

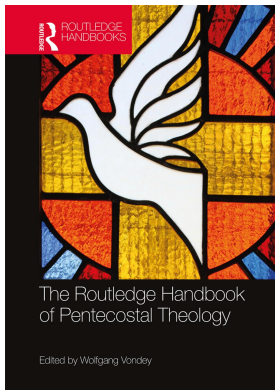
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THEOLOGY OF DISABILITY

The Spirit and disabled empowerment

Shane Clifton and Greta E.C. Wells

Disability plays a significant role in the history of Pentecostalism, even if that role is often implicit as the silent partner to the dominant emphasis on divine healing. This chapter offers a critical and constructive discussion of the intersection between Pentecostal theology and disability studies. As a work of Pentecostal theology, it references the experiences of its two authors: Shane, who has lived with quadriplegia since 2010; and Greta, who was born with Nail-Patella Syndrome. We are conscious, however, that the experience of disability in Australia, where we have a National Disability Insurance Scheme and access to universal healthcare, is very different from the experience elsewhere, especially in the global South. Thus, we intend to outline the parameters of a global Pentecostal theology of disability, which might also be called a disabling of Pentecostal theology. We begin by addressing the problem of healing in the context of disability and then develop a pneumatological theology that considers the implications of pneumatology and disability for our understanding of the Pentecostal full gospel and for theologies of creation, redemption, and eschatology.

Disability: context and meaning

Setting the context of disability on a global scale is difficult. As noted by the World Health Organization (WHO), disability is a “complex, dynamic, multidimensional, and contested” concept, and thus difficult to measure (WHO and The World Bank 2011, 3). Disability affects 15–20% of the global population (more than one billion people), the majority of whom live in the poorer countries of the global South (WHO and The World Bank 2011). The relationship between disability and poverty is complex, and while existing literature points toward “a feedback loop existing between poverty and disability and ill health,” inconsistent definitions for disability and poverty mean that these relationships “remain ill-defined and significantly under-researched” (Groce et al. 2011, 18–19). What we do know is that in rich and poor countries alike, people with disabilities are much more likely to be disadvantaged. Against the prevailing assumption that poverty results from a lack in capability (a logic that follows the medical model, see below), the link between poverty and disability is more so a product of the social determinants of health since poverty and conflict create disabling environments (Emerson et al. 2011). Prejudice in the workplace also works against the financial independence of people with disabilities and exacerbates the experience of impairment and

ill health (Toldrá and Santos 2013). The connection between disability and poverty, the overrepresentation of the global South, and the issue of prejudice are all of importance to a Pentecostal theology of disability since Pentecostalism has its roots in marginalized communities and is experiencing its most rapid growth in the global South (see Chapter 2). As we shall see, it can be a movement that either exacerbates the problem of disabling prejudice or facilitates empowerment.

Disability is usually defined in terms of its impact upon the structure and functions of the body (including the physical organ of the brain), and to this end, various classifications have been developed that are used by medical professionals, government agencies, and sporting organizations to identify the type and extent of an individual's impairment (WHO 2013). The line between a so-called normal body and one that is considered disabled is inevitably fuzzy, as illustrated by the distinction between low vision and the legal definition for blindness. When it comes to cognitive disabilities, further complexity ensues. Broader societal expectations of adequate functioning, particularly in knowledge-based economies, often influence the boundaries of what is normative and non-normative. This is certainly true in the case of mental illness but has noteworthy implications with certain neurological conditions, which can afford unique skills sets or perspectives. As one example, many who fit under the broad umbrella of spectrum disorders (e.g. autism, sensory processing disorder, etc.) are highly functioning, and are often able to excel in professional careers when provided with appropriate workplace support—but still often find themselves at the helm of stigmatized attitudes, which hinder their opportunities. Thankfully, there has been a significant move within the STEM context to intentionally seek out neuro-diverse individuals via tailored recruitment programs.

It is also the case that human life is framed by infancy and old age that mirror the embodied limits and dependencies that are common to disability, and even at our seemingly independent height we are ever vulnerable to disabling injury. The universal experience of embodied limitation and vulnerability means that disability should not be treated as a topic of marginal interest (affecting *only* 15% of the population), but one that gets to the heart of what it is to be human.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the disability rights movement came to distinguish between two models of disability, the medical and social. The former sees disability as a problem with an individual's body, to which medicine is the solution. The latter understands disability as a social creation and locates the problem of disability with society's failure to create accessible environments. In this case, the response to disability is focused not on fixing the person but transforming the built and sociocultural environment to make it accessible. While it is common to distinguish between impairment and disability and to conceive of the medical and social models in opposition to one another, it is now widely recognized that disability exists in the complex interaction between the body and its social environment (Shakespeare 2014). Disability is an embodied experience framed by physical and psychological factors (some of which are amenable to medical intervention), the accessibility of physical spaces (e.g. access ramps), social habits (e.g. sign language and Braille services), technological support (e.g. wheelchairs and computer technologies), and cultural and political attitudes that too often exclude and disempower people with differently shaped and functioning bodies.

Because disability is embodied and sociocultural, disability theory—and theology—is grounded on a critical hermeneutic, which unmask ideologies and power structures that create and sustain oppression. Paternalism is at the heart of disability disempowerment since it assumes the superiority of the normative person over and against the disabled: “Paternalism is often subtle in that it casts the oppressor as benign, as protector” (Charlton 2000, 53).

As with feminist, race, and queer theory, disability theory is also identity-forming and political (Kafer 2013). “Crip” theorists critique and reclaim pejorative language (crippled), unmask oppressive ideologies, deconstruct stigmatizing and “othering” narratives and characterization, and thereafter seek to recreate sociocultural environments that celebrate and empower the diverse bodies and capabilities that constitute the disabled identity. In crip theory, disability provides a hermeneutical lens to read culturally significant texts. These strategies have obvious implications for disability engagement with religious traditions and theologies, including Pentecostalism.

In acknowledging the complexity of definition and the role that culture and context play in the lived experience of disability, as it does in developing Pentecostal identities, we should not assume that we can develop a unifying “Pentecostal theology of disability” in a short chapter. However, we can begin to tease out some of the implications of disability for Pentecostal theology and, as important, intimate some of the ways in which a Pentecostal outlook might contribute to the emerging scholarship.

It is noteworthy that very little reflection on disability has been done from a specifically Pentecostal perspective, although Amos Yong (2007, 2010, 2015) provides a notable exception. While his work on disability addresses a broader audience, he inevitably works from the Pentecostal pneumatological imagination in framing his creative contribution to the field (see Chapter 14). By comparison, Shane Clifton’s (2018) constructive theological work on disability has largely steered away from Pentecostal categories, a situation that in part is rectified in this chapter.

Pentecostalism, disability, and healing practices

Compared to the brevity of literature exploring Pentecostal theologies of disability, healing has received significant in-depth consideration because Pentecostal frameworks often (directly or indirectly) draw from the classical fivefold or full Gospel of Jesus as savior, sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, divine healer, and the soon-coming king (see Chapter 16). Healing is a central motif that goes back to the origins of the Pentecostal movement, and to dismiss this in relation to disability would be to reject a key element of Pentecostal living (see Chapter 24). Numerous studies suggest that experiences or promises of healing are what have been predominantly attracting people to the Pentecostal movement (Gunther Brown 2014).

Even so, numerical growth is not theological justification, and “complaints about Pentecostal-charismatic healing practices are legion in the disability literature” (Yong 2007, 242). Yong maintains that many within the global Pentecostal movement still associate illness and disability with unrepentant sin, a lack of faith, or demonic strongholds, shaping practices that can create confusion and shame, if applied “uncritically” (241). Reflecting upon personal experiences of living with quadriplegia, Clifton finds this can certainly be the case. In particular, he notes that testimony is central to Pentecostal identity—but “if healing has [also] been central to Pentecostal identity, it is the priority given to testimonies about God’s power that has sustained this priority” (Clifton 2014, 206). The outcome is that those who are not healed miraculously and continue to live with their conditions “are [usually] given no opportunity to testify about their experience” (Clifton, 209). This is particularly dire because public testimony is crucial for Pentecostal spirituality. Sitting outside of what is considered theologically normative, people with disabilities can be denied the opportunity to publicly share their ongoing lived experiences and thus weave their hard-won spiritual insights into that of the faith community and the broader Christian story (Yong 2010).

In addressing the issues arising from Pentecostal healing theology, Yong (2007) argues that we might “distinguish between disability on the one hand and illness, sickness, or disease on the other” (Yong 2007). He argues that doing so will shape practices that are more nuanced in their aims of viewing healing as a holistic endeavor rather than just a limited view of “curing (physically)” (245). Yong extrapolates from Catholic theologian Jennie Weiss Block, who argues that in the broader church, theologies of disability are often based on “medical model[s],” not acknowledging that “while some people become disabled as a result of an illness, most people with disabilities are not sick; and illness is a separate and not necessarily related experience” (Block 2002).

The distinction between disability and illness is especially important when it comes to people with congenital conditions, who do not necessarily experience ongoing illness, but can be affected in the way they engage with the world around them. Greta E.C. Wells, and members of her family, have a rare genetic condition called Nail-Patella Syndrome (NPS), which affects various bodily systems. There are many presenting features, but people with NPS often have poor upper body muscle tone, restrictions in various limbs, early onset glaucoma, renal issues, and malformed or missing kneecaps (Sweeney et al. 2003). Given the complexity of NPS, the notion of a miraculous cure is highly problematic, as this would require restoring the affected gene in every cell, leading to the severe alteration of multiple bodily systems. While many might see this as an ideal outcome, Greta notes that NPS is not just a “bodily” reality but has contributed to her identity formation. Namely, minor physical restrictions have meant that she was never athletic, but this allowed her to focus on intellectual strengths. Pentecostals need to be aware of the danger of the medical model of disability and its assumption that disability is a problem that needs to be fixed. On the contrary, people with disabilities need to be valued as faithful agents of the Spirit—not just as bodies that need to be normalized through miraculous faith. As such, disability can help shape Pentecostal theologies toward a wholeness that does not merely focus on the “normative” body shaped by societal ideal but looks to a redeeming interaction of that body with its faith community and society.

A pneumatological theology of disability

While there is value in distinguishing disability from illness, it does not fully solve the problem of healing for people with disabilities. Part of the issue is that the logic of healing in Pentecostal theology does not stand on its own but is wrapped up in theological constructions. The image of God in the human being comes to be understood by reference to the normative body, sin as the explanation for disability and illness, healing as a mark of the atonement, and the elimination of disabled difference as the eschatological promise. Thus, the full gospel is shaped thoroughly by “normate” thinking—Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s term to designate “the social figure with which people can represent themselves as definitive human beings” (Thomson 1996, 8). Normate theology, then, supports “the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into positions of authority and wield the power it grants them” (8). In Christianity, this social figure is a constructed Christ, inevitably framed by those with ecclesial power. In Pentecostalism, Jesus the healer is constructed as the definitive human, as the one whose charismatic power restores the sin-broken bodies of cripples to a perfect normate whole. Christology and soteriology are further shaped by disabling theologies of creation. Literal readings of the Genesis creation narratives, grounded in a misunderstanding of genre and suspicion of scientific theory, understand disability, death, and suffering as a consequence of the Fall and as a deviation from God’s original intention of an idealized, normate humankind.

By way of contrast, if evolutionary science is taken seriously, disability is understood not as an aberration but part of the natural biological processes of human life, inherent to our species' limitations, vulnerabilities, and interdependence. Evangelicalism has proved ill-equipped to theologize from the radical diversity of both evolution and disability, at least in part because of a univocal constructed and idealized Christology (Word) that generates a fixed and narrow reading of the scriptural word (singular), which is afraid of authorial difference and alienates minority interpreters, including the disabled. But Pentecostalism, if it is willing to follow the free flow of the Spirit in the writing, compilation, and reading of the text, has the potential to embrace a theological plurality that makes space for the uncontainable diversity of our evolved world, including humanity's embodied difference.

Yong has led the way in developing “a p(new)matological theology of disability” (Yong 2015, 10). In doing so, he continues his long-term work on Pentecostal theological method and the pneumatological imagination, previously applied to other fields of inquiry. The pneumatological imagination is a Spirit-filled epistemology that grounds other theological foci—including Christology and soteriology—on the Pentecost narrative's vision of the Spirit being poured out on all flesh (Acts 2:17). It imagines ways of thinking and acting that generate new communities constituted by *difference*, which celebrate, rather than silence, a multiplicity of “tongues.” This theology empowers those otherwise considered non-persons: foreigners, daughters, youth, slaves, and (unmentioned in Acts 2 but certainly present) people with varieties of disability. Vitality, this empowerment does not eliminate a person's distinctiveness as a foreigner, woman, or disabled, but it is transformative, making it possible for derided and alienated identities, validated and liberated by the fire of the Spirit, to become labels of potent pride.

Yong's pneumatological imagination is not merely focused on Acts 2 but draws on an understanding of the person and work of the Spirit out of the diverse testimony of the scriptures. Before attending to disability, Yong had undertaken a pneumatological reading of Genesis 1–2 in dialogue with the emergent processes of evolution, noting that a theology of creation that begins with the Spirit—the *ruach Elohim* that hovers over the waters of the primordial creation—empowers “the process of differentiation, separation, and particularization that constitute the days of creation” (Yong 2006, 202). The emergent creation is declared “good” at each point of differentiation, and humanity “very good,” not because it is otherworldly, but in its creaturely embodiment.

The cycle of life and death that frames evolution, in all its wonder and terror, does not follow a perfect, completed, and static divine creation, but constitutes it, and thus disability, sickness, and death are not an evil to be overcome but a part of God's creative plan for a flourishing world. In the face of inevitable chaos and terror, the Spirit of God is present as “the possibility and promise of creation” (Dabney 2006, 80), as the Spirit of life that brings light to darkness, order to chaos, and meaning and purpose to humanity made in the divine image. The image of God is thus fully realized in every person, including those of us with disabilities.

There is substantive discussion among theologians of disability about the nature of the *imago Dei* and the ways in which the disability lens reshapes traditional conceptions, such as the implication of profound intellectual disability for traditional notions that the image is constituted by reason and will (Reinders 2008). The primary point is that disabled people image the divine as fully as any other person. The affirmation of the full humanity and inherent value of persons with disability has implications for beginning and end of life ethics and generates a confluence between disability advocacy and Christian attitudes to abortion and euthanasia (Giric 2016). Against the prevailing assumption that disabled lives are not

worth living, a pneumatological theology of disability insists on the sacredness of every person and seeks out their contribution as Spirit-filled image-bearers to the flourishing of families, churches, and the wider world.

Yet this sacredness does not imply their deification. People with disabilities sin and suffer sin's consequences, although not in their bodily impairments per se, which however little or much suffering they entail, may have a natural cause or be the product of some evil (Clifton 2015). More importantly, sin is the marginalization, paternalism, and injustice that is identified by the social model of disability. People with disabilities are victims of and perpetrators in the structures of sin and are infantilized if presumed to be saintly. Disablement can be an apt synonym for sin and its effects, as the social model magnifies the entrenched evils of paternalism (Gen 3:16 "and he will rule over you"), exclusion (being driven from the garden), enmity, rejection, and injustice.

Beyond Genesis 1–3, the biblical narratives tell of the redemptive work of God, which is trinitarian and so pneumatological throughout. Michael Welker (2013) argues that the Bible offers a multi-perspectival testimony that canonizes the presence of the Spirit in and through diverse contexts and often contrasting testimonies. He notes how church hierarchies have generally emphasized the work of the Spirit in facilitating union and unanimity, but while "in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13), this unity emphasizes the diversity of Jews, Greeks, slave, free, male, female, and so forth. From the earliest biblical narratives of the Spirit, to the prophetic and messianic promises, to the boundary breaking message and life of Jesus, to the outpouring of tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost, the unity of the Spirit is constituted by a plurality that redeems and empowers "the infinite diversity of individual human beings in their respective uniqueness" (Welker, 23). Consequently, a pneumatological theology welcomes and empowers the respective uniqueness of disable bodies (including inimitable minds).

The challenge of Jesus from a disabled perspective

A pneumatological theology contributes to a robust Christology. From a disability perspective, it is noteworthy that Jesus fulfills the messianic promise of Isaiah 53:2–4, as savior who is unattractive, despised and rejected, familiar with pain, one whose face causes people to turn away, considered punished by God. It may be that the author of this text did not have disability in mind, but they describe the reality of the day-to-day disabled experience (Schipper 2011). In Eiesland's (1994) image of the disabled Christ, disability is paradoxically transformed, from being the symbol of ugliness, falsehood and evil, to represent the truth, goodness, and beauty of God. The New Testament exemplifies Jesus as the image of God (Col. 1:15). Yet the image Christ represents is not the singularity of his all-knowing, masculine, authoritarian, divine power, but his submission to God in the fullness of the Spirit, embracing the limits and vulnerabilities of (disabled) human life.

It is now well-established that the Spirit-empowered life, death, and resurrection of Jesus means much more than salvation of the soul; a truncated gospel that is still too common in evangelicalism and Pentecostalism alike. Yet, while the good news of the gospel includes empowered justice for people with disabilities, the Gospels and their characterization of Jesus can present a challenge. Belser and Morrison (2011) argue that although people with disabilities litter the pages of the four gospel narratives, their portrayal is ablest throughout, where ableism is the "belief that impairment or disability (irrespective of 'type') is inherently negative, and should the opportunity present itself, be ameliorated, cured or eliminated" (Campbell 2009, 5). Although receiving Jesus' compassion (which disabled scholars may

interpret negatively as pity), disabled people are mostly nameless and voiceless, serving as props to reveal the miraculous power of Jesus and the faith (and faithlessness) of the named disciples. That the gospels present Jesus' characteristic response to disability as delivering a cure establishes the problem of healing described earlier in this chapter.

There are various ways to respond to these difficulties, the most common of which is to argue that the emphasis of the healing narratives in the gospel is not healing per se but social transformation, since the ministry of Jesus results in the blind, deaf, lame, and unclean presenting themselves to the temple and being welcomed back into the center of community life (McKinney Fox 2018). In the story of the hemorrhaging woman, for example (Mark 5:21–43), what is radical is not her healing, but that against the cultural and religious dictates that she is unclean, she has the audacity to touch Jesus, and he does not rebuke her.

Even so, the problem of disability in the gospel narratives cannot be avoided in any honest engagement with these authoritative texts, since ableist interpretations persist and shape present-day attitudes, especially in charismatic contexts. Pentecostal hermeneutics (see Chapter 13), with its willingness to move past fixed historical readings of Scripture and recognize subjective spiritual, experiential, and testimonial interpretations may provide a way forward. Yong (2017) provides a noteworthy example of a sensory disability reading of the Lukan narrative. When speaking about the healing of the paralytic, for example, Clifton (2015) can inject himself into the text, and so provide an imaginative reading that names a disabled character and sees the narrative through a disabled lens. He understands the experience of embarrassment and shame that goes with being lowered through a roof (or, in his case, carried upstairs) before a crowd, and feels the aggravation at the implication of Jesus' "your sins are forgiven," suggesting that his paralysis is his own fault. However, he also notices that, unlike any other character in the story, Jesus did not respond to the man's broken body with pity, but instead focused on his inner being, his need for the release of forgiveness. It is paradoxically empowering that the paralytic is not infantilized but treated as Jesus does everyone, a sinner in need of grace.

Spirit-empowerment and the flourishing of people with a disability

Pentecostals often focus on the work of the Spirit in the supernatural (such as healing), but first and foremost the Spirit mediates grace—the interior dimension of the love of God at work in the life of the individual, freeing us from the bounds of sin, and opening us to the flourishing that comes through faith, hope, and love. Grace orients us to flourishing, but one of the challenges of developing a theology of disability is that nondisabled people presume that the disabled life is one of relentless hardship and suffering, in which case—as with the medical model—flourishing is impossible unless it can be overcome or fixed.

The focus of Clifton's (2018; Clifton, Llewellyn, and Shakespeare 2018) oeuvre since the occurrence of his injury has been happiness: reclaiming his own happiness following the losses that accompany quadriplegia and examining the happiness of people with a disability. He draws much of his insight from Greek virtue ethics and its take-up in Christian tradition through the theology of Thomas Aquinas. This tradition argues that happiness is not principally to do with short-term pleasure but is earned in the pursuit of meaning, goodness, and beauty over the course of a life. This vision of happiness (Greek, *eudaimonia*, or flourishing) is not accomplished by avoiding pain and suffering but, rather, is earned in the context of the ups and downs of life. *Eudaimonia* is achieved by the exercise of virtues, which are habits or dispositions of character that facilitate success.

There is theological advantage in recognizing the potential of the pneumatological imagination to expand the horizons of the virtue tradition. In the letters of the apostle Paul, virtues are labeled as fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23), and the problem of the virtue tradition is seen in that the habits of the flesh—the sinful nature or vice—work against the exercise of virtue: “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15). The solution, Paul says, is liberation from the bondage of the flesh by the work of Christ who sets our minds and the desires of the Spirit (Romans 8). The Spirit of the disabled Christ encourages fresh and creative visions of flourishing unconstrained by normative assumptions, empowers a person with the virtues needed to reach for those visions, and mediates the grace required to persevere through opposition and failure. Because the Spirit stirs the affections, the pneumatological imagination helps to ensure that *eudaimonia* does not devolve into stoicism but balances the goodness of virtue with the liberty of expressive joy, sadness, laughter, grief, and contentment.

As for the implications of disability and flourishing for Pentecostalism, it can be argued that the whole of life’s flourishing encompasses the trajectory of the Pentecostal emphasis on healing and prosperity. At its best, Pentecostal soteriology extends truncated conceptions of the gospel. Rather than focusing just on the soul, Pentecostal theology holds that the full gospel has implications for our bodies (healing) and our social situation (prosperity). Too often, focus on supernatural healing and working up faith for prosperity devolves into the absurdity and manipulations of the so-called health-and-wealth gospel (see Chapter 38). However, reconceiving of health and wealth in terms of flourishing, and placing that flourishing in the context of disability and illness, sets a holistic gospel within the context of our limits and vulnerabilities.

Finally, *eudaimonia* is a teleological construct; a goal toward which we journey. In Christian theology, eschatology has too often been otherworldly, whether envisioning the salvation of a disembodied soul or an idealized resurrected body (even though the risen Christ still has his scars). The Pentecostal full gospel includes the additional otherworldly impetus of the imminent return of Christ (see Chapter 25). Disability invites eschatological reimagining, and to this end, it is again Yong (2007) who leads the way, influenced by his brother, Mark, who has Down syndrome. He wonders what it would mean for Mark to be “healed” in heaven from a genetic condition that is central to his identity and personhood. Yong examines Paul’s arguments in 1 Corinthians 15 to imagine an eschatological future where a person whose identity, formed by disability, remains the same person while being liberated from physical suffering and social evil (259–92). In respect to the imminent return of Christ, we once again raise the question of scientific plausibility, the role of hermeneutics in minimizing harmful literalistic interpretations and recognizing the ethical focus of the eschatological kingdom (“your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”). As we have argued throughout, from creation to salvation to eschatology, a Pentecostal theology of disability needs to understand disability as being within the divine intention.

Conclusion

In this volume, the responses of Pentecostal theology to social issues are being explored. As we draw some concluding practical remarks regarding disability, it would be remiss to ignore the intersection of disability with issues in other chapters, especially as they pertain to other marginalizing factors. Within our own Australian context, it is harrowing to note that “70% of women with disabilities have been victims of violent sexual encounters at some time in their lives” (Didi et al. 2016). While it can be paternalistic to view people with disabilities as

“victims,” we cannot ignore that the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic standing can make people with disabilities increasingly vulnerable to abuse of various forms.

While we have engaged in rigorous critique here, we need to celebrate the empowering nature of the early Pentecostal movement regarding women, the poor, and people from minority ethnic backgrounds, who were readily welcomed as Spirit-filled partners in ministry. As Jeff Hittenberger (2013) argues, “[t]o truly understand and embrace the gifts of those with special needs is to experience a renewal of the theology and of church life” (144). In the radical outpourings of the Spirit in the early Pentecostal movement, a democratization took place that decentralized power away from those assumed as the natural leaders of congregations. While inevitable institutionalization may have lessened the impact of this democratization, the ethos of Pentecostalism points to the Spirit-empowerment of those we would otherwise overlook as potential partners in ministry.

In the decentralization of power, Pentecostal theologies of disability should center on Spirit-empowerment, regardless of obstacles being faced, or whether persons are being “healed” (or “cured,” considering earlier discussion). After all, the women who were Spirit-empowered at Azusa Street were not healed of their “offensive” gender—but rather, the Spirit utilized their female-ness as they went out and ministered. If anything, disability reminds Pentecostalism to be what it originally was—a movement of empowerment with the Spirit that decentralized and distributed the power of God to the margins. In an age where it is so easy to be paternalistic, the question is not what Pentecostal theology has to offer disabled persons—but what people with disabilities have to say to Pentecostalism. If you will, what is a disabling theology of Pentecostalism? And what does this mean in terms of outworked spirituality?

At the least, people with disabilities reject the charitable pity that is too often directed at them (Shapiro 1994), instead insisting that they have a share in the priesthood of all believers; that they have vital contributions to make to the life of the church at *every* level of leadership and ministry. For that contribution to be realized, there will need to be a new awareness of the variety of needs and gifts of disabled people, so that church communities can become welcoming and hospitable places (Reynolds 2008; Woodall 2016).

Building on this, embracing the ministry of Spirit-filled people with disabilities starts with providing space for their testimonies in congregational gatherings, in empowering and acknowledging the unique way in which the Spirit can work through all people, in all situations. We need to provide a platform for Pentecostals with disabilities to “tell their own stories, recover their own histories, and claim their own voice and language” (Block 2002). Doing so will not only provide a stronger sense of connection to community for disabled persons and a more realistic portrayal of how the Holy Spirit works through lifelong impairments, but there is also the potential to develop a rounded Pentecostal embodied spirituality. This nuanced theology deepens the fivefold gospel and a justice-oriented missiology that imagines a future in which all people—especially those presently on the margins—are empowered to flourish.

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