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Contending with a Disabled Bible : From Retribution to Redemption

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Gerald O. West

17 Contending with a Disabled Bible

From Retribution to Redemption

Abstract

In honouring both Joachim Kügler's commitment to biblical scholarship and to African contexts, this essay reflects on the Ujamaa Centre's work over more than twenty-five years with organised communities of those living with disability. The essay follows the See-Judge-Act process, so familiar to Kügler, beginning with See: the reality of those living with disability in South Africa (and further north in the continent). The essay then turns to actual biblical text (Judge), from three different perspectives. First, I reflect on texts used against those living with disability, recognising a pervasive voice in scripture which discriminates against and stigmatises those living with disability. Second, I reflect on texts selected by those living with disability as potentially useful resources in their struggle for a full and dignified life. Third, I reflect on the kind of Bible that these two trajectories evidence, a Bible that is inherently a site of struggle with respect to disability – a disabled Bible. Fourth, the essay also reflects on the pervasive interlocking theological system of retribution that stigmatises, discriminates, and condemns those living with disability, alongside their HIV-positive, unemployed, and queer compatriots. Finally, the Act component of the essay reflects on the ongoing work of the Ujamaa Centre in this area and the kinds of actions particular organised groups of people living with disability take up.

Keywords: *Disability, Retribution, Redemption, Theology, Exclusion*

1. Introduction

"I am often blamed for not being healed. Is it because of my sin? Some people say if I confess my sins, I will be healed" (ConneXion, 2011). This was one of the voices within a resource sent to the Ujamaa Centre in a disABILITY ConneXion document, "A Bible Study to Develop a Biblical

View of Disability” (ConneXion, 2011). Patricia Bruce, a colleague with scholarly and familial engagement with disability studies (Bruce, 2010), within the Biblical Studies department of the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics, of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, invited the Ujamaa Centre to meet with the national coordinator of disABILITY ConneXion, Erna Moller and her colleagues on the 30th June 2011. Moller sent us the Bible study document, from which I have taken this quotation. disABILITY ConneXion were inviting the Ujamaa Centre to train them in doing Contextual Bible Study (CBS). This was the beginning of the Ujamaa Centre’s work with disABILITY ConneXion, and other organised groups of people living with disability.

This essay reflects on the Ujamaa Centre’s work specifically within the context of disability and more generally within the trajectory of retribution theology. We begin with the recognition that the Bible is itself – intrinsically – a site of theological and ideological contestation, before turning to reflect on the relationship between disability studies and biblical studies. We then turn to the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) praxis of the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research (Ujamaa Centre) as it is summoned by organised communities of those living with disability to re-read the Bible with them. Finally, the essay reflects on a pervasive form of biblical theology – retribution theology – which interconnects a number of marginalised communities, including those living with disability, those living with HIV, those who have survived and those who have not survived gender-based violence, those who are unemployed, those who practice alternative masculinities, and those who inhabit alternative sexualities.

2. Contending Trajectories in the Bible

In the late 1970s, Walter Brueggemann proposed the biblical literature could be analysed as reflecting two contending ideological and theological trajectories, each grounded in particular struggles across biblical history and sociology. Brueggemann refers to these trajectories using different terminology: the Mosaic liberation trajectory/the royal consolidation trajectory; the have nots trajectory/the haves trajectory (Brueggemann, 1993, p. 201); the structure legitimation trajectory/the embrace of pain trajectory (Brueggemann, 1985a, p. 31); contractual theology/compassionate

theology (Brueggemann, 1985a, pp. 45–46); retribution theology/redemption theology.

Briefly, but incisively, the structure legitimation trajectory is the dominant ideo-theological voice in the Bible; it is a theology that “provides an ordered sense of life that is lodged in the sovereignty of God, beyond the reach of historical circumstances”; it is a theology which asserts that not only does God govern, “but there is an order that works through the processes of history, even if that purpose is not always visible”; such a theology “tends to serve the ruling class, which regularly identifies the order of creation with the current social arrangement”; and while this theological trajectory tends to make universal ahistorical claims, this ideo-theological voice “is wrought by power agents who have a socio-political point to score and who mean to defeat alternative views and legitimate their own” (Brueggemann, 1985b, pp. 395–396).

The other trajectory, the embrace of pain trajectory, is a crucial but “minority voice” in the Bible; it is a theology “that this is a rigorous protest against claims that the dominant order is God’s order; “this theological stance insists and affirms that the legitimated order”, what is claimed to be God’s order, “can be addressed, assaulted, impinged upon, and transformed”; and this theological trajectory summons the “risk” of actual historical protest which invites God “to participate in the critique that will permit a newness” (Brueggemann, 1985b, pp. 405–406).

In the late 1980s, Itumeleng Mosala offered South African Black Theology a similar, though more complex (West, 2020), analysis. Mosala’s focus was not on coherent ideo-theological trajectories across the Bible; his focus was on the particular ideo-theological struggles which produced a particular biblical text, both in its initial formation and in its subsequent redactions (or reuses). Mosala reconceptualises the notion of “source”, refusing to restrict its reference to “different literary sources or different historical provenances”, and insisting instead on “different social class, cultural and gender sources”, and on historical-sociological provenances “that would raise the important factor of [class, cultural, and gender] struggle in and beneath the text” (Mosala, 1989, p. 10). Not only is the Bible “the product and record of class, race, gender, and cultural struggles”, it is also “the site and weapon of such struggles”, ancient and contemporary (Mosala, 1989, p. 11).

For both Brueggemann and Mosala the pervasive contestation is economic and political. Neither of them engages specifically with disability, though both would recognise its inclusion within their categories of “have nots” (Brueggemann, 1993, p. 201) or “the poor and exploited” (Mosala, 1989, p. 193).

3. Disability Studies and Biblical Studies

I borrow this sub-heading from the work of Hector Avalos, who has given us a very useful overview of the relationship between these two areas of study (Avalos, 2019). He begins by situating biblical studies work within the wider field of disability studies. Disability studies “centers on the differential valuation of human beings based on their perceived physical and/or mental features and ‘abilities’” (Avalos, 2019, p. 344). Adopting the epistemology of this marginalised sector of our society, Avalos goes to state that “the disability rights movement often encourages use of the term, ‘people with disabilities’ (PWD), to emphasize the fact that a disability need not define one’s entire spectrum of abilities or worth” (Avalos, 2019, p. 344). Significantly, he locates disability studies within the “broader study of embodiment or corporeality” (Avalos, 2019, p. 344).

What is particularly useful about Avalos’ survey is how he delineates different approaches within biblical studies to disability. The biblical studies approach he identifies, with a disability studies approach, “seeks to redeem the biblical text, despite any negative stance on disabilities, by re-contextualizing it for modern application”, recognising “the ill social effects created by linking sin and disability/illness in the treatment of the disabled (e.g., the claim that AIDS is God’s punishment for a sinful lifestyle)” (Avalos, 2019, p. 347). Implicit in this approach is the recognition of contending theological perspectives in both biblical text and contemporary context concerning disability. Another approach, which is closer to Mosala’s analysis, rejects the usefulness of the Bible within disability studies, recognising within the dominant redactions of the biblical text that the Bible itself “has negative portrayals of disability that should be rejected in modern society” (Avalos, 2019).

Like Brueggemann and Mosala, in the work of the Ujamaa Centre we work with a Bible where there are contending views on disability. A dominant biblical theological trajectory, as Avalos notes, is that there is direct relationship between sin and sickness, including disability. Alongside this trajectory, contending with it, is a minority (an almost absent, in Mosala's terms) theological trajectory in which disability is a site of struggle in which God works with those living with disability, acknowledging their humanity, their dignity, their agency, and their ability.

A good example of these two biblical trajectories or perspectives or voices in a single biblical text is the well-known story in John's gospel. In John 9, Jesus has come directly, according to John, from the Jerusalem temple, where he has been contending with the scribes and Pharisees (John 8:3, 13), who are part of the temple leadership. Specifically, Jesus has rejected a theology of retribution, aligning himself to the "woman caught in adultery" (John 8:3), refusing to "condemn" her (John 8:11). No sooner has Jesus escaped the violent response (John 8:59) of the temple leadership than John draws the reader's attention to Jesus who "saw a man blind from birth" (John 9:1). The verb "to see" is in the aorist, indicating a complete action. Jesus fully "sees" this man. The disciples of Jesus also see this man (John 9:2), but instead of seeing him fully as a person, they see only his disability. Their question to Jesus illustrates their theological perspective: "And His disciples asked Him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?'" (John 9:2).

Here we have the two trajectories, side by side: recognition-redemption and stigmatisation-retribution. Both are in the Bible. Here we have evidence of an ancient site of struggle, centred on disability, with Jesus representing a minority perspective over against the majority perspective of the disciples. Significantly, John foregrounds the perspective of Jesus, placing it first. Significant too is how Jesus responds to this question by the disciples: "Jesus answered, 'He did not sin, nor his parents; but his disability was so that the works of God might be made manifest in him'" (John 9:3). How we are to understand this response should be left to those living with disability; they should guide our understanding of this text. This is precisely the approach of the Ujamaa Centre, where we adopt a liberationist approach to disability studies (Avalos, Melcher & Schipper, 2005; Eiesland, 1994).

Central to the biblical interpretation process of the Ujamaa Centre is the See-Judge-Act process associated with the Young Christian Workers movement in Europe (Sands, 2018), South Africa, Brazil, and the Philippines (ICT, 1989), among others. We begin our work with a particular organised community, with “Seeing” reality from their perspective, recognising the epistemological privilege of their experience and their conceptual understanding of this experience. There can be no theology of disability without those living with disability being the primary interlocutors.

This is why it was important for the Ujamaa Centre, in 2011, to receive an invitation from DisABILITY ConneXion, a national and local organised group of people living with disability.

4. Working with a Disabled Bible

We had our first workshop with disABILITY ConneXion on a Saturday, the 17th March 2012 (ConneXion, 2012; Ujamaa, 2012, pp. 61–63). The Pietermaritzburg branch is a small group, so we did not anticipate more than about 10–15 participants. However, Barbara Watt, the coordinator, and her team were surprised as more and more chairs had to be put out. The reason, we were told by the new people who had come on this particular day, was that they had heard from friends in the group that the workshop would be dealing with the Bible from the perspective of disability. This had never happened before in their experience, and they were eager to hear what the Bible might say from their own perspective. Everyone agreed that the Bible was often used to stigmatise and discriminate against them.

When all had arrived, we were 25, with 13 women and 12 men, and with various forms of disability. This was the first meeting with this enlarged group, so time was spent introducing ourselves to each other. We sat in a circle, making space for those who used crutches and those in wheelchairs. We used both English and isiZulu, as the group was composed of both language groups and was multiracial, including Africans, Coloureds, Indians, and Whites (in South African racial terms). Most of those present knew each other, for they were an organised group. However, it soon became clear to us that there were a fairly large number of new people, as numbers kept growing, and as people introduced themselves.

After personal introductions, the Ujamaa Centre briefly explained our understanding of Bible study, introducing the concept of ‘Contextual Bible Study’ (CBS) and how CBS as a Bible re-reading process was located within the See-Judge-Act process (West, 2015). We then began the CBS process, beginning with “See”.

The “See” part of the process was a very moving experience. Everyone shared about their experience. Their experiences of discrimination were divided by them into four categories: discrimination at school, discrimination in marriage, discrimination in church, and discrimination in the community. For example, at school other children mimicked the way they walked, in marriage family members did not think them worthy of being married, in church they were kept at the back out of sight or left at home, and in the community their special needs were seldom recognised and so they struggled to find work (ConneXion, 2012).

Clearly, these people living with disability experienced the ambivalence of their theological, social, and cultural traditions. When they first arrived at a church, for example, they almost all had a similar experience. They would be welcomed, because they were an “opportunity” for the pastor to show his healing power. But if they were not healed, then they were quickly kept at the back of the church, and the failure to be healed was considered to be their lack of faith. Their families would from then on often make excuses for not taking them to church with them. Here is classic version of structure legitimation theology (ConneXion, 2012). The normative system is not at fault; the fault lies with those whose disability disrupts and questions the normative system.

The “See” component of the See-Judge-Act process took most of the workshop time. Everyone wanted their opportunity to tell their story. We then spent considerable time together reflecting on and analysing the lived realities we had shared. The result, as indicated, was an analysis that identified four primary areas of stigmatisation, discrimination, and marginalisation: at school, in marriage, in church, in community (ConneXion, 2012; Ujamaa, 2012, p. 62).

There was a deep need for those present to express their own understanding of their reality, so this took a few hours. When each person had fully expressed their understanding of their lived reality, we then moved into the second phase, Judge. Here we began to identify biblical texts that

might be useful in the context of disability and in the context of the reality of those living with disability. We identified the following biblical texts as potentially useful: Mark 3:1–8, Exodus 4:1–17, 2 Corinthians 12:1–10, Acts 3:1–11, and John 9:1–41. The Ujamaa Centre offered three guidelines for reflecting on the potential of any biblical text: (1) Identify a general question to open the CBS, such as “What is the text about?”, which allows each of the participants to speak, enabling the Bible study to belong to the participants. (2) Identify a series of specific questions which allows the details of the biblical text to become apparent, enabling the voice/s of the Bible to come alongside the voices of the participants. (3) Identify a series of specific questions which connect specific disability contexts with the detail of this biblical text, enabling appropriation to take place, which in turn should lead to potential forms of action for transformation (ConneXion, 2012).

With each biblical text we then followed the three guideline questions. We used two CBS which the Ujamaa Centre had already developed with people living with HIV, the Mark 3 and the John 9 text (Ujamaa, 2015). The other three CBS were emerging CBS, and reflected the preliminary work being done by our colleague, Micheline Kamba Kasongo, on these biblical texts. The Ujamaa Centre was fortunate to have Kasongo working with us. She had participated in an ongoing way with disABILITY ConneXion and other organised groups of people living with disability, especially groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where she lived.

Kasongo had come to the Ujamaa Centre and the University of KwaZulu-Natal to do PhD work on biblical studies, CBS, and disability. She was herself a person living with disability, and so carried in her body the realities of living with disability in African (and other) contexts. Specifically, working together with Pat Bruce and I as her PhD supervisors, Kasongo constructed a series of three CBS. The first was on Exodus 4:1–17, and had as its generative theme (in Paulo Freire’s sense (Freire, 2006, p. 96)) disability self-identity. The second CBS was on 2 Corinthians 12:1–10, and had as its generative theme suffering as another way of discovering oneself, whether as someone living with disability or someone not yet living with a disability. The third CBS was on Acts 3:1–11, and was designed “for church leaders from the Presbyterian Church in Kinshasa with the aim of helping church leaders to widen their understanding of healing for better

integration of and support for PWDs [People With Disabilities] in society” (Kasongo, 2013; see also Kasongo, 2019).

As we worked through each of the draft CBS, we showed how each CBS incorporated the three guidelines and how each CBS fitted into the See-Judge-Act process. The disABILITY ConneXion participants were fully engaged throughout this process, probing both each biblical text and how the Ujamaa Centre had shaped the draft CBS on each. Their contributions, as is common in the Ujamaa Centre’s CBS process, contributed to revised versions of a CBS. The See-Judge-Act process of CBS was itself a powerful resource. It began with their experience of disability and discrimination and only then turned to re-read the Bible from this perspective. They had never before had an opportunity determine how the Bible was read. They had become “subjects”.

Each of the biblical texts had resources that were identified as useful resources for their life situations. In the Mark 3 text the participants noted that Jesus became angry because of the way the synagogue treated the disabled man. They agreed with Jesus, “it is time for the church to change, putting people before their rules”, said one participant. In the Exodus 4 Bible study the participants were delighted to see that God used Moses, even though God had not healed Moses of his speech disability. God can and does use people with disabilities. In the 2 Corinthians 12 text there was a great deal of discussion about verse 7 in which Paul refers to disability as a messenger of Satan (2 Cor 12:7). The participants did not like this verse, but they found the rest of the text helpful. This was an important recognition for them, recognising that not all the Bible was empowering and redemptive for those living with disability. They realised that they had to contend for the meaning of the Bible from their experience. In this case it was important to read the whole text and not to focus on one verse. In the Acts 3 text what was most helpful was the recognition that the disabled man was healed in a number of different ways. This was very important for people living with disability, for all of them had been healed in many ways, even if their disability remained. In the John 9 text the group focused on the way in which Jesus identified with and stood in solidarity with the man who was blind. They wished, they said, that their church leaders would stand in solidarity with them (ConneXion, 2012; Ujamaa, 2012, pp. 62–63).

We did not complete the Act phase of the CBS construction process. This task was assigned as “homework”, inviting each participant to reflect for themselves on how one of these texts, or another they themselves had identified, might speak in an affirming manner into their lives, their family relationships, the theological orientation of their churches, and the attitudes and perspectives of their wider community (ConneXion, 2012). They were encouraged to use these CBS and to create their own.

In our evaluation at the end of the workshop there was agreement that the “See” component of CBS construction process was very important because it enabled those living with disability to break the silence around disability. As one participant said, “disability has never been given a voice, it’s shrouded in silence, at all levels and also in the church – in the church you either heal it or you ignore it” (Ujamaa, 2012, p. 63). The “Judge” component was vital too, because it enabled those living with disability to re-read the Bible from their experience, in order, in their words, “to bring life and healing, hope and inclusion, and transformation” (Ujamaa, 2012, p. 63).

My essay has devoted considerable space to this formative summons by disABILITY ConneXion to the Ujamaa Centre. This was not our first engagement with disability realities, but it was our first experience of working with an organised South African group of people living with disability. More than a decade earlier we had worked alongside Janet Lees, who had taken CBS methodology and worked with it among “people with communication difficulties” (Lees, 1997). Lees had trained and worked as a speech therapist and was completing her theological training for ordination when she encountered our CBS work while visiting South Africa in 1994. She immediately made the connections, and decided to do a Master’s thesis with the Department of Theology here at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, under my supervision. Citing Mark 7:31–37, Lees writes, “I met Jesus being a speech therapist, committed to the liberation of people with communication disorders”, and in so doing Lees recognised that “being a speech therapist and a reader of the bible were connected, not separate, parts of my life” (Lees, 1997, p. 9).

In a remarkably creative series of twenty-six CBS-type Bible studies, Lees engaged with the embodied realities and “bodies of knowledge” (Lees, 1997, p. 213) of people living with disability in England. She begins and

ends her Master's thesis, deconstructing the typical form of an academic thesis, with silence. Her Bible studies, she says, have "sought to explore many layers of silence. Yet almost as many remain to be explored. The way 'out of silence' for us all is in partnership with people with disabilities" (Lees, 1997, p. 213). Lees' work, then and now (Lees, 2007a, 2007b, 2022), enabled others, like Kasongo, who uses her work, to connect CBS and disability realities.

Both Lees' and Kasongo's work on doing CBS in the context of people living with disability have theorised biblical studies work on disability, alongside an emerging body of biblical scholarship from other contexts (cited in Avalos, Melcher & Shipper, 2005), and also offered socially engaged Bible study practice for those actually working among and with people living with disability. The work of the Ujamaa Centre continues, led by our colleague Noluthando Gasa, among local groups here in the KwaZulu-Natal region, and it has been taken up in various forms by socially engaged biblical scholars and theologians further afield (Lawrence, 2016; Mainwaring, 2014). There is now a considerable body of biblical studies and CBS-related praxis work on disability and the Bible, each summoned by particular realities of disability.

A significant recent CBS resource on various diverse aspects of disability was summoned by the global Covid-19 pandemic. Working with Mwai Makoka and colleagues from the World Council of Churches' Programme for Health and Healing, the Ujamaa Centre facilitated an online process in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic in which participants from around the world contributed to a process of creating a range of CBS related to health and healing (West, Makoka & Chitando, 2022). The resulting resource, the product of a series of online workshops over many months in 2021, includes an introduction to CBS processes and a series of twenty-seven Bible studies. Each of the more than sixty participants worked through the See-Judge-Act process in their own context; most identified a potential biblical text which might resonate with and offer resources to the health and healing reality that had been identified; and thirty-one constructed a draft CBS, some of which were overlapping. Working closely with Makoka, who provided a health care perspective for each CBS, we produced a resource manual in which various forms of disability have a distinctive presence (Makoka & West, 2022).

What struck me as we worked together on this WCC project was how pervasive the theological trajectory of retribution is when it comes to health and healing across our global world.

5. Retribution Theology's Interlocking System of Exclusion

“Notwithstanding the lack of any systematic exposition of the subject in the canonical texts, we cannot help realizing that retribution, taken in a wide sense, is one of the basic Old Testament dogmas. All the strata of Hebrew life betray the pervading belief that prosperity follows a righteous conduct and calamity an evil one.” (Zerafa, 1973, p. 471).

This is one of the strands of Brueggemann's structure legitimization theology. And it does not stop at the end of the Old Testament, but continues into and constitutes a significant theological trajectory in the New Testament (Shauf, 2008). More troubling is how the retribution theological trajectory has shaped our churches, with Jonathan Kangwa persuasively arguing that “the success of prophecy and healing in these [African Pentecostal-charismatic] churches is based on their extensive engagement with the theology of retribution” (Kangwa, 2016).

What our work with disABILITY ConneXion demonstrated was how people living with disability clearly recognised this theological trajectory. The John 9 CBS generated this recognition, even though we had developed this CBS in the context of HIV (Ujamaa, 2015, pp. 32–34). As one participant expressed it: “This text deals directly with one of the issues we as disabled people have identified – which is the same in HIV, namely the question, “Where does this come from? Your disability, or your HIV+ status, where did you get it?”. This question destroys our church, it's an obsession of church people to ask that question” (ConneXion, 2012). Even though we went on in the John 9 CBS to identify the priority given to Jesus' recognition of the man who is blind from birth (John 9:1), his refutation of the disciples' retribution theology (John 9:2), and his affirmative, inclusive, and compassionate engagements with this person living with a disability (John 9:3–41) – demonstrating “the works of God” (John 9:3) – the theology of retribution haunted our workshop.

The theology of retribution had haunted other CBS workshops of the Ujamaa Centre, including workshops on HIV, on unemployment, on gender-based violence, on alternative masculinities, and on sexuality. “What you sow you will reap” (Gal 6:7), “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23), “If a man does not work, he should not eat” (2 Thess 3:10), and many more such proof-texts dominate most African Christianities, condemning and excluding those living with disability, those living with HIV, those who are unemployed, those who are survivors of gender-based violence, those who are different kinds of ‘men’, and those who inhabit and practice and different sexuality. Brueggemann and Mosala are correct when they acknowledge that the theology of retribution is a biblical theology, it is in the Bible, it is not simply a problem of misinterpreting the Bible. Furthermore, the retribution theological trajectory intersects and forms an interlocking theological system across a range of marginalised realities. Those who are HIV-positive are reaping what they or their parents have sowed; those who are unemployed do not have enough faith; those women who are the victims and survivors of male violence should remain within the abusive household for their faith is being tested; those who are different kinds of men should be disciplined to become proper “men”; those who are and practice a queer sexual identity should be punished/corrected for their evil lifestyles; and those living with disability are being punished for sins committed by generations before them, to the third and fourth generation (Deut 5:9). The disciples’ question (John 9:2) and its idolatrous theology of condemnation and death lives on.

However, both Brueggemann and Mosala are insistent, as is the Ujamaa Centre, that there is a minority trajectory or voice within biblical text that can and must be recovered, heard, and mobilised in the struggle for survival, liberation, and the fulness of life. It is a struggle, to use the terms invoked by Pablo Richard, between the God of life and the idols of death (Richard, 1983). Crucially, as Mosala makes clear, appropriating this minority trajectory requires the reception presence of the marginalised themselves in order to discern these kindred minority voices in and behind the biblical text (Mosala, 1986, p. 196). Equally important, however, and this too is a point Mosala makes, we must acknowledge that the biblical text is a site of struggle and we must recognise the ideological perspective of any and every text. For, he says, it is only “through struggle

with the dominant forces inscribed in the text itself” that “the oppressed and exploited people today can seek to discover kin struggles in biblical communities” (Mosala, 1989, p. 188). There can be no redemptive re-reading of a disabled Bible without the actual presence and participation of those living with disability.

6. Conclusion

This essay uses the formative experience of the Ujamaa Centre’s work with a particular organised group of people living with disability – disABILITY ConneXion – to reflect on the biblical and theological significance of working with a disabled Bible – a Bible that is itself “a problem as well as a solution” (Mofokeng, 1988, p. 37). The reality of this kind of Bible is that its pervasive theological trajectory of retribution shapes the lived reality of those living with disability, among many others. We must not ignore these related realities. We also must not hand over the Bible to those in our families, churches, and communities who prefer and perpetrate its retributive theological trajectory. The God of life summons us to read with those voices in the biblical text and in our contexts that affirm and include those living with disability, and many others who have been condemned and excluded. We must contend with the God of life against the idols of death – both in the Bible and in our African contexts.

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