of the estimated half a billion persons with disabilities live in developing countries. It is possible that many – up to half - disabilities could be prevented. The causes of disability include lack of proper nutrition - sometimes caused by difficult political situations - and social causes, including poverty.

Palestine, at the time of Jesus' birth, was a politically oppressed nation. As Boff (1987:11-12) explains, Palestine had been oppressed by the Romans for hundreds of years. They had a godless king in Herod the Great and were occupied by foreign armies as well as being subject to high taxation levied by these foreign rulers. In this society, there was no economic security, with income being unstable due to the frequent need to look for work.

Into this politically oppressed nation Jesus was born a poor man. Moltmann-Wendel (2005:10) reminds us that, after his birth, Jesus was laid in a manger. This is an image of poverty and one which later interpreters have linked to the cross. Becoming poor, according to Moltmann (1974:52), involved Jesus emptying himself and giving over everything to freeing those who are poor (2Cor 8:9). T.F. Torrance (1998:50-51) points out the powerlessness of Jesus. Jesus did not act to rescue himself from the hunger which he experienced when he fasted in the desert (Matt 4:2). In the same way he refused to come down from the cross (Matt 27:40).

Another way in which Jesus expressed his identification with persons with disabilities is in the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46. The nations will be judged according to how they act towards the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, and those in prison. Boff (1987:17) interprets verse forty of this parable to mean that God is hidden in the other, in our neighbour who is in need. Cooper (1992:179) also understands this parable as saying that God is present in the weak and marginalised. According to Chitando (2007:54), Jesus here characterizes faithfulness towards his person in terms of compassionate actions. Rotholz (2002:87)

adds: “It is a mysterious but wonderful truth that God is present in those who are not considered worth much according to the standards of this world.”

Jesus identified with the sick he healed in that every healing took place at some expense to himself. Mackrell (1987:18) notes that each healing brought some harm to Jesus. The woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:30) caused power to go out from Jesus. When Jesus healed on the Sabbath he consistently came into conflict. After healing the leper (Mark 1:41), Jesus became isolated while the leper was free to re-enter society. Hull (2007:167) asserts that in showing compassion for a grieving woman (Luke 7:13) or for blind men (Matt 20:34) Jesus demonstrated his empathy. Even more so, when Jesus cried tears with Lazarus’ sisters (John 11:35), “he [was] entering into the loss and bearing it.”

Moltmann (1998:115-116) maintains that Jesus’ power to heal the sick came through his suffering. Jesus did not heal the sick by means of magic but by means of faith. The answer to how Jesus was able heal lies in the passage which Matthew (8:17) quotes from Isaiah (53:4), “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases”. Jesus healed the sick by bearing their diseases; he took the sicknesses and disabilities upon himself. The healing of the sick and disabled points to the cross:

The entire life of Jesus is basically a single path of passion from Bethlehem to Golgotha; and on his way to suffering and death for the sake of the salvation of the world, Jesus heals the sick, accepts the outcasts, and drives out evil spirits (Moltmann 1998:115).

It is not the deity of Jesus Christ, then, which gave him the power to heal the sick, but rather his willingness to suffer and die for human sickness and death.

The miracles of Jesus also have links to his resurrection. T.F. Torrance (1998:32-33) explains that there are two words used in the New Testament for resurrection, *anistēmi* and *egeirō*. The way in which *egeirō* is used in the New Testament is unique, which underscores its connection to God's raising of Jesus from the dead. The fact that *egeirō* is used when speaking of raising up the sick is a sign that healings are within the scope of the resurrection. Jesus' healing miracles, according to Hendrickx (1987:12, 27-28), herald the new condition of humanity in which "death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away" (Rev 21:4).

Jesus identified with persons with disabilities. He lived as a true human being under conditions which are frequent causes of disability in the world: oppression, poverty and malnutrition. He verbally identified with persons with disabilities when he declared that a person's treatment of the sick will be reckoned as his or her treatment of Jesus. Lastly, Jesus' healings were not mere acts outside his person but each healing affected Jesus negatively. Jesus suffered in his compassionate actions towards persons with disabilities, whether through weakness or isolation or taking the infirmities upon himself. This identification of Jesus with persons with disabilities would become complete in the cross. Nonetheless, the miraculous has links with his resurrection from the dead, showing that Jesus' identification with persons with disabilities does not end with suffering but with overcoming.

Conclusion

Jesus' ministry to persons with disabilities was a very positive one. He brought about healing for persons with disabilities and this healing encompassed all that healing means – physical cure, reconciliation of relationships, reintegration into community, compassion, inclusion, and transformation of society. Jesus also accorded status to those without status, suggesting that he would have valued people with intellectual disabilities. Jesus' healings took place within the kingdom of God which has arrived in him. As such these healings are difficult to separate from salvation. The consummation of the kingdom of God will bring about the complete redemption of the body. The healing ministry of Jesus is intimately connected to his cross and resurrection. Jesus began to identify with persons with disabilities even in his life.

At this point it is fair to say that Jesus has earned the title 'God of the disabled' but he has not yet earned the title the 'disabled God'. For Jesus to be given the title the 'disabled God' requires a number of things: he must be fully God and fully human; he must have a positive relationship with persons with disabilities; and he must experience disability himself. So far chapter one has argued his status as the God-man and chapter two has argued that Jesus spent a large amount of time with persons with disabilities and met their needs in multifaceted ways. The next chapter will examine the cross of Christ and his experience of disability in his person.

The Cross

Introduction

Previously I have argued that the second person of the Trinity freely emptied himself in the incarnation and entered into the world in which disability is common. During his ministry Jesus healed many persons with disabilities as part of his inauguration of the kingdom of God. In both his free entering into the mortal human sphere, and in his positive treatment of persons with disabilities, Jesus identified with persons with disabilities. Thus far Jesus could rightly be called the ‘God of the disabled’. This chapter will turn its attention to the cross on which Jesus entered fully into the experience of disability. The divine freedom is expressed in the intentionality of the cross. There Jesus experienced what it is to be a person with disabilities - physically, socially and emotionally. It is on the cross that Jesus truly became the ‘disabled God’. The implications of this disabling experience on the cross will be discussed in four sections: the implications for the Trinity, theodicy, ability in weakness, and implications for persons with disabilities.

Divine Freedom and the Intentionality of the Cross

In chapter one I pointed out that God is free to become other than himself and hence free to become incarnate. But, as Balthasar (cited by O’Donnell 1988:64-65) posits, “*de potentia absoluta*” is not the same as “*de potentia trinitaria*”. The Son’s freedom must be understood within the context of his sonship. He will not ever exceed the bounds of his mission. Barth (CD IV.1:163-166) insists that Jesus desires

only obedience to his Father. Jesus emptied himself and humbled himself even to death on a cross (Phil 2:7-8) and this humiliation was no chance occurrence. Jesus chose this humiliation freely because he was the obedient Son. And yet there can be no other choice if he is to be consistent with himself. “He chooses, but he chooses that, apart from which, being who he is, he could not choose anything else” (166).

It is vital to understand that the death of Jesus on the cross was no accident of history but rather a part of the divine plan for the salvation of the human race. Cousar (1990:26-27) points out that God the Father was the hidden initiator behind the cross. It was the self-giving love of God (Rom 5:8) which prompted the divine intention to see the Son go to the cross, and the willing obedience of the Son, who submits to the will of the Father (Gal 1:4), that brought it about. Jesus did not bend the Father’s will nor was the resurrection a response of pity towards the martyred Jesus by the Father.

The scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, assert the inevitability of the cross. “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures” (1Cor 15:3). R. Jenson (1997:183) remarks that the death of Jesus was a divine certainty; it happened “according to the definite plan...of God”. The fact that Jesus predicted his own death as recorded in the Gospels (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33) points to the same inevitability. Weber’s (1979:105, 134) analysis of the Gospel passion stories also leads him to the conclusion that the cross was a “divine must”. Mark uses the Psalms of lament to stress the “divine must” of the cross while John does this by emphasising the “must of love”.

Jesus accepted his own death as something which was part of his mission. According to L. Keck (2000:115-118), the Synoptic Gospels contain three main predictions of Jesus' passion (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34 plus parallel passages). These passion predictions in the mouth of Jesus imply that Jesus was not surprised by events in Jerusalem. Only Matthew mentions the crucifixion (Mat 20:19), but Jesus knew that going to Jerusalem meant death (Luke 13:32-33) and he spoke of "going through many sufferings and being treated with contempt" (Mark 9:12).

Knowing that suffering, rejection and death awaited him there, Jesus deliberately went to Jerusalem. Luke 9:51 records, "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." O'Donnell (1988:58) states that several New Testament passages record Jesus' willingness to die for humanity. His decision to go to Jerusalem was deliberate despite the inexorableness of his death. As L. Keck (2000:121) argues, Jesus was not simply "in the wrong place at the wrong time." His disciples did not convince him to make the journey to Jerusalem. Jesus made a deliberate and free decision to go to his death in Jerusalem because he understood this action to be the climax of his divinely appointed mission.

Jesus' death was the continuation of his life, which he lived in the service of others. O'Collins (1977:59) maintains that Jesus might have prevented his death by backing away from his ministry and message but he did not. His words and his actions provoked his opponents into bringing about his death. Cooper (1992:176) also sees the Cross as related to the life which Jesus lived. He lived for others and he died for others, thus demonstrating that he was willing to suffer death because of the love for others which he expressed in his words and deeds. Medieval theologian

Bernard of Clairvaux (d1153) expressed well this willingness to suffer on the part of Jesus:

We have an example in our Saviour. He wanted to suffer so that he would know how to suffer with us (Heb 2:17), to become wretched so that he could learn mercy...(quoted in Sloyan 1995:134-135).

The cross was an event which was freely and deliberately chosen by both the Father and the Son. The Father chose the cross in order to bring salvation to broken humanity and the Son humbly obeyed the will of the Father as recorded in the scriptures and as prophesied by his own words. The decision of Jesus to submit to the cross demonstrates that Jesus saw his death as the climax of his mission and also that he was fully committed to a life lived for others, even to the point of giving up that life on behalf of others.

Jesus' deliberate decision to endure the cross means that he made a deliberate decision to allow himself to become disabled. In this sense he was not a hapless victim in his disablement, as so many people are, but he was a victim nonetheless. To be the 'disabled God' requires that there is willingness to take on disability. Jesus did not shy away from the consequences of the life he intended to live. A life lived for the weak and the marginalised and the disabled culminated in the Son of God becoming weak and marginalised and disabled. In becoming the 'disabled God' upon the cross, Jesus demonstrated the heart of the Father to those who suffer disability.

Jesus Took on Disability on the Cross

Thus far, in this chapter, I have argued that Jesus went to the cross in response to the will of the Father and with full deliberateness. For Jesus, dying was not an

accident of history but the climax of a life lived in service of the poor, the weak, and persons with disabilities. In this section I will explore the ways in which Jesus became disabled during his passion. In doing so I will attempt to show that Jesus not only took on physical disability but he also identified with people with intellectual disabilities on the cross.

On the cross Jesus literally became the ‘disabled God’. Burton Cooper, in his article ‘The Disabled God’ (1992:176), uses Moltmann’s image of the ‘crucified God’ to coin the new image of the ‘disabled God’ – albeit Cooper’s concept of the ‘disabled God’ is considerably different to Eiesland’s. He pertinently observes: “Jesus on the cross is God disabled, made weak and vulnerable to worldly powers because of the perfection of divine love.” This insight is weakened by Cooper’s understanding of the title ‘disabled God’ as a metaphor elsewhere in his article. When Moltmann calls Jesus Christ the ‘crucified God’ he means this literally not metaphorically. I will argue in the following discussion that the title ‘disabled God’ can be applied literally to Jesus in his passion.

To understand the disabling of Jesus on the cross it is instructive to have a general understanding of crucifixion. Hengel (1977:25, 29-31) describes what was involved when a person was crucified. There was large variability in the form of the execution because the soldiers were permitted to give full vent to their own sadism, but a ‘typical’ procedure can be described. Before the crucifixion the victim was flogged and often expected to carry the crossbeam to the site of the crucifixion. Then the person was nailed to the crossbeam, “raised up and seated on a small wooden

peg.” The torture which resulted continued for a long time. Seneca described the agony of the cross:

Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, longing sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly weals on shoulders and chest, and drawing the breath of life amid long-drawn-out agony? He would have many excuses for dying before mounting the cross (quoted in Hengel 1977:30-31).

The cross is inherently disabling. Crucifixion would have made it almost impossible to function as a human being on any significant level because of the extreme and unrelenting pain. Being pinned to a cross meant the victim was unable to move his or her limbs, was barely able to breathe, and could do none of the most basic human activities like eating or drinking without the assistance of sadistic soldiers. There is very little about this experience which would not be called disabling.

What follows is a description of some of the specific disabilities which Jesus experienced on the cross. As Jesus went through his passion he took on many of the disabilities which he had healed during his ministry. In this way Jesus fully identified with persons with disabilities by experiencing what they experience.

John Hull (2001:159-160, 164) offers the example of Jesus’ blindness as the way in which Jesus identified with people who are blind. Hull observes that whenever Jesus came across people who were blind he restored their sight; he did not merely offer acceptance and inclusion. Jesus spoke of healing the blind as central to his ministry (Luke 4:18ff). Yet it was following Jesus’ arrest that he identified most fully with blind people. Mark 14:65 records, “Some began to spit on him, to

blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him ‘Prophesy!’ The guards also took him over and beat him.” Because of this humiliation and ridicule, which took place when he was without power to tell who was hitting him (Luke 22:64), Jesus knows what it is to experience the obstacles and powerlessness of blindness.

The next disabling event was severe weakness, most likely brought about by the flogging, which meant Jesus was unable to carry his own cross to Golgotha. “They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus” (Mark 15:21). Weber (1979:105-106) suggests that the community to which Mark wrote were perhaps wont to remember the miracles of Jesus and his resurrection. Mark wanted them to see that it is the suffering and weak Jesus who calls them “to follow him in his suffering.” The now risen Jesus is the same person who was too weak to carry his own cross.

Jesus suffered in his passion in a way which parallels the woman with the long-term issue of blood. Moltmann-Wendel (2005:11-12) draws out the parallels between the woman with the severe case of uterine bleeding, mentioned in Mark 5:25-34, and the suffering of Jesus. When Jesus met this socially repudiated woman, she was healed by touching his garment. Likely Mark intended to use this example to show the reader the parallels to the passion story via the use of particular words. The woman suffered in the hands of doctors and Jesus also suffered (Mark 5:26; 8:31; 9:12). The blood of the woman is analogous to that of Jesus. Mark only uses the word ‘body’ in this story and the story of the passion. ‘Scourge’ is another link between the two events. The woman’s illness is called a ‘scourge’ (*mástix* Mark

5:29) and ‘scourge’ (*mastigoō* Mark 10:34)² is used in regard to what Jesus would endure.

In his ministry Jesus healed several people who were unable to speak (e.g. Mat 9:33; 12:22; 15:30). Jesus went to his death like a mute lamb. Horne (1998:94) describes the muteness of the Lamb of God in his passion. The servant song of Isaiah (52:13-53:12) is interpreted in the New Testament as referring to the death of Jesus Christ. This passage describes the inability of the servant, yet, paradoxically, this accomplishes the will of Yahweh. Central to this paradox is the muteness of the lamb; “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent [mute], so he did not open his mouth” (Is 53:7). Here mute means both inability (cf. Ps 39:9) and obedience (cf. Ps 38:13-15), and in both the power of God is enigmatically brought to completion.

The above discussion demonstrates that Jesus bore in his body many of the disabling conditions of which he had healed people in his ministry. It may be possible to speak of more disabilities such as paralysis. As O’Collins (1977:52) has stated, “Who is weaker than a man pinned to a cross to twist in pain and die slowly?” D. Keck (1996:17) also refers to “the obvious fact that when you are nailed to a cross, you can no longer control your body’s motions.” However, instead of attempting to show that Jesus experienced every physical disability on the cross I want to adapt an argument from Wilkinson regarding Paul’s thorn in the flesh in order to demonstrate the universal applicability of Jesus’ experience of disability.

² The verses and Greek wording are my additions to Moltmann-Wendell.

In his discussion on Paul's thorn in the flesh (2Cor 12:7-10), Wilkinson (1998:231-232) argues that Paul's experience of the thorn has significance for the present day, particularly because the identity of the thorn cannot be ascertained with certainty. Certainty would mean that Paul's experience of strength in weakness (2Cor 12:9) may only be applicable to people who had the same physical problem in common. Similarly, the Gospel writers, as L. Keck (2000:125) notes, do not seem interested in going into depth in their descriptions of the crucifixion. Mark 15:24 states baldly, "and they crucified him". In the same way that Wilkinson can apply Paul's thorn to the present, because of the uncertainty of what afflicted Paul, the experience of Jesus can be applicable to all persons with disabilities in the present because it is not possible to provide every detail of Jesus' disabilities.

There is no doubt that being nailed to a cross would cause a person to lose physical control over his or her body, but there is much which cannot be said about Jesus' experience of disability on the cross. It is not possible to state categorically that Jesus experienced the symptoms of multiple sclerosis, for example, because there is simply not enough detail to draw on. The disabling of Jesus must be seen in more general terms so that a person with a disability is able to see that Jesus had, on the cross, much in common with him or her even though a particular person's disability may not be identifiable in the passion narrative. Smalley (2001:104) puts it well as she states:

One could argue that Jesus hanging on the cross at the time of his Crucifixion had taken on the persona of a man with multiple disabling conditions. Jesus' vulnerability links him with all those who are helpless and vulnerable. God's plan called for Jesus to both come into the world and leave the world as one who was totally helpless.

In addition to his physical disablement, in dying the death of a helpless man, Jesus also seems to have lost the messianic anointing by which he healed the sick during his ministry. Weber (1979:114, 127) contends that Matthew's passion story shows a Jesus who has given up his power and authority. Instead of looking like the mighty Son of God Jesus became god-forsaken. John's Gospel takes up this idea in a different fashion. In John's account Jesus says "I am thirsty" (John 19:28) pointing to the irony "that the one who has in his giving the eternally thirst-quenching water of life, should now be thirsty." On the cross all power to heal the sick and bring about the kingdom of God seems lost as Sobrino (2003:238-239) concludes. Indeed the opposite of kingdom power is present. God is, at best, no longer actively present, or, at worst, not present at all. Thus the death of Jesus stands in sharp contrast with his life.

Thus far I have argued that Jesus experienced physical disability in his passion. He experienced extreme weakness, blindness, muteness, suffering, loss of control over his body, and agonising pain. While it is not possible to attribute the symptoms of every physical disability to the experience of Jesus, it is possible to say that Jesus was subject to many disabling conditions and thus he identified with persons with physical disabilities in a radical way by his submission to the cross. Not only did Jesus experience physical disability he also lost his ability to heal such disabilities in contrast with his life. Now I will attempt to explicate Jesus' identification with persons with intellectual disabilities.

Intellectual Disability and the Cross

Not only did Jesus identify with persons with physical disabilities but he also identified with persons with intellectual disabilities. I aim to demonstrate that Jesus is the ‘disabled God’ in terms of intellectual disability as well as physical disability. Gregory of Nazianzus (cited in O’Collins 1977:74) wisely observed that “what is unassumed is unhealed”. I opine, consequently, that Jesus needed to identify with persons with intellectual disability. While it is possible to see that Jesus experienced physical disability on the cross it is more difficult to see how Jesus identified with persons with intellectual disabilities in his passion. There is no evidence to suggest that Jesus had an intellectual disability on the cross. However, it is not necessary for Jesus to have an intellectual disability for him to identify with those who do. Hauerwas (1986:184) comments:

to be retarded is not finally a scientific or medical description, it is a moral claim that puts people at a disadvantage simply because they seem different from most of us in humanly significant ways.

Accordingly, I conclude that it is disadvantage which is the most significant aspect of intellectual disability with which Jesus needed to identify.

Jesus identified with persons with intellectual disabilities through his experiences of loneliness, poverty, shame and stigma in his passion. Loneliness, poverty, shame and stigma do not exclusively apply to people with intellectual disabilities. However, such people probably experience the above in greater degree than others, even more so than those with physical disabilities. To demonstrate Jesus’ identification with persons with intellectual disabilities it is first necessary to

explore the world of such people. This section will follow a pattern of identifying the nature of the experience of persons with disabilities and then showing the parallels for Jesus on the cross.

People with intellectual disabilities are regularly excluded and are consequently very lonely. According to Smalley (2001:102), people with intellectual disabilities are frequently excluded from participating in groups of 'normal' people. To be excluded is dehumanising and painful to the excluded person. Exclusion diminishes the person and implies that the excluded person is undeserving of being part of human interaction. Jean Vanier (cited in Smalley 2001:102) says: "I have come to the conclusion that those with intellectual disabilities are among the most oppressed and excluded people in the world."

Jesus experienced the extremes of loneliness and exclusion on the cross. O'Collins (1977:53) comments that the cry of dereliction which Mark records shows that Jesus was completely forsaken by both human beings and also, seemingly, by God. All the people in Jesus' life – his family and country-people, the king and the religious leaders, his chosen disciples and all the people of Jerusalem – left him alone to die a despised death inflicted by the enemy Romans. In the loneliness of this scene Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). "Mark...lets Jesus die utterly alone."

Poverty is so often an unwanted adjunct to having a disability. Fritzson and Kabue (2004:49) note that many persons with disabilities are amongst the world's poorest people. According to Hauerwas (1986:172) those with intellectual

disabilities also suffer from problems which accompany poverty – poor housing, poor medical treatment, and poor education.

Like so many persons with disabilities, Jesus endured extreme poverty on the cross. Hengel (1977:51, 57) observes that crucifixion was the “slaves’ punishment” and those slaves were subject to their master’s every capricious notion. L. Keck (2000:125) states that it was standard practice for the victim to be crucified naked. Putting all this together it is possible to see that Jesus suffered the death of the lowest rank in society and on the cross he did not even have the basic necessity of clothing to cover him. Thus he identified with the world’s poor in his passion.

In addition to loneliness and poverty there is a distinct sense of stigma and shame attached to being disabled. Black (1998:8-9) comments: “historically persons with disabilities have been seen as less than human.” She notes that while the degree of stigma varies, the experience of being stigmatized is common to all persons with disabilities. Fritzon and Kabue (2004:24-25) observe that most persons with disabilities experience stigmatisation resulting in discrimination, derision, condescension, and exclusion. Hauerwas (1986:184) notes that this particularly applies to people with intellectual disabilities because being different is enough to stigmatise them. There is a strong sense of blame attached to disability, as Cooper (1992:177) remarks. Even with a scientific world-view many people still secretly believe that persons with disabilities and their families are in some way to blame for that disability.

Jesus identified with those who experience shame and stigma because crucifixion was the most shameful death in the ancient world. Hengel (1977:4, 8, 24, 37, 42) states that crucifixion was a death meant for criminals. Josephus called it “the most wretched of deaths”. The executioners intentionally subjected the victim to extreme humiliation. So despised was the act of crucifixion, and the fate of the criminal assigned such a punishment, that mention was hardly made of crucifixion in ancient inscriptions. Hengel quotes Cicero:

But the executioner, the veiling of the head and the very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. For it is not only the actual occurrence of these things or the endurance of them, but liability to them, the expectation, indeed the very mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man (42).

Sadly, religious vilification is common experience for people with intellectual disabilities even in the Christian Church. Eiesland (1994:76) criticises the American Lutheran Church (ALC) for passing a resolution to prevent people with “‘significant’ mental or physical handicaps” from entering the ordained ministry. Black (1998:16) explains that this attitude springs from the belief that people who are not physically whole cannot represent the perfect man Jesus. This attitude towards persons with disabilities extends further than exclusion from ordination. Susan Speraw (2006:222) provides some disturbing examples of persons with disabilities being denied a meaningful place in their Churches because of those disabilities. One twenty year-old with cerebral palsy was not permitted to sing in the choir “because the pastor says he is too strange”.

There were religious dimensions to the shame of the cross which gave Jesus something further in common with people with intellectual disabilities. Hengel

(1977:84-85, 88) explains that the Jews of Jesus' time looked at crucifixion through the lens of Deut 21:23, "anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse". The religious aspects of the shame of crucifixion added to the general denigration of the victim in the common mindset. O'Donnell (1988:60-61) observes that Jesus was considered a blasphemer by the religious leaders. The manner of his death seemed to emphasise this view; he was put to death outside the holy city of Jerusalem (Heb 13:12) like one repudiated and condemned.

It is difficult to talk about Jesus having an intellectual disability on the cross. To say that Jesus identified with people with intellectual disabilities by experiencing cognitive impairment would be to go beyond what the Gospel accounts tell of his death. However, Jesus did identify with persons with intellectual disabilities in his experience of loneliness, poverty, shame and stigma, and religious vilification as he was crucified. Jesus is truly the 'disabled God' because he was physically disabled on the cross and he identified with persons with intellectual disabilities in the negative experiences that they commonly face.

Consequences of the 'Disabled God'

Now that the conclusion has been reached that Jesus is truly the 'disabled God' – because of his identification with persons with disabilities on the cross - the question must be asked, "So what?" What difference does it make that Jesus is the 'disabled God'? This section will explore the difference that this makes to both an understanding of the Godhead and to persons with disabilities by discussing the relationship of the disabled Jesus to the Trinity, theodicy, a theology of weakness,

and the consequences of Jesus taking on disability for those people who experience disability. I begin with the 'disabled God' and the Trinity.

The Cross and the Trinity

What does Jesus' experience of disability on the cross mean for the Godhead? In attempting to answer this question I have chosen to begin with the ideas of Moltmann in *The Crucified God*. Moltmann (1974:240-243) speaks of the cross as an event within the life of the Trinity. According to Moltmann "the theology of the cross must be the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the Trinity must be the theology of the cross." The Father delivered up (*paradidonai*) the Son to death and that death involved all that being delivered up means for sinful humanity. God delivers up sinners to their own sinfulness (Rom 1:24) and this handing over into godlessness is the punishment for their abandonment of God. The solution to the godforsakenness of the godless is the godforsakenness of the Son on the cross.

But, Moltmann (1974:243-244) continues, it is not merely that the Son is delivered up to suffering and death, this suffering is a suffering within the Trinity. As the Son dies in godforsakenness on the cross the Father also suffers in his delivering up of the Son. The Father's suffering is different to the Son's. "The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son" (243). Yet in this separation of Father and Son there is a profound unity of purpose. The Son also gives himself, according to Gal 2:20b - "the Son of God, who loved me and gave (*paradontos*) himself for me." The will of the Son is fully in accord with the will of the Father in the cross

and, as such, there is both fellowship in their separation and separation in their fellowship.

So, concludes Moltmann (1974:246), the cross is an eschatological event between the Son and the Father. Thus understanding of the Trinity is found in the cross of Christ. In the cross is desolation, godforsakenness and even death, eternal condemnation and infinite emptiness and non-being and, therefore, these are in God himself. Only because of this is it possible for fellowship with this God to be “eternal salvation, infinite joy, indestructible election and divine life.” The death of Jesus Christ occurred within the “history of God”, that is the history of the Father and the Son. As a result all human history is incorporated into this “history of God” and human beings are able to participate in God’s future, which involves salvation, joy, and life.

In ‘Liberate yourselves’, Moltmann (1998:116-117) goes further than this to apply his understanding of the Trinitarian event of the cross to the experience of disability. The early Church adduced the maxim “whatever is not assumed is not healed”. In effect this means that Jesus Christ must necessarily be a true human being in order for humanity to be healed. The ever-living God did not merely limit himself but became disabled, weak, powerless, and subject to death like mortal humanity. He made disabilities part of his eternal life. It is through subjecting himself to all sickness, disease and suffering that disability is healed by Jesus. By his radical participation in human suffering, God transforms human suffering into “part of his eternal love.”

From Moltmann's understanding of the cross I conclude, most significantly, that as Jesus became disabled on the cross this was something which had an effect on the Trinity. The Father did not become disabled, because human disability requires becoming a human being, but the Father did experience suffering because of Jesus' weakness, loneliness, abandonment and shame. He suffered while the Son was unable. He suffered while the Son was vilified. These aspects of disability have become part of the "history of God". Because of his being disabled, disability will be fully healed by Jesus. But Moltmann goes too far in his conclusion that disability has become "part of [God's] eternal love".

Care must be taken in formulating a conception of what it means for Jesus to be the 'disabled God'. According to Cooper (1992:182):

disabled people [*sic*] enter in, contributing their reality to God and eternity. God receives the reality of the disabled and gives a place in God's eternal life that adds to the divine richness of God's being and all other beings.

Cooper rightly wants to give dignity to persons with disabilities and to recognise their contributions to the world. But Cooper has failed to understand that God knows the reality of persons with disabilities only because he has experienced this reality in the disabling of Jesus on the cross. Jesus has taken this reality into God by virtue of his unique status as the God-man. It is not that being disabled will add to God but rather God will heal disability because he has borne it on the cross.

The fact that God, in Jesus Christ, has become the 'disabled God' on the cross does not imply that God is not omnipotent. Cooper (1992:180) suggests that God should not be thought of as "unlimitedly able". Instead of thinking of God as able to

do whatever he wants we should think of God as “suffering with us, broken for us.” Cooper’s idea suggests a God who is not omnipotent. However, a truer understanding of the ‘disabled God’ is that God is *free to be weak*. In Christ, God has freely chosen to suffer in the way which human beings suffer. This does not mean that God is not omnipotent but only that, in his omnipotence, he is free to empty himself and become impotent for the sake of love.

Through Christ, God has taken death and, as a corollary, disability into himself by his submission to death on the cross. This action brought about a change in the Trinity in that now death and disability have become part of the “history of God”. Yet the result of this humiliation of Jesus is not the eternalising of disability within God but rather the extinguishing of death and disability. This is possible because Jesus is uniquely both God and human being simultaneously. Disability does not add to God but Jesus’ taking on of disability has added to God’s omnipotence through his freedom to make himself impotent in the cross.

Theodicy

I have argued that Jesus is the ‘disabled God’ by virtue of his experience of being disabled on the cross and because he experienced the things which often accompany disability: abandonment, loneliness, poverty, shame and stigma. Becoming the ‘disabled God’ is an event which had an effect on the Trinity in that disability is now part of “the history of God”. Now the subject of theodicy needs to be examined. Many people have wondered why disability exists and why an omnipotent God does not ‘do something about it’. The cross is the answer.

The cross is the ultimate theodicy as Alan Torrance (1989:345) maintains. When Job was afflicted with suffering he voiced a cry of protest to God that may be a cry for all the afflicted: “Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as humans see?” (Job 10:4). How far can God go in identifying with those who suffer? It is not possible to give a cogent reply to Job’s question because there is no reason why suffering must be a good within a universe created by a God of love. If such an answer were to be formulated it would serve only to make suffering acceptable, even something to celebrate, as part of God’s good creation. Torrance asserts:

The only possible ground of meaningfulness for Job in this context is the address of the crucified Christ, not simply the Christ on the cross carrying out the painful work of redeeming humanity from its sin – this would be to refer to a suffering with a purpose whereas Job’s seems to be meaningless – but the God who bears the cross in total and radical solidarity with Job in all his godforsakenness (1989:345).

The cross is a surprising theodicy. Sobrino (2003:242-246) contends that God fails to ‘do something’ about suffering in the way in which human beings want him to. What is totally surprising is that God participates in suffering. Love is never love without solidarity with the beloved. God’s solidarity with humankind is demonstrated by the incarnation, in which God was willing to become a victim. Ultimately the cross demonstrates that God not only wages war against human suffering but he does this in solidarity with suffering humanity by becoming a suffering man. The suffering of Jesus introduces a third option in dealing with suffering; instead of accepting suffering as noble or removing suffering from without, Jesus has borne it. If God is silent in the face of suffering it is because he is also suffering in order to bring all suffering to an end.

Jesus' experience of disability on the cross means that God's love for persons with disabilities has been demonstrated in a credible way. McGrath (1987:95) declares that the cross shows the true depth of God's love for humanity. This love is not something which can be understood from an appreciation of creation. It can *only* be known through the cross of Christ. As Sloyan (1995:188) notes, such entering into the pain of history discloses a God whose love is wholly credible. For D. Keck (1996:172) this brokenness of God permits the Church to speak credibly to those who are suffering "because the Church is called into existence through the desolation, despoiling, and twisting of God's own body."

Persons with disabilities need not question the love of God nor need they question why disability has become part of their experience. God has not ignored the fact of disability in the world but has freely submitted himself to all that disability entails in solidarity with those who suffer because of their disabilities. Jesus has not called disability good or stood outside and temporarily removed it, but rather he has healed it from the inside by bearing it. Such bearing of disability makes the 'disabled God' a God of credible love for persons with disabilities and enables the Church to minister to persons with disabilities because her God is the 'disabled God'.

Ability in Weakness

Having come to an understanding of what being the 'disabled God' means for the Godhead and what the cross means in terms of theodicy for disability, I now turn to the way in which the cross transforms ideas of strength and weakness. One significant aspect of the 'disabled God' is his weakness on the cross in contrast to the

traditional philosophical ideal of an omnipotent God. This power in weakness is something which must change any understanding of disability amongst the people of God.

The powerlessness and weakness of Jesus on the cross has brought about a transformation of reality. As Forde (cited in Colb 2003:457) expresses it:

Whereas the theologian of glory tries to see through the needy, the poor, the lowly, and the “non-existent”, the theologian of the Cross knows that the love of God creates precisely out of nothing.

Fritzson (2000) rejects the idea that the Bible is only a book about healing persons with disabilities. Instead he observes that because God’s power is made perfect in weakness (2Cor 12:9), it is necessary to experience weakness in order to know the power of God.

Horne (1998:93) expands on the idea of power in weakness and sets out to relate it directly to disability by translating *astheneia* (usually translated as ‘weakness’) as ‘inability’. In 2Cor 12:5-10 Paul glories in his inabilities because God has spoken directly to him saying, “My power is made complete in inability” (Horne’s translation). Thus Paul can conclude, “When I lack ability then I am able” (Horne’s translation). This seeming paradox of a God who is all powerful, yet whose power is completed in inability, is explained by the cross of Christ. For Paul the cross stands at the centre (1Cor 1:23, 2:2; Gal 6:14). The fact that the Messiah was crucified is inherently contradictory for both Jew and Gentile. Yet it was in the cross that God perfectly manifested his power and love through the complete inability of Jesus Christ.

Paul believes, writes Horne (1998:95), that his lack of ability is evidence that “the power of Christ may rest on me” (2Cor 12:9b Horne’s translation). The word Paul uses here for ‘rest’, *episkēnoō*, is hapax in the New Testament. It evokes that idea of a tent like that of the Old Testament tabernacle. This tabernacle was the “locus of sacrifice” in Leviticus. In the Levitical tradition a priest with inabilities was excluded from the tabernacle and from offering sacrifice. Yet Paul has tipped this tradition on its head as he says “that inabilities are the place where God’s power is made complete and that inabilities are the place where Christ’s power comes to abide.”

The result of this new paradigm of power in weakness is a different view of those who are weak and needy. Smalley (2001:104) posits that the cross of Christ brings about a new understanding of being human. Dependence, not independence, is the path to “fullness of life”; need is no longer a bane for now it opens the door to life and blessing. Fritson (2000) observes that people who are weak have been given gifts that the Church cannot do without. “The members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable” (1Cor 12:22). No longer is it obvious what weakness is because reality is different to the way things seem.

The cross changes the meaning of disability because it changes the meaning of weakness. Knowledge of God flows out of weakness and not strength. It is through Jesus’ inability, his disability, that the power of God was manifested completely. Now God’s power dwells where there is weakness, including where there is disability. As a result, being dependent is no longer negative and the Church needs those who have disabilities.

The Effect of the ‘Disabled God’ on Persons with Disabilities

The consequences of the ‘disabled God’ discussed so far are the effect on the Trinity, the cross as theodicy, and a change in understanding of weakness and strength. In addition, the ‘disabled God’ can have an effect on persons with disabilities. This includes differences in dignity, status, and the way in which people experience disability. The discussion below utilises the idea that disability is a subset of suffering; disability often involves physical pain, weakness, loneliness, stigma and other difficulties.

The cross bestows dignity and meaning to those who experience disability because God has entered into that experience. David Smith (cited in D. Keck 1996:27) observes: “We deny personhood to, and hence close sympathetic experience with, those who suffer precisely because we want to avoid suffering ourselves”. In contrast to this, McGrath (1987:106-107, 157) notes that by participating in human suffering on the cross, Jesus sanctified suffering and thus afforded dignity to even the most miserable facets of human experience. God’s wretchedness in the cross can give meaning to the believer in the present “contradictions and confusions” of life, not just in the future.

The cross gives those who are suffering a precedent for crying out to God in their pain. L. Keck (2000:149) affirms that the cross has relevance to situations in which suffering is caused by another party. Hurt and anger which result from such pain do not need to be suppressed because Jesus, in Mark’s Gospel, gave vent to his feelings of grief and desolation on the cross (Mark 15:34). If God was present in the

seeming abandonment of Jesus on the cross, then God is present for the believer even when no consciousness of that presence exists. The cross offers no rationales for suffering, but rather it confers the power to endure in hope, because Jesus has gone before by calling out to God, even in his abandonment.

The cross also transforms existing ideas of social status and importance. Cousar (1990:31, 32, 35) explains Paul's discussion in 1Cor 1:18-2:5 about wisdom and strength in light of the cross. It is not that the foolish and weak Corinthian Christians were made strong and wise. Their human capabilities remained the same but the gospel brings liberation from the old outlook which determines social status. Many of the Corinthians were poor, uneducated and without political suffrage; their social status was low. Yet, now that these people are the elect of God they are able to view themselves in a different light; they are no longer inferior to the "seemingly wise and mighty" (1:28). The cross tips upside-down all notions of wisdom and power, weakness and strength.

Consequently, the cross gives a new status within the Church to persons with disabilities. Black (1998:16) states that this new status is necessary because many people believe that persons with disabilities cannot represent Jesus, who was perfect. This chapter has argued that Jesus was not perfect in the sense of physical perfection. During his passion he was scourged to the point of being unable to carry his own cross. Whatever strength and ability he had left was removed by the act of crucifixion, which left Jesus physically disabled as well as humiliated. The idea that persons with disabilities cannot represent Jesus must be disputed in the light of the 'disabled God'.

Just as death is undone by the death of Jesus, so too is healing effected by the cross and will be brought to completion in the resurrection of the dead. Medieval mysticism understood something of the healing afforded by the wounds of Jesus. Moltmann (1974:45-46) explains that mysticism viewed the cross of Christ differently to the more normative view of the cross as reconciling sacrifice. Instead mysticism involved meditation on the sufferings of Christ and his nearness to those who suffer. Jesus, in pain and anguish on the cross, was a particular comfort to “the poor and the sick, the oppressed and the crushed” (45), while no one else could be of any help. The theological truth which the mystics correctly understood was that “suffering is overcome by suffering, and wounds are healed by wounds” (46).

Medieval theologian Bernard of Clairvaux (cited in Sloyan 1995:135) described the comfort found in the wounded Christ. He believed that Christ was in no way separate from his people. Jesus has one body of which he is the head, and the people in the Church are his members. There is no separation. Jesus did not suffer merely in the past but he continues to suffer in the present because his body the Church suffers. The pain which his Church feels is borne by him; it is his pain. Knowing that Christ experienced human misery changes us psychologically.

Because of the cross, suffering is transformed from something which is meaningless and must be simply endured alone to something which is done in Christ. Jones (1933:210-211) asserts that Jesus has purified suffering. Suffering is no longer part of the meaninglessness of existence, or the result of past personal sins, or even the outcome of incurring God’s wrath. As a result of the cross, “suffering is the gift of God.” Weinandy (2000:173) contends that those who are in Christ experience

suffering completely differently to those who are not. This is because Christ is God's response to suffering and Christians suffer as a part of that response. And, therefore, as Moltmann (1974:56) declares, Christians do not suffer alone but in communion with Jesus.

On the cross Jesus has brought about hope for all people through his conquering of death. As Rahner (cited by Mackrell 1987:8) writes, "Jesus is one who can no longer die but who has died; who can no longer suffer but who has suffered; who can no longer fear but has feared." Moltmann (1974:217-218) explains that "the crucified Christ is the ground of [God's] new creation" (217), in which death is abolished by life and suffering is brought to an end. The emptiness and meaninglessness of death has been taken into God by Jesus and thus people can now live in the hope of the new creation. This hope is for the resurrection of the dead.

Persons with disabilities experience suffering on their lives to varying extents. That suffering may take the form of physical limitation, physical pain, mental anguish, hopelessness, discrimination, loneliness, poverty or religious vilification. As Jesus has experienced all of these forms of suffering, his passion transforms the experience of disability. Persons with disabilities are accorded dignity and meaning within those disabilities. There is precedent for expressing frustration and pain to God because of Jesus' cry of dereliction. Notions of status within the Church for persons with disabilities have been upturned. The cross is the means by which physical and emotional healing is brought about. Disability is no longer an experience to endure alone because it takes place 'in Christ'. Most significantly,

disability is undone as death is undone and there is hope for persons with disabilities in the resurrection of the dead.

Conclusion

The cross is the place in which Jesus became the 'disabled God' in experience. Prior to this event it was possible to call Jesus the 'God of the disabled' because he willingly emptied himself and entered into the human experience with the chance of becoming disabled. In his ministry Jesus spent time with persons with disabilities and brought them healing in all its facets: physical, emotional, spiritual and relational. Yet in none of this could Jesus truly be called the 'disabled God' because he had not experienced what it was to be a person with a disability.

The cross is the rightful locus for understanding the 'disabled God'. It is on the cross that Jesus experienced disability and all that it entails - incapacity, physical pain, mental suffering, weakness, poverty, shame and abandonment. Although Jesus did not become intellectually disabled, he did experience the extreme discrimination, loneliness and loss of personhood which people with intellectual disabilities face regularly. Because of these experiences, it is possible to give Jesus the title of the 'disabled God' in every sense. This taking on of disability was part of the intention of God within his plan to redeem humanity. Jesus deliberately went towards the cross in accord with the will of the Father. He has become the 'disabled God' by intention not by accident. Because of this, Jesus can speak powerfully to persons with disabilities as one who has entered into their reality.

The implications of the 'disabled God' are many. For the Trinity there has been a change in that disability has been taken into "the history of God". God has not become impotent but he freely chose to empty himself of his omnipotence in the cross. The result is that disability has been borne to extinction in God. This disabling of Jesus has also served to justify God in the face of disability; God is now credibly a God of love for persons with disabilities. Power and weakness have also been transformed with weakness having become the place of God's presence. Finally, the 'disabled God' has given new dignity, status, healing, comfort, and hope to persons with disabilities.

The story of the 'disabled God' does not, indeed cannot, end with the cross. Jesus rose from the dead immortal and is seated at God's right hand. Without his resurrection from the dead the cross is nothing but a tragic event amongst a myriad of tragic events. If Jesus did not rise again from the dead then he cannot be the 'disabled God' because God cannot be contained by death. The resurrection guarantees that the implications of the 'disabled God' are both possible and will be completed. The final chapter will discuss the resurrection of the 'disabled God'.

Resurrection

Introduction

The previous chapter argued that Jesus was physically disabled during his passion because of his physical weakness and suffering. He also identified with people with intellectual disabilities by entering into their experience of abandonment, loneliness, poverty and stigma. This chapter aims to clarify why Eiesland's location of the 'disabled God' in the resurrection is problematic.

Eiesland

Eiesland (1994:98-100) locates her conception of the 'disabled God' within the resurrection of Jesus. Eiesland's 'disabled God' is such because he has risen from the dead and bears the marks of crucifixion in his hands and in his side. Eiesland (1994:99-100) contends:

In the resurrected Jesus Christ, [the disciples] saw not the suffering servant for whom the last and most important word was tragedy and sin, but the disabled God who embodied both impaired hands and feet and pierced side and imago Dei....In presenting his impaired hands and feet to his startled friends, the resurrected Jesus is revealed as the disabled God....The disabled God is not only the One from heaven but the revelation of true personhood, underscoring the reality that full personhood is fully compatible with the experience of disability.

While Eiesland is notable in her desire to see persons with disabilities included and accepted within the Church, her conception of the 'disabled God', centred in the resurrection, has some fundamental problems. This chapter on the resurrection of Jesus aims to clarify what these problems are and thus reinforce my contention that the locus for the 'disabled God' must be the cross of Christ and not the resurrection.

There are two major problems with Eiesland's centring the 'disabled God' in the resurrection. The first is that Jesus should not be seen as disabled in his resurrected state. While he bears the scars of the crucifixion, he is not disabled even by Eiesland's own definition of disabled. Eiesland (1994:27) defines disability as "the consequences of the impairment, that is, an inability to perform some task or activity considered necessary." The second follows from the notion of Jesus as resurrected and disabled. If Jesus has risen from the dead as a person with disabilities, then persons with disabilities have no hope of being healed in the resurrection of the dead. To bring clarity to these problems this chapter will discuss the scars of the resurrected Christ, the nature of the resurrection body, the exalted state of Christ, and eschatological hope for persons with disabilities.

The Wounds of the Resurrected Christ

Eiesland (1994:100) sees the wounds of the resurrected Jesus as providing proof that the resurrected Christ is the 'disabled God'. That Jesus still bears the scars of crucifixion is significant but for reasons other than what Eiesland posits. The first is simply that the resurrected Christ can be identified as the same Jesus who was crucified.

Both Luke (24:37-40) and John (20:20, 24-27) report that after Jesus rose from the dead he still carried the marks of crucifixion; Luke mentions wounds in hands and feet while John refers to hands and side.. The primary reason mentioned in the Gospels for the wounds is identification. According to Keener (2003:1202), there was a Jewish tradition, in which a resurrected person would look the same as at death,

wounds included (e.g. 2Bar. 50:2-4; Gen. Rab. 95:1; Eccl. Rab. 1:4). Hooke (1967:83) states that the disciples needed to be reassured that the man in their midst was the same man that they had seen crucified days earlier. Without this proof of Jesus' identity they would never understand the new creation brought about by his resurrection. Bock (1996:1925, 1932-1933) notes the bodily nature of the resurrection; Jesus asks the disciples to touch him and also eats with them to provide further proof that he was no phantom. The body of Jesus was transformed by his resurrection but he bore the scars in continuity with his former existence.

The cross of Jesus is not something which is past and done away with; the cross has ongoing significance for both Jesus and his disciples. Moltmann (1974:181-182, 186-187) says the cross is not undone by the resurrection; it is not an event which is a mere passing phase of Jesus' journey to glory. Instead, the resurrection changes the cross into "an eschatological saving event". O'Collins (1973:120) notes that the apostle Paul could never minimise the significance of the cross. The resurrection needs the cross in order for the resurrection to be a saving event. This connection is evident in Rom 4:25, "[He] was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification."

The marks of the crucifixion also imply something for the disciples of Jesus; discipleship involves taking up the cross. O'Collins (1973:120) sees this motif of suffering discipleship within the resurrection narratives in John's Gospel. "The remembrance of the crucifixion qualifies the resurrection story." When Jesus appears to his disciples and Thomas (John 20:20, 27), he displays his wounds and offers to let Thomas touch them. Later he appears to Peter on the beach and asks him, "Feed my

lambs” (John 21:15ff). The joy of this encounter with the resurrected Christ is tempered by Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s imprisonment and death (John 21:18-19). The resurrection of Jesus means continued service, together with suffering, for his disciples.

The marks of crucifixion which Jesus continues to bear in his body remind all who look upon him that his lordship is dependent on the cross. O’Donnell (1988:61) asserts that the wounds of the resurrected Christ are a reminder “that he rules from the cross” thus challenging human notions of power and weakness. Harrington (1993:25-26) comments on the image of Christ in Revelation 5. The Lamb is one who has been slain and at the same time he is powerful and exalted. The victory of the Lamb was gained by his self-sacrifice on the cross. Rev 5:6 describes the Lamb as having seven horns which symbolise fullness of power, a power which flows from the cross.

The resurrected Jesus continues to have scars in his hands, feet and side. Thus he is clearly the same person who was crucified and who died. Jesus carries the marks of crucifixion because the resurrection needs the cross as the cross needs the resurrection. The disciples of Jesus cannot forget the cross because suffering is part of discipleship. Indeed, this risen Jesus rules in heaven as the crucified one.

The Resurrection Body

The previous section examined the reasons for the marks of the crucifixion in the resurrected Jesus. This section will explore the nature of Jesus’ resurrected body to see if this body qualifies as a disabled body. This exploration will take in both Paul’s conception of the resurrected body and the evidence of the Gospels.

The examination of the resurrected body of Jesus will begin with an examination of Paul's discussion of the resurrection in 1Corinthians 15. Pannenberg (1968:76-77) observes that although Paul's discussion of the resurrection in 1Cor 15:35-56 is not so much about the resurrection of Jesus as about the future resurrection of the dead, the two resurrections are fundamentally comparable (cf. Phil 3:21; Rom 6:8-9, 8:29). Paul had seen the resurrected Christ and he believed that this appearance was of the same kind as that which the other apostles experienced. Thus Paul's description of the resurrection of the dead should give some insight into the nature of the resurrection body of Jesus.

The first aspect of resurrection to note is that this involves both continuity and transformation. O'Collins (1973:113) summarises Paul's conception of the resurrection in terms of both continuity and transformation. The continuity consists in the fact that the present mortal body will be resurrected (1Cor 15:53; Phil 3:20-21; Rom 8:11). The person who experiences resurrection is continuous with the person who died. The old creation will experience the liberation of recreation (Rom 8:21). As Pannenberg (1968:76) expresses this, there is a "historical continuity" between the beginning and end points of the transformation of the individual.

In contrast to this continuity, there is a radical discontinuity because of the transformation which takes place in the resurrection. O'Collins (1973:113) conveys this notion of far-reaching transformation. Resurrection of the body is by no means like the resuscitation of a dead body or even rejuvenation of old matter. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (1Cor 15:50). Resurrection requires a "radical transformation" of

human existence. As Pannenberg (1968:76) writes, “nothing will remain unchanged. There is no substantial or structural continuity from the old to the new existence.”

The resurrection body will be a spiritual body in contrast with the present mortal body. Wilkinson (1998:184-185) provides an apt description of the resurrection body. Paul, in 1Cor 15:42-54, speaks of the resurrection as a transformation from the physical body to the spiritual body. The two bodies are vitally different. The present physical body is mortal, weak and destructible, liable to disease, decay, and shame. The spiritual body is the antithesis, being “imperishable, glorious, strong, immortal and life-giving”. Such a body is living and cannot die (Rom 8:11) nor can it become sick or injured. Harris (1983:121) stresses that the body of the resurrected Christian will never experience corruption, it will be outwardly magnificent, and will possess endless health and vitality.

It must be noted that the spiritual resurrection body is not immaterial. Harris (1983:120-121) observes that the resurrection body is not without substance. When Paul uses the term *pneumatikos* (spiritual) he does not mean that the body will be composed of spirit, rather he is referring to a body governed by spirit. This ‘spirit’ could mean either the Holy Spirit or the human spirit renewed by the Holy Spirit. This body governed by spirit is thus equipped to commune with the heavenly reality. No more, according to O’Collins (1973:113), will the body be oppressed by all the “negative, death-dealing forces” to which it is now subjected.

Paul’s description of the future resurrection body includes both continuity and transformation. The person who is raised from the dead will be the same person who

has died but that person will be radically transformed. This transformation will involve a change from mortality to immortality. The resurrected body will no longer be able to experience death in any form including disability. Such a body will be spiritual in contrast to mortal and will thus become part of the heavenly reality.

Jesus' Resurrection Body

The Gospel descriptions of the body of the resurrected Christ are similar in some ways to Paul's description of the believer's resurrection body as well as providing something further. Bock (1996:1933-1934) notes the continuity of the risen Christ with the Jesus who died. Luke 24:39 describes Jesus as having flesh and bones. The risen Jesus has a discernable body which cannot be characterised as a mere phantom. Jesus is recognisably Jesus; he has not been replaced by a spirit. The risen Christ is changed but his former self is discernable in ways such as the nail prints in his hands and feet.

While there is substantial continuity with his old existence, the body of the risen Jesus has been transformed so that he is no longer bound by the same limitations. Wilkinson (1998:185) puts it this way: "His body bore a new relationship to matter." Harris (1983:53-54) claims that neither matter nor space placed any limits on the risen Christ. He could move through matter – the sealed tomb (Matt 28:2, 6) and closed or even locked doors (John 20:19, 26). He could appear and disappear instantly, although only one disappearance is recorded. The resurrected Christ was generally invisible: the Greek word *ōphthē*, meaning 'he became visible', is used for

his appearances; his appearances are itemised suggesting that he was not normally visible; and Jesus did not regularly eat with his disciples or stay overnight with them.

In his resurrected state, Jesus entered into a new mode of existence. According to Harris (1983:57), this mode of existence was characterised by Jesus having become a “life-giving spirit” (1Cor 15:45). In this form of existence the spirit is ultimate; Jesus is unhindered by the limitations of time and space and continuously creating new life for both body and spirit. The resurrection body of Christ responds instantly to the commands of his will and is not reliant on his physical surrounds. O’Collins (1973:115) calls this new existence of Jesus a “fully liberated” one. Jesus is truly himself but in his resurrected state he is “enhanced”.

The resurrection body of Jesus is comparable to the resurrection body of the believer as described by Paul in 1Corinthians 15. There is both continuity – such as the wounds in Jesus’ hands and feet – and discontinuity with the mortal body of Jesus. Now that Jesus has risen from the dead he is no longer mortal, no longer subject to decay, and no longer able to experience disability. He is not bound by the limitations placed on a mortal body: he is able to appear and disappear at will; he is able to walk through walls and locked doors. His body is one which is governed by spirit, immediately responsive to his will and able to exist within the heavenly realms. Jesus is not disabled in his resurrected state, rather he is enabled to do far more than he could ever do before his death.

The Exalted State of the Resurrected Christ

Not only is Jesus not disabled in his resurrected state but he is not humiliated either. Jesus was exalted by his resurrection from the dead in contrast to the humiliation of the cross. Harris (1983:72, 78-80) explains that a crucified Messiah was oxymoron to Jews because a crucified man must be under God's curse (Deut 21:22-23) but the resurrection of Jesus has shown that this verdict is reversed. No longer is Jesus humiliated, but rather he is exalted, as the frequent allusion to Psalm 110:1, "The LORD says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool'", in the New Testament in relation to Jesus attests (e.g. Acts 2:34; Eph 1:20, 22; Heb 1:3, 13, 8:1, 10:12). Jesus is now greatly honoured and shares the throne with God (Rev 3:21).

The resurrected Jesus has been exalted to the highest place that is possible for a human being to reside. Hooke (1967:57) comments that the result of Jesus' obedience was glory for the Father (Phil 2:9-11) and hence the Father has both raised the Son from the dead (Rom 6:4) and given him authority over the whole of creation, so that humanity shall now revere the Son in the same way in which they revere the Father (John 5:23). Harris (1983:79-80) observes that because of his obedience, Jesus has been exalted by the Father and given the title 'Lord' thus becoming 'equal with God' (cf. Phil 2:6) in the judgment of human beings. Harris also argues that Jesus has returned to his pre-incarnate glory but with even greater glory.

Is the Risen Jesus the 'Disabled God'?

The risen Christ is no longer disabled, but rather the resurrection has transferred the risen Christ into a new reality radically different to the old. T.F. Torrance (1998:37) explains the transformed reality of the resurrection which cannot be compared to the reality of mortal humanity:

The risen Jesus Christ cannot be discerned within the framework of the old conditions of life which by his resurrection he has transcended, and cannot be understood except within the context of the transformation which it brought about. If it could be discerned and understood within the old framework and context, then that would imply the subjugation of Jesus once again to his passion.

To call Jesus disabled from within his resurrection state is to fail to discern the effect of the transformation which took place in the resurrection. Eiesland (1994:100) insightfully recognises that the resurrected Jesus bears “the representation of the body reshaped by injustice and sin”. What Eiesland concludes from this is that the resurrected Jesus is thus the ‘disabled God’. Such a conclusion fails to understand the transformation which has operated on the body of the risen Christ. He cannot be subjugated “once again to his passion” and hence he cannot again be subjected to disability. He bears the scars because he is the same Jesus who was crucified but he is no longer disabled because he has transcended mortality.

Jesus is no longer disabled and he will never again be disabled; he has overcome disability in the cross and entered into a life without the effects of mortality and decay. However, in a similar way to Moltmann’s designation of Jesus as the ‘crucified God’, Jesus remains the ‘disabled God’. He is the God who has gone to the

depths of human physical weakness, pain, suffering and humiliation, and the resurrection does not dissolve that fact.

Implications for Hope

I argued above that because Jesus has been radically transformed by his resurrection, Eiesland's locus of the 'disabled God' within the resurrection does not fit the nature of this new reality. Now I turn to addressing another problem with Eiesland's conception of the 'disabled God', that of hope. The following section discusses the question of eschatological hope for persons with disabilities.

The resurrection of the believer is wholly interconnected with the resurrection of Christ. Moltmann (1974:186) explains that Jesus died for those who are "dead" in order to impart to them his resurrection life which means including them within his eternal life. O'Collins (1973:110) explicates the connection between the resurrection of Christ and that of the believer. Jesus' resurrection is not merely the first resurrection of many; the resurrection of all believers inheres within the resurrection of Jesus. O'Collins states, "Either we hope for resurrection through assimilation to the risen body of the exalted Christ, or we cannot hope for any resurrection at all."

The resurrection of the dead belongs to the future New Age and cannot be contained within the confines of the Present Evil Age, in which sin reigns. Moltmann (1974:188) observes that the present creation has been rendered futile by sin so the resurrection of the dead does not involve restoration of the old creation, but rather an entering into the new creation. D. Keck (1996:135-136) stresses the eschatological nature of resurrection. Human beings are not fully human until they enter into the

future glorious and incorruptible state which comes about in the resurrection of the dead. People are embodied creatures, but sickness and congenital disease demonstrate the need for imperishable bodies, which humans cannot possess until the future resurrection.

The resurrection of Jesus is vitally connected to the resurrection of the believer. Both belong, not to the old, decaying, obsolete age, but to the new eschatological age in which all things become new. Eiesland's vision of Jesus as the 'disabled God' in the resurrection places disability within the new creation and effectively implies that disability will remain forever part of eternity. If Jesus is disabled in his resurrection then any person with a disability who is resurrected from the dead should expect to have a disability forever. Such a conception of the risen Christ means the end of hope for healed and whole bodies for those who experience disability, sickness or disease in their present.

Conclusion

Eiesland has placed the locus of the 'disabled God' with the resurrected Jesus but this is problematic. Jesus still bears the scars of crucifixion because he is still the one who was crucified. The crucifixion cannot be discarded as something of the past but it has ongoing significance for Jesus, the slain Lamb, and the disciples of Jesus who continue to suffer. Jesus has risen from the dead as a person who can no longer die and who is no longer subject to all that death means – decay, disease, and disability. He is now enabled in ways well beyond his capacity as a mortal human being.

Jesus is still the 'disabled God' as the resurrected Christ because his experience of disability is not forgotten but he is not still disabled. The risen Christ is not lowly but highly exalted and glorified. He will take believers into his resurrection where they similarly will be free from death, disease, and disability for all eternity. The resurrected Jesus is the 'disabled God' who offers hope for all those who must now suffer because of their disabilities.

Conclusion

Conclusions of this Thesis

In this thesis I have explored the concept of the ‘disabled God’ and attempted to construct solid theological foundations for this image. I have done so using common themes of evangelical theology adapted to embrace theology of disability, in conversation with others who have written about disability, along with some other voices. The foundation of the image of the ‘disabled God’ is the entire incarnation, including the kenosis, life of Christ, the cross and the resurrection of Christ. This use of the incarnation with the cross at the centre is able to give a complete picture of what it means to be the ‘disabled God’.

Becoming the ‘disabled God’ is a choice which Christ made before time but which only became actualised in his incarnation. Becoming the ‘disabled God’ involves the true God becoming a true human being in order to be able to experience disability. God is not essentially disabled but he has chosen to become so in Christ. Jesus did not experience disability during his ministry but he expressed compassion towards persons with disabilities. Jesus’ ministry involved healing such people in every sense of healing – physically, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. All this was done within the context of the coming of the kingdom of God, the consummation of which will involve the redemption of the body.

Even though Jesus had begun to identify with persons with disabilities in his ministry and his teaching, he fully identified with such people on the cross. Before

the cross, Jesus could have been called the ‘God of the disabled’ but on the cross he can truly be called the ‘disabled God’. On the cross Jesus was physically disabled and he shared in the experience of people with intellectual disabilities because he experienced shame, stigma, loneliness, and loss of personhood. The ‘disabled God’ has implications for the Trinity in that disability has been taken into “the history of God”. That Jesus has taken disability upon himself provides a theodic function for persons with disabilities. There is a change in the meaning of strength and weakness, and the ‘disabled God’ gives new dignity, status, healing, comfort, and hope to persons with disabilities.

The correct locus for the ‘disabled God’ is the cross, and not the resurrection as Eiesland contends. In his resurrected state, Jesus is no longer subject to death or disability. He is now exalted above every name and seated at the right hand of God. Jesus still bears the scars from the cross because he is the same person who was crucified. Although Jesus is no longer disabled he is still the ‘disabled God’ because he has shared in the experience of disability and he offers hope of healed bodies to people with disabilities.

Questions Raised by This Thesis

The writing of this thesis has raised a number of questions which could not be explored within the space allowed. One of the major goals of this thesis was to include intellectual disability within the image of the ‘disabled God’. I have attempted to include the ways in which Jesus would treat persons with intellectual disabilities and his identification with them on the cross, but I have not explored the

nature of hope for persons with intellectual disabilities. Mental illness can come under the umbrella of disability (WHO 2009) but what I have made no attempt to do is examine the image of the ‘disabled God’ in relation to mental illness. This would be best left to a research paper with greater space.

I have also not considered the way in which the Holy Spirit is important in the reality of Jesus being the ‘disabled God’. The Spirit works to apply the work of Christ to the Church, and so the way in which the Spirit works to apply the disabling of Jesus and his victory over disability to the Church would be worth exploring in the future. Related to the work of the Spirit is the question of how the early Church acted in response to the ‘disabled God’. A consideration of healings in the book of Acts in relation to the ‘disabled God’ would help this investigation.

The final suggestion I will make for further research is something which is controversial amongst writers of theology of disability. In various aspects of this thesis the question of the connection, or lack thereof, between sin and disability has come up. This question is complex and needs careful consideration. Therefore, I have avoided any attempt to answer this question in this thesis. It is something which needs to be properly addressed in a study with greater space.

Implications of This Thesis

The disabled God adds a new dimension to the Church’s understanding of God’s immanence in Jesus Christ. God is not distant from the experience of persons with disabilities, but rather he knows what it is like to have multiple physical disabilities and he has experienced many of the experiences common to persons with

intellectual disabilities. Knowing this could change the way in which persons with disabilities relate to God as one who is intimately affected by their disabilities. It should also change the way in which people with disabilities are treated within the Church. If God has such immanent concern for persons with disabilities then the Church must have a similar concern.

The image of Jesus as ‘disabled God’ is a contextualised Christology which relates particularly to the needs of persons with disabilities. Contextualisation is present within the New Testament canon and is therefore valid for the situations which the contemporary Church faces today. Weber (1979:134) concludes that there were different interpretations of the cross given by each of the Gospel writers. This canonical diversity means that the Church is enabled to preach the crucified Christ in new and diverse situations. McGrath (1987:79) observes that “we will never plumb the full depth of the meaning [of the cross]”. Therefore, the Church of every age needs to again examine the cross to understand the circumstances in which she finds herself.

The fact that the significance of the cross is without limit means that it is possible to find a contextualised Christology to apply to the situation of disability. This is not simply possible or acceptable but also necessary. Some ten percent of the world’s population – by some estimates - have a disability and these persons with disabilities encounter difficulties, both personal and social, which are not encountered by those who do not have a disability. To ignore the needs of such a large group of people is not desirable or wise.

The title 'disabled God' is a title which adds to and does not diminish the titles which have been given to God in past theology. In the Old Testament, God was called the 'God of Israel', and in the New he is given the title 'God of Gentiles' also (Rom 3:29). The latter does not detract from the former. To call Jesus Christ the 'disabled God' does not take away from previous titles; he can be both King of kings and Lord of lords yet still be the 'disabled God'. Eiesland (1994:91-92) wants the title 'disabled God' to replace other titles for Christ but this is not my intention. It is reasonable to suggest that further contextualised Christologies could be written for different situations arising within the Church, and hence further titles could be given to Christ which would serve to give him more glory.

Jesus has earned the title of the 'disabled God' by his compassion towards persons with disabilities and by his bearing of disability upon the cross. This explication of the 'disabled God' has sought to present a way of understanding Christology which relates most directly to persons with disabilities and others who care both for and about persons with disabilities. May this new way of viewing the incarnation of Jesus Christ bring both glory to God and comfort and eschatological hope to persons with disabilities.

Bibliography

- Barth, Karl. 1956. *Church Dogmatics I.2 The Doctrine of the Word of God*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Barth, Karl. 1956. *Church Dogmatics II.1 The Doctrine of God*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Barth, Karl. 1956. *Church Dogmatics IV.1 The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Black, Kathy. 1996. *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Black, Kathy. 1998. 'A Perspective of the Disabled: Transforming Images of God, Interdependence, and Healing' in *Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives* edited by Christine Marie Smith. Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 6-25.
- Bock, Darrell L. 1996. *Luke 9:51-24:53*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.
- Boff, Leonardo. 1987. *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World: The Facts, Their Interpretation, and Their Meaning Yesterday and Today*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 1978. *Christ the Centre*. Translated by Edwin H. Robertson. San Francisco: Harper and Row.
- Chitando, Ezra. 2007. *Living with Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS I*. Geneva: WCC Publications.
- Colb, Robert. 2003. 'Luther on the Theology of the Cross' in *Lutheran Quarterly* 16:4, 443-466.
- Cooper, Burton. 1992 'The Disabled God' in *Theology Today*; July 1992; 49:2, 173-182.
- Corner, Mark. 2005. *Signs of God: Miracles and Their Interpretation*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate.
- Cousar, Charles B. 1990. *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Eiesland, Nancy L. 1994. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Fiddes, Paul S. 1988. *The Creative Suffering of God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- France, R.T. 2007. *The Gospel of Matthew*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- French, Sally. 1993. 'Disability, Impairment or Something in Between?' in *Disabling Barriers – Enabling Environments*. Edited by John Swain, Vic Finkelstein, Sally French and Mike Oliver. London: Sage Publications, 17-25.
- Fritzson, Arne. 2000. 'People with disabilities in the Bible: Who are they and what can we learn from them?' *Echoes*, issue 19. Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/echoes/echoes-19-06.html> [accessed 31/7/2008].
- Fritzson, Arne and Samuel Kabue. 2004. *Interpreting Disability: A Church of All and for All*. Geneva: WCC Publications.
- Gavrilyuk, Paul. 2004. *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grant, Colleen C. 1998. 'Reinterpreting the Healing Narratives' in *Human Disability and the Service of God*. Edited by Nancy Eiesland and Don E. Saliers. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 72-87.
- Harrington, Wilfrid J. 1993. *Revelation*. Sacra Pagina Series Vol 16. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press.
- Harris, Murray J. 1983. *Raised Immortal: The Relation between Resurrection and Immortality in New Testament Teaching*. Marshalls Theological Library. London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. 1986. *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections of Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Hebblethwaite, Brian. 1987. *The Incarnation: Collected Essays in Christology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hendrickx, Herman. 1987. *The Miracle Stories of the Synoptic Gospels*. Studies in the Synoptic Gospels. London: Geoffrey Chapman.
- Hengel, Martin. 1977. *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*. London: SCM.
- Holmes, Christopher R.J. 2007. *Revisiting the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes: In Dialogue with Karl Barth, Eberhard Jüngel, and Wolf Krötke*. Issues in Systematic Theology Vol 15. New York: Peter Lang.
- Hooke, S.H. 1967. *The Resurrection of Christ: as History and Experience*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

- Horne, Simon. 1998. ““Those who are Blind See””: Some New Testament Uses of Impairment, Inability and Paradox’ in *Human Disability and the Service of God*. Edited by Nancy Eiesland and Don E. Saliers. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 88-102.
- Hudson, Alan and Gray Radler. (Aug) 2005. ‘Psychologists and Intellectual Disability’ in *InPsych Bulletin*. Australian Psychological Society (APS). <http://www.psychology.org.au/publications/inpsych/disability>. [accessed 5/9/09].
- Hull, John M. 2001. *In the Beginning there was Darkness: A Blind Person’s Conversations with the Bible*. London: SCM Press.
- Jenson, Matt. 2006. *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on Homo Incurvatus In Se*. London: T&T Clark.
- Jenson, Robert W. 1997. *Systematic theology Volume 1: The Triune God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, Stanley E. 1933. *Christ and Human Suffering*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Keck, David. 1996. *Forgetting Whose We Are: Alzheimer’s Disease and the Love of God*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Keck, Leander E. 2000. *Who is Jesus?: History in Perfect Tense*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Keener, Craig S. 2003. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary, Volume Two*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson.
- Ladd, George Eldon. 1974. *The Presence of the Future*. London: SPCK.
- Mackrell, Gerard. 1987. *The Healing Miracles in Mark’s Gospel: The Passion and Compassion of Jesus*. Middlegreen, Slough: St Paul Publications.
- McGrath, Alister. 1987. *The Enigma of the Cross* London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- McKelway, Alexander J. 1990. *The Freedom of God and Human Liberation*. London: SCM.
- Milligan, William. 1881. *The Resurrection of Our Lord*. London: Macmillan and Co.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. 1974. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. London: SCM Press.
- Moltmann, Jürgen 1998. ‘Liberate Yourselves by Accepting one Another’ in *Human Disability and the Service of God*. Edited by Nancy Eiesland and Don E. Saliers. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 105-122.

- Moltmann-Wendel, Elisabeth. 2005. 'The Crucified Jesus – the Bodily Jesus' in *Good is the Flesh*. Edited by, Jean Denton. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 9-12.
- O'Collins, Gerard. 1973. *The Easter Jesus*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd.
- O'Collins, Gerald. 1977. *The Calvary Christ*. SCM Press London.
- O'Donnell, John J. 1988. *The Mystery of the Triune God*. London: Sheed and Ward.
- O'Hanlon, Gerard F. 1990 *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oliver, Mike. 2006 'Social Policy and Disability: Some Theoretical Issues' in *Overcoming Disabling Barriers: 18 Years of Disability and Society* Edited by Len Barton, London: Routledge.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. 1968. *Jesus – God and Man*. Translated by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe. London: SCM.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. 1985. *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Rotholz, James M. 2002. *Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Christianity and Culture: Between God and Illness*. New York: Haworth Medical Press.
- Sloyan, Gerard S. 1995. *The Crucifixion of Jesus: History, Myth, Faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Smalley, Kathy J. 2001. 'Open Wide the Doors to Christ: Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and the Roman Catholic Church' In *Spirituality and Intellectual Disability: International Perspectives on the Effect of Culture and Religion on Healing Body, Mind and Soul*. Edited by William C. Gaventa and David L. Coulter. New York: Hawthorn Pastoral Press, 99-112.
- Sobrino, Jon. 2003. *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological reading of Jesus of Nazareth*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Speraw, Susan. 2006 'Spiritual Experiences of Parents and Caregivers Who Have Children with Disabilities or Special Needs' in *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*; 27, 213-230.
- Torrance, Alan. 1989. 'Does God Suffer?: Incarnation and Impassibility' in *Christ in our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World: Essays Presented to James Torrance* Edited by Trevor Hart and Daniel Thimell. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 345-368.
- Torrance, Thomas F. 1996. *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

- Torrance, Thomas F. 1998. *Space, Time and Resurrection*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Webb-Mitchell, Brett. 1994. *Unexpected Guests at God's Banquet: Welcoming People with Disabilities into the Church*. New York: Crossroad.
- Weber, Hans-Ruedi. 1979. *The Cross: Tradition and Interpretation*. London: SPCK.
- Weinandy, Thomas G. 2000. *Does God Suffer?* Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Wilkinson, John. 1998. *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- World Health Organisation [WHO]. 2009. 'Depression'
http://www.who.int/mental_health/management/depression/definition/en/
 [accessed 15/6/2009].

All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.