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Do Persons with Disability need healing? An African Pentecostal perspective within the selected African Pentecostal Churches in Zimbabwe.

Abstract

Much has been written on disability care and support from the human rights, cultural and religious perspectives around the world. However, there is still paucity of information on the experiences of Persons with Disability (PWD) in their divine healing and deliverance encounter with the African Pentecostal Churches (APC) in Zimbabwe. This qualitative phenomenological study seeks to establish the lived experiences of 28 PWDs within the selected four APCs operating in the Harare province of Zimbabwe. The central questions underpinning this study were whether PWD need divine healing and are they realistically getting healed? The study used the religious model of disability and the Pentecostal ‘hermeneutic of healing’ as theoretical frameworks. Whilst healing is essential to physical life, the findings show that PWD need dignity, recognition and compassion more than the unrealistic promises of divine healing. In the premises of the foregoing, the study concludes and recommend the establishment of a holistic material and psychosocial support of the PWD and desisting from endlessly chasing the goose.

Keywords: Disability, African Pentecostalism, healing, Apostolic Faith Mission, Zimbabwe

1. Introduction

In the past four decades, Sub Saharan African countries, which Zimbabwe is a part, witnessed the mashrooning and proliferation of the African Independence Pentecostal Churches (AIPC). The founders of these AIPC are predominantly known by using the nomenclatures or titles such as “Apostles, Prophets and Bishops” in Africa and beyond.¹ In the history of Pentecostal explosion in Zmbabwe, Togarasei opined that most of these AIPC are breakaway movements from the AFM in Zimbabwe (AFMI)². Whilst most of the breakaway pentecostal movements

¹ E. Chtando, M.R. Gunda and J. Kugler. “Prophets, Profits and the Bible in Zimbabwe”, (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2013)

² L. Togarasei. “Historicizing Pentecostal Christianity in Zimbabwe’, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*”, 42.2 (2016), pp. 1-13

from the AFMZ were witnessed in the past four decades in Zimbabwe, Burger and Nel³ assert that the history of these breakaways progressively started from South Africa where the AFM Church originated in 1908. The history of the African Pentecostal Movement (APM) was spelt out by Burger and Nel who further revealed that, APM was influenced by the Zionist Movement Theology of John Alexander Dowie in America⁴. In view of the above, Alexander Dowie physically and spiritually mentored several missionaries in his doctrine of divine healing and deliverance. One outstanding example of these missionaries under the tutelage of Dowie from America was Johannes Bucluer. Burger and Nel revealed that Bucluer was instrumental in consolidating the Zionist Movement in South at the end of the 19th century⁵. Hwata further established Thomas Hezmaleck and John G. Lake the founders of the AFM Pentecostal Church in South Africa hatched it within the corridors of the Zionist Movement in 1908⁶.

The establishment of the AFM Pentecostal movement in South Africa later spread like wild fire in the neighbouring countries in Sub-Saharan Africa giving birth to the AFMZ. It is in the premises of the foregoing that the AFMZ is regarded as the mother of APC in Zimbabwe due to the number of pentecostal churches that ceremoniously and unceremoniously split out of it. Thus, the influential AIPCs organizations in Zimbabwe are the AFMZ's offsprings, which include but not limited to Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) founded by Archbishop Ezekiel Guti, Johanne Mazowe Chishanu founded by Shonhiwa Masedza and United Families International Ministries (UFIM) founded by Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa. Whilst this study's main focus is not in exhausting the history of the explosion of the AIPC in Zimbabwe, this brief history help to establish the scope of the unity of analysis underpinning this study.

The fundamental belief which was replicated from Alexander Dowie's Zionist Movement by the AIPC in Zimbabwe was the charismatic doctrine of divine healing and

³ I. Burger & M. Nel, "The Fire Falls in Africa: A History of the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa. Centennial Edition 1908-2008", (Vereening: Christian Art, 2008)

⁴ Burger and Nei, + "The Fire Falls in Africa: A History of the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa"

⁵ B. Hwata, "An Investigation of the different phases of the Pentecostal experiences in the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM). (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2005).

⁶ Hwata, "An Investigation of the different phases of the Pentecostal experiences in the Apostolic Faith Mission"

deliverance. In view of the above, Etieyibo and Obiege⁷, and Ringson⁸ studies convergently argue that whilst healing and deliverance is an essential ministry in the church, it has grossly interferes with the reality of positive living of the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in Zimbabwe. Thus, the critical question to be answered in this study is; Do Persons with Disability need physical healing or there is another form of solution that must be conventionally administered to inculcate positive living to PWD in Zimbabwe?

Disability cuts across race, ethnic grouping, religion, gender and social class. In other words, it is indiscriminate hence, individuals in society may have a spouse, partner, neighbour, friend or parent who is living with a disability. Disability studies are interdisciplinary, drawing on insights from humanities, sciences and social sciences. PWD tend to experience difficulties in their attempts to be integrated into communities and become part of the mainstream society of faith-based organisations. One of the callings of the church is to make sure their doors are open to everyone.⁹ Pentecostals strongly believe in healing, miracles and the power of the Holy Spirit. Such a position is part of the hallmarks of the AIPC in Zimbabwe. The AFMZ and the Zionist Movement purportedly imitate and re-live the early ‘Apostles in the book of Acts’ as a mission and mandate. In an attempt to replicate the foregoing, the AIPC takes healing and deliverance to the extreme and extend that if a person is not healed he/she is blamed of not having faith, a sinner or cursed. In fact, the excessive belief in healing and deliverance has paved a way for exorcism, nicromancers and enchanters to disguise their evil practices hiding behind the distorted christian perspectives¹⁰. There is a strong emphasis that the sign of power in the church is when the blind are healed, the lame walking and the deaf hearing. Such, literal biblical perceptions about disabilities influence the hermeneutical position of both the pastors and the laity in the church. Faith-based organisations subtly interpret the narratives that incorporate PWD to reinforce the view that disability is the repercussion of transgression or a

⁷ E. Etieyibo and O. Obiege, “Religion, Culture and Discrimination against persons with disabilities in Nigeria”, *African journal of Disability*, 5.1 (2016), pp.192.

⁸ J. Ringson, “The Misconceptions of children living with albinism: An Evidence from the Gutu District of Zimbabwe”, *African Journal of Social Work and Social Development*, 30.2 (2018), pp. 1-17

⁹G.F. White, ‘People with Disabilities in Christian Community,’ *Journal of the Christian Institute on Disability*. 3 (2014), pp.11-35.

¹⁰ Chitando, Gunda and Kugler, “Prophets, Profits and the Bible in Zimbabwe”

form of God's discipline.¹¹ Many scholars are interested in questioning the role of the Bible on disability.¹² The Bible uses figurative language to refer to PWD.¹³

From a contextual position, the lives of PWD continue to deteriorate due to a myriad of factors. Challenges include, but are not limited to, stigmatisation, discrimination, exclusion and abuse, which have a significant bearing on the socio-cultural, religious, economic and socio-political paradigms. A report on Zimbabwe by UNICEF in 2013 stated that PWD in Zimbabwe live under challenging circumstances and are vulnerable.¹⁴ PWD are mostly invisible, hidden within families or in institutions.¹⁵ PWD experiences take many forms, in fact, PWD experience harsher socio-economic conditions and greater poverty than their able-bodied counterparts.¹⁶ As in any developing country, PWD in Zimbabwe struggle to take ownership of their own identity and space. As such, for cultural identity and empowerment, PWD deserve to have their Christian identity upheld in a way that is not harmful.¹⁷ In Zimbabwe, institutions claiming the love of God reflect a poor image of PWD.¹⁸ In reviewing the literature, whilst there has already been much work done concerning PWD in Zimbabwe by Ndlovu¹⁹; Stone-MacDonald²⁰; Mpofo and Harley²¹ and Machingura.²² Closer scrutiny of this literature reveals that no study has asked whether PWD need healing and do Pentecostals heal them? Accordingly, using the experiences of PWD in the APC this study seeks to fill this gap. It is essential to understand that healing is central to Pentecostal theology, but there are

¹¹ C.A. Satterlee, C.A. (2009). "The Eye Made Blind by Sin": The Language of Disability in Worship,' *Liturgy*, 25.2 (2009), pp.33-41.

¹² J. Hull, 'Blindness and the Faces of God' (Unpublished Manuscript, 2010).

¹³ S. Githuku, S, *Biblical Perspectives in Disability" Disability, Society, and Theology-Voices in Africa* (Kenya: Zapf Chancery Publishers Africa, 2011).

¹⁴ UNICEF, 'Living Conditions Among Persons with Disability Survey Key Findings Report,' (Harare, 2013).

¹⁵ Chidindi, E, *Disability and Disadvantage: The Educational Access and Participation for Students With Disabilities* (Norway: University of Oslo, 2011).

¹⁶ World Health Organisation, *World Report on Disability*, (Geneva, 2011).

¹⁷ R. Chimedza, and S. Peters, 'Disabled People's Quest for Social Justice in Zimbabwe,' *Disability, Human Rights and Education* (1999), pp.7-23.

¹⁸ F. Machingura, 'The Rights of People Living with Disability from a Third World Perspective: The Zimbabwean Context, in Subrata Sankar Bagchi and Arnab Das, *Human Rights and the Third World: Issues and Discourses* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Book, 2012), pp.285-306.

¹⁹ H.L. Ndlovu, 'African Beliefs Concerning People with Disabilities: Implications for Theological Education,' *Journal of Disability and Religion*, 20.1-2 (2014), pp.29-39.

²⁰ A. Stone-Macdonald, 'Cultural Beliefs and Attitudes about Disability in East Africa,' *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal*, 8.1 (2014), pp.10-17.

²¹ E. Mpofo, and D.A. Harley, 'Disability and Rehabilitation in Zimbabwe: Lessons and Implications for Rehabilitation Practice in the US,' *Journal of Rehabilitation* 68.4 (2002), pp.1-26.

²² Machingura, 'The Rights of People'.

diverse inter-dependent approaches. Predicated in this backdrop, the thrust of this study is on the lived experiences of PWDs within the APC with a special reference to the four selected congregations in Harare, Zimbabwe. In this view, the AFMZ, ZAOGA, Johanne Masowe Chishanu and UFI pentecostal congregations were consciously selected as the unity of analysis to this study. This paper therefore starts by putting the study into context through a brief discussion of the history of African Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe and disability. This is followed by the conceptualization of African Pentecostal Perspective and the Pentecostal Hermeneutics of healing. The foregoing two concepts were discussed to establish how African Pentecostalism infringes the reality, positive living and rights of PWD in Zimbabwe. This was followed by the discussion of the phenomenological qualitative methodology that sought to establish the lived experiences of the PWD within the APC operating in the Harare area of Zimbabwe. Subsequently, the thematic discussion of the findings based on the lived experiences of the PWD within the ACP in Zimbabwe were discussed and concluded by the implications of the study to social development and transformation.

2. Conceptualizing African Pentecostalism Perspective

Pentecostalism is based on the events which took place in Acts 2:1-4 that when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. Suddenly, there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. There appeared to them divided tongues as of fire and one sat upon each of them and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and begun to speak in tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4). Whilst speaking in tongues is the outstanding feature of Pentecostalism, Kgatle²³ argued that there are other characteristics such as faith healing, spirited music, prophecy and miracles. In most of the Pentecostal believers, tongues serves as an evidence of the endowment of the Holy Spirit which must be followed with prophecy, dreams, visions and performance of wonders and signs in accordance to (Joel 2:28). Put simply, Machingura²⁴ described Pentecostalism as a radical expression of Christianity which emphasizes ecstatic speech in an unknown tongues and disorderly movements accompanied with wonders and signs. It is in the premises of the aforementioned that when Pentecostalism

²³ M.S. Kgatle, "African Pentecostalism: Christianity of Elias Letwaba from early years until his death in 1959", *Scriptura*, 116.1 (2017), pp.1-9

²⁴ F. Machingura, "The significance of Glossolalia in the Apostolic Faith Mission, Zimbabwe", *Studies in World Christianity*, 17.1 (2011), pp. 76-89

came to Africa it was misconstrued as the continuation of African religious systems of ritualism and exorcism. Thus, from an African Pentecostal perspective, disability is a form of the manifestation and an attack of the evil spirit which can be healed by the Holy Spirit.

African Pentecostalism is an indigenous worldview that answers questions raised by Africans from their cultural, religious and theological context²⁵. African preachers believe that African demons that causes illness and any form of disability understands a culturally and contextually based theology. In this view, Nel avers that African Pentecostal churches emerged as a radical expression of cultural resistance enabling blacks to mitigate the sufferings imposed by colonialism²⁶. In the basis of the Neil's assertion, it can therefore be safely interpreted to mean that African Pentecostal churches provide a dynamic Christianity that met African needs with a practice and theology of the Holy Spirit that is contextually based. It is this message of liberation that makes the Pentecostal churches are more attractive to Africans than their western counterparts. Thus, in view of the above, African Pentecostal theology emphasises more on liberating Africans from their socio-economic and political challenges. Marrinated in their preaching vocabulary are words of insult to the evil spirit which may not augur well with people who aught to positively live with some chronic situations such as physical diability.

2. The Pentecostal Hermeneutic of Healing

The study used the religious model of disability and the Pentecostal 'hermeneutic of healing' as theoretical frameworks. First, the religious model of disability is used to understand the church view about disability. The religious model has its roots in ancient Greek and ancient Israel and perceives disability as evidence of divine wrath and sin. It is the oldest model of disability, permeating several religions.²⁷ This model is important to this study because it views disability as a punishment meted out by a divinity or God when someone has either committed a crime or the community has committed an offence. So, in the context of the church, the bodily defect in this case (physical disability) is a visible sign of divine punishment. Further, the sin discussed in the religious model of disability can be traced back to the sins committed by

²⁵ M.S. Kgatle, "African Pentecostalism: The Christianity of Elias Letwaba from early years until his death in 1959"

²⁶M. Nel, "Remembering and Commemorating the Theological Legacy of John G Lake in South Africa after a hundred years", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 41.3 (2015), pp. 147-170

²⁷ J. Murphy, and J. Pardeck, *Disability Issues for Social Workers and Human Services Professionals in the Twenty-first Century* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Social Work Practice Press, 2005).

parents and ancestors.²⁸ In the context of this study, Christian beliefs impact people's perspective about disability. It follows therefore that the negative impact of the religious model of disability has a ripple effect on the family of PWD. Family can be interpreted as biological and spiritual. If disability is a curse, then the curse of such stigmatisation may defame the entire family and prohibit everyone from social and civic participation.²⁹ Within the religious model framework, some individuals believe that disabilities are the consequence of the failure to adhere to social chores and or religious declarations cautioning against participating in specific conduct.³⁰ Additionally, some beliefs presume that disabilities are the consequence of discipline from God. The conviction is that it is a demonstration of discipline for transgression against religious decrees.

Second, the study used the Pentecostal 'hermeneutic of healing'. Healing is a key component that distinguishes Pentecostalism as a unique form of Christianity. Pentecostals believe in the Holy Spirit who is responsible for administering healing. The Pentecostal 'hermeneutic of healing' is complex and use different but inter-connected elements. Healing accentuates the soteriological, revelation, confrontational and holistic elements. This is essential to this study because it helps to explain what Pentecostals mean by healing. As such, the importance of healing to Pentecostals impact their perspective about PWD. Healing authenticates the message proclaimed by Pentecostals that Jesus saves, heals, baptises and is the coming king. In this study, the Pentecostal 'hermeneutic of healing' helped to create space for questioning the practices and processes of evaluating the need for healing PWD.

3. Methodology

The study is based on the lived experiences, feelings and views of PWD within the four selected congregations of the APC in Harare, Zimbabwe. Informed by Merriam³¹ and Ringson³² this study employed a qualitative phenomenological study based on its propensity to make sense

²⁸ G. Henderson, and W. Bryan, *Psychosocial Aspects of Disability* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 2011).

²⁹ A. Rimmerman, *Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³⁰ Henderson, and Bryan, 'Psychological Aspects of Disability', p7.

³¹ S. Merriam, "Qualitative Research: A guide to design and implementation", (San-Fransco: Jossey-Bass- A Willy Imprint Publishers, 2009)

³² J. Ringson, "The impact of inheritance experiences in orphans and vulnerable children support in Zimbabwe: A care-givers' perspective", 24.4 (2019), pp. 503-511

of the respondents' experiences. Merriam³³ further posits that phenomenology is a study of people's conscious experience of their lifeworld, that is their everyday life and social actions³⁴. In-depth interviews and participatory observations were used to gather data about the lived experiences of 28 PWDs who were purposively sampled from the four APC congregations which represented the AFMZ, ZAOGA FIF, Johanne Masowe Chishanu and UFI fellowshipping in the Harare area of Zimbabwe.

Patton³⁵ argued that purposive sampling is the best method to be used when selecting the most appropriate participants in a study that involves a small group of people. This was further affirmed by Tengco³⁶ who remarked that "in purposive sampling it is the researcher who decides what needs to be sampled and who can be the most appropriate participants to furnish the study with the right information required to respond to the research questions of the study". Thus, it is in the premises of the foregoing justification that judgemental purposive sampling was used to determine both the participants and the unit of analysis of this study.

The APC were purposively selected as information rich sources to this study among other pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe on the basis of their sizes and influence. Whilst the other three are all splits from the AFMZ, they have taken African Pentecostal theology to another level where AFM as mother of pentecostalism has never been. Thus, on that basis, the combination of these four congregations were found to be potentially appropriate to furnish this study with the depth and rich information deemed necessary. The inclusion of AFMZ was because it is the largest and the mother of all the influential and striving APCs Zimbabwe.³⁷

The criteria for choosing the PWD participants were that, they were supposed to both male and female of 18 years and above with a physical disability. The PWD were supposed to either active members of any one of the APC congregations or those who had backslidden from any of the APCs due to the verified or unverified circumstances. The backslidden were considered appropriate because the circumstances that precipitated their backsliden were regarded as part of the information the study was looking for. The main questions asked were

³³ S. Merriam, "Qualitative Research: A guide to design and implementation"

³⁴ S. Merriam, "Qualitative Research: A guide to design and implementation".

³⁵ Q.M. Patton, "Qualitative evaluation and research methods", (Newsbury Park: Sage Publications, 1970).

³⁶ C.B.M. Tongco, "Purposive sampling as a tool for informant selection", *A Journal of Plants, People and Applied Research*, 5.4 (2007), pp. 147-158

³⁷ N. Sande, 'Faith and Equality: Rethinking women in leadership positions in Pentecostalism,' *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 23.1 (2017), pp.50-62.

whether PWD need healing, and do Pentecostals heal them? Further, probing around these areas were aimed at exploring the lived experiences of PWD fellowshiping in the four APC congregations in Harare, Zimbabwe. On the participant observations, both the writers of this papers are ordained pastors within the AFMZ, researchers and practical theologian. Thus, on that basis they capitalizes on their positions to observe how the PWD were treated within some services they were privy to attend.

The data were analysed using the model of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke³⁸. Braun and Clarke argue that thematic analysis provides an accessible open-coding approach to analysing qualitative data. This involved familiarizing ourselves with the data, reviewing and defining themes. As such, an inductive method of theme development was undertaken on the basis of the content of the data. The data were analysed using the model of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke. Braun and Clarke argue that thematic analysis provides an accessible open-coding approach to analysing qualitative data. This involved familiarizing myself with the data, reviewing and defining themes. The trustworthiness of the study was enhanced by triangulation of sites and sources, using purposive sampling and providing a detailed description of the methods used. Since the study involved human participants, pertinent ethical issues were considered prior to and during the study. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant ethical department and organizations. Written informed consent was obtained from all the participants before the study was undertaken. Lastly, questions in the study tools were focused on the topic and, as far as possible, nothing outside the scope of the study was discussed.

4. Findings

The participants felt that in the church they are being insulted by the preachers. In this view, one of the female PWD remarked; “People insult us, sometimes by calling us all to raise our faith and receive healing”. It is apparent from the way they referred to these incidences that some PWD take offence when they are called to the prayer line. These results may suggest that in as much as the preachers feel inspired to minister to PWD, they fail to empathize with PWD. One participant mentioned that “we need to be treated as human beings irrespective of the nature of the disability we have.” A possible explanation is that PWD feel sidelined from

³⁸ V. Braun & V. Clarke, “Using thematic analysis in psychology: Qualitative research in psychology”, 3 (7), pp. 77-101.

participating freely in the worship ministry of the church because of their disabilities. About 80% of the participants felt that the church should treat them as people who are created in the image of God. When probed about what the church should do for them, one unanticipated finding was that they did not mention the need for healing. Rather, what is important to PWD were material needs.

In this study, 90% of the participants said that the church had not done anything to help PWD. While about 7% of the participants pointed out some sporadic material assistance that PWD have received from the church members. For instance, in his assessment one man aged forty-five concluded that “the church has done something, but it is not enough, it can do more”. The participants indicated that they need material needs to cover accommodation, fees, health and food. Other challenges mentioned include stigma, discrimination and exclusion from participation in the church. In the current study, participants show that the church has not created a social space for PWD to worship equally with the persons without disabilities.

A notable example that describes stigma is how the church perceives PWD. One outstanding finding was that “the church’s first reaction upon encountering the PWD is the anticipation for miraculous healings or eradication of the disabilities through divine intervention”. The participants pointed out that there is a perception that PWD deserve healing. It was somewhat surprising that one participant mentioned that the church is overzealous about healing, but PWD are normal. A possible explanation that the church feels that PWD needs healing probability because of the theology of disability.

Findings from the sermonic analysis showed that the preachers within the AFM explain that the cause of disability is sin and Satan and that PWD demonstrates the power of God were the most critical areas in the pastoral ministry to PWD. About 90% of the PWD explained that they have not seen healing when they received prayer. Findings from my participant observations, the AFM pastors preach that the power of God can heal any type of disability. Over ten years of my pastoral ministry I have not witnessed the blind seeing, the deaf talking and the lame walking. However, there are testimonies that during the infant stages of the church there were many miracles that were reported.

5. Discussions of Findings

Analysing the findings of this study has human dignity, recognition and compassion are key emerging themes for the needs of PWD. So, this study discusses these themes.

5.1 *The Human Dignity of PWD*

Human dignity emerged as a key need for PWD. The results of this study show that the APCs in Zimbabwe view PWD as needy and require healing. These results confirm the religious model of disability which view disability as caused by sin.³⁹ The reason that Pentecostals pray for PWD is that Pentecostals believe that sin can be dealt through healing. The Pentecostal ‘soteriological approach to healing’ argues that healing depends on the atonement of Christ. The work of Jesus on the cross made believers access healing by having faith in Jesus Christ. Results from participatory observations show that preachers use exclusionary hermeneutical practice which presents forms of disability such as to be blind, deaf, lame and demon-possessed as caused by sin. In this way, the church feels obligated to heal and restore PWD. According to this data, the challenge of African Pentecostal is focusing on bodily restoration than the human dignity of PWD.

On the contrary to expectation, in the current study, the findings showed that PWD need the provision of services such as food, hospital fees, tuition and accommodation. PWD complained that they lacked these necessities. Provision of these needs likely restores the human dignity of PWD. It can, therefore, be assumed that instead of focusing on healing, the AFM church should recognize an opportunity to value the human dignity of PWD.

It is evident from the responses of the participants that the church marginalizes PWD by calling them to receive healing. One characteristic of Pentecostalism which makes it distinct from other forms of Christianity is ‘divine healing’.⁴⁰ Pentecostals are known to magnify divine healing or faith healing above the issue of speaking in tongues and prosperity. These findings may help to explain why Pentecostals offer healing solution to PWD as their humane intervention(s).

Another prominent challenge noted by participants was that dealing with certain aspects of healing was disabling PWD. Certain attitudes, actions and words (de)value and make PWD vulnerable. For instance, the notion that healing PWD demonstrates the move of the power of God. These results may be explained by the fact that accepting the healing of PWD as the

³⁹ J. McClure, *Preaching Words* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

⁴⁰ C.A. Brown, ‘Introduction: Pentecostalism and the Globalization of Illness and Healing’, in C.G Brown (ed) *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), p3.

demonstration of the ‘power of God’ suggests that PWD are ‘objects’ for the power of God. In this way, human dignity is taken away. Further, PWD are treated as inferior and unequal to persons without disabilities. Such an approach creates a disadvantage for worship opportunities for PWD. These results resonate with the idea that access to inclusive spaces is difficult for PWD.⁴¹

In general, therefore, the Pentecostal hermeneutic of healing has the potential to create derogatory views towards PWD. These views have a negative psychological impact on PWD creating a window to low esteem. For instance, the Pentecostal ‘holistic healing approach’ argues that the power of the Kingdom of God is evidenced by the ministry of Jesus. Healing is holistic in the sense that it deals with the total person (body, soul and spirit). Therefore, Pentecostals believe that healing is not limited to the body but should cover the total person. Be as it may, the findings of this study showed that the church refers to physical healing. Proper rethinking of the theology of healing physical disability is needed. The entire church has a part to play in changing attitudes towards PWD. As everyone imparts ideas and communicates in some way; as such, this will create a safe space for PWD. Even though there is no legal mandate prohibiting discrimination against PWD, the conscience of believers in the AFM should: first; be more sensitive to the real needs of PWD who are fellow brothers and sisters. Second, discover hidden possibilities to meet these needs.

5.2 *Recognition as Part of Human Dignity*

Recognition as part of human dignity emerged as one of the key themes in this study. Human dignity is enhanced through the way society acknowledges people. One interesting finding in this study was that “we need to be treated as human beings irrespective of the nature of the disabilities we have”. There are several explanations for this result, but it is possible to hypothesize that such recognition of PWD as ‘human beings’ is a critical need of PWD. An implication of this is the possibility of the church to make a mental shift and to take responsibility for the real needs of PWD. One of the issues that can be noticed about changing believer’s perception is the fact that this cannot be accomplished overnight, as it requires church leadership to review and shift their belief systems, traditions, and sermons to make a difference in the way people recognize PWD. Another interesting finding is that most preachers

⁴¹ T.E. Reynolds, ‘Invoking Deep Access: Disability Beyond Inclusion in the church,’ *Dialog* 51.3 (2012), pp. 212-223.

say that the power of God can heal any type of disability. The Pentecostal 'holistic approach to healing' democratize healing whereby the elders of the church are supposed to use anointing oil to heal the sick (Js. 5:14). Every believer can be used by God to heal and are trained to heal. Pentecostals believe that the gifts of the healing can be transferred by impartation.⁴² Therefore, it is essential to understand how hegemonic Pentecostal hermeneutic of healing in the church are constructed and perpetuated. It could conceivably be hypothesized that every believer has some form of obligation to heal PWD. Such perception makes the church fail to recognize PWD as human beings that need empathizing with them. Put differently, the church should 'identify with PWD' as this can be a good entry point for transforming perceptions. It has been suggested that to embrace the inclusion of PWD, the church must continually adapt to the changing needs to effectively address the issues of individuals like PWD.⁴³ Recognizing PWD as part of human dignity provides insight into constructing discourses that can promote equality and inclusion.

The spirit of recognition of PWD is a much-needed feature in the church. When probed about what the church should do for them, one unanticipated finding was that they did not mention the need for healing. These findings show that the church should work towards the realisation of a full and productive life for PWD. Inclusion of PWD must prioritise access to all spheres of life, such as spiritual, emotional and physical, thereby prioritising accommodation, creating relationships and moving into communion.⁴⁴ Hence, the recognition of PWD has the potential to acknowledge the contributions of PWD to worship. Accordingly, this has the potential to help to discourage the unhealthy perception that PWD need healing. Inclusion of PWD should go beyond the rhetoric of acceptance but should offer a holistic approach to meet all the needs of PWD. From a Pentecostal perspective, this entails that PWD are endowed with the Holy Spirit and can be empowered for missional and evangelistic work, and the pastoral ministry. At times empowerment for the ministry involves exorcisms and deliverance which is a form of healing. The Pentecostal 'confrontational approach' to healing assumes that some sickness is caused by demons. The Pentecostal newsletter of the 20th century reported that exorcisms and deliverance were associated with healings.⁴⁵ In this approach evil

⁴² Brown, 'Introduction: Pentecostalism', p39.

⁴³ T.A. Paterson, D. Specht, and D. Duchon, D, 'Exploring Costs and Consequences of Religious Expression in Family Businesses,' *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion* 10.2 (2013), pp.138-158.

⁴⁴ Reynolds, 'Invoking Deep Access', p221.

⁴⁵ Anderson, 'Pentecostal Approaches to Faith', p525.

spirits and demons are perceived as the causes of sickness. A notable challenge is that not every sickness comes from evil spirits.

The lived experiences of PWD in this study helps to question some aspects of the Pentecostal hermeneutic of healing. Theological reflection explores the experiences of both the community and the individual in conversation with the insight of a religious tradition.⁴⁶ There is a richly different story in the lived experiences of PWD and their views about God which can benefit the community of the Christian faith. In this study, an honest dialoguing of lived experiences of PWD, their needs and the Pentecostal hermeneutic of healing have provided alternative understandings of disability. A Christian theology of disability must demonstrate that God is for and in favour of PWD since they bear the image of the 'Disabled God'.⁴⁷ Understanding the needs of PWD requires a 'theology from below', where the voice of the PWD constructs theology and praxis. Therefore, a deliberate formulation of theology whose agenda is to meet the real needs of PWD.

The existence of the church presupposed the meeting of people who needs salvation for their wicked hearts and sinful nature. If this is anything to go by, then looking at healing physical disability is reducing the mission of the church to humanity. Pentecostal view healing as a critical part of the gospel and salvation.⁴⁸ Pentecostals believe that 'healing in the atonement'. Therefore, purification provides healing for believers. Therefore, the church should not define disability within the continuum of sin.

The most obvious finding to emerge from the findings is that PWD feel that the people in the church should treat them as people created in the image of God. These results are consistent with data obtained that say without the experience of PWD, the church falls short of the glory of God.⁴⁹ It could be argued that the image of God is viewed differently by Pentecostals. The concept of man being created in the image of God does not take into account PWD. The idea that everything God created was 'good' causes the church to shun all other forms of the image of God. The creation theology in Genesis presents a normal being without

⁴⁶ P.O.C. Killen, and J. De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad, 1994).

⁴⁷J.N. Amanze, 'Disability discourse: Imago Dei, teaching theology from a disability perspective', in Kroesbergen, H. (ed.). *Christian Identity and Justice in a Globalised World from a Southern African Perspective*, (South Africa: Christian Literature Fund, 2014).

⁴⁸ J.W. Williams, *Spirit Cure: A History of Pentecostal Healing* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), p3.

⁴⁹ Ecumenical Disabilities Advocates Network. September, 'A Church of All and for All: An Interim Statement', (Paper Presented at the Meeting of World Council of Churches, September 2003).

any disabilities and the church perpetuates this ideal through praying for the sick and healing them. In this case, the idea of the image of God is limited since accommodating the PWD requires them to be healed first. Thus, the image of God should entail the complexity of human experience and this is seen in how the APCs represents the interests of PWD. The APC can redefine their understanding of the image of God by focusing on making everyone affirm their total contribution to the holistic image. The redemption of PWD is not when they are healed but when their social, structural, economic, political and religious barriers are removed.⁵⁰ A possible explanation for this might be that Pentecostal and Charismatics view healing as a soteriological function. When people are healed it shows that God has the power to save humanity.

Consequently, the plight of PWD presents a theological opportunity to respond to both the needs of PWD and to create a safe space for them in the community, rather than focusing solely on the divine healing of PWD. Investing and removing social barriers as proposed by the social model of disability is important for the church. Not everything needs healing, the church provides alternative needs for PWD. For instance, digital texts, braille bibles, listening devices for the hearing impaired, and so forth can be a starting point for the church. Therefore, in the context of technology and advanced medical treatment Pentecostals may need to complement its 'faith healing' approach with medical healing.

It follows, therefore, that honouring and recognising the dignity of PWD means also being in solidarity with activists taking a stand for social justice for PWD. Provisions of materials which help PWD not to be inferior. The social inclusion of PWD in the church is a moral rights issue. The church has a social responsibility to work toward such inclusion. It is possible to develop a disability theology, and this theology should be theology for, with, of and by persons with disability.⁵¹ For instance, the pastoral ministry approach to reading and interpretation of the passages that involve PWD should relate more fully to social, political and ideological forces that affect PWD. It is suggested that the APCs must encourage and consider PWD to be full-time ministers; this will proactively empower PWD to create their theology that will meet the challenges they are facing.

Economic challenges affect the needs of PWD. The emphasize of prosperity theology in the AFM has some bearing on how PWD participate in the economics of the church.

⁵⁰ A. Yong, 'Disability and the Love of Wisdom: De-forming, Re-forming, and Per-forming Philosophy of Religion,' *Ars Disputandi* 9.1 (2009), pp.54-71.

⁵¹ T.K. Christiani, 'Doing Theology: Towards the Construction of Methods for Living with Disability,' *Asia Journal of Theology* 28.1 (2009), p35.

Material, health and financial blessing are gifts given to the church.⁵² The Pentecostal ‘holistic approach to healing’ argues that healing is a virtue which targets to restore the health of believers. This restoration is regarded as ‘prosperity’ because it shows the abundance of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the healing package speaks full salvation which focuses to achieve wellbeing and freedom from poverty. Thus, the economic model of disability creates an interplay between poverty and the sustenance of PWD. The APCs believes in divine intervention as well as financial contributions in terms of tithes, offerings and physical work. Some of these expectations have a bearing on PWD since most of them are poor and cannot work, also the failure of the divine intervention not materialising will seem as though they are not close to God, hence they fail to participate. Thus, the challenge of relying on divine provision is that it leaves the already marginalised PWD feeling hopeless when this does not materialise. The AFM should render practical assistance to PWD without this assistance often being misconstrued as an admission of weakness.

5.3 *Love and Compassion to PWD*

Compassion to PWD emerged as a key theme in this study. Another important finding was that “the church’s first reaction upon encountering the PWD is the anticipation for miraculous healings or eradication of the disabilities through divine intervention but we need love and compassion”. These results suggest that PWD are comfortable in receiving love and compassion than physical healing. This finding resonated with the part of the Pentecostal healing which says ‘the love of God’ is the source of healing.⁵³ So, the demonstration of love and compassion by Pentecostals focuses on prayer, fasting and divine interventions. In contrast to these beliefs, the findings in this study showed that PWD are looking for material needs that help to improve their well-being. Therefore, providing material needs like education, health and home care services are areas that the church can make a difference in the lives of PWD than desiring for the healing.

It is interesting to note that in all the participants in this study mentioned that they were not healed of their physical disabilities in the church. Pentecostal believes that failure for the

⁵² L. Togarasei, “Churches for the Rich? Pentecostalism and Elitism,” *Faith in the City: The Role and Place of Religion in Harare*, in L. Togarasei (ed), *Aspects of Pentecostal Christianity in Zimbabwe*, (Switzerland: Springer, 2010), pp.19-40.

⁵³ Brown, Candy Gunther, “Introduction: Pentecostalism and the Globalization”.

people to be healed is the mystery of the sovereignty of God.⁵⁴ It is important to bear in mind the possible bias in this approach of healing because it leaves everything to God. The present study raises the possibility that this approach by Pentecostals make them invite them more often to the prayer line. Many participants in this study explained that “we are insulted by people, sometimes call us all to raise our faith and receive healing”. This study has been unable to demonstrate why preachers continue to call PWD for prayer when many are not healed. But, there is a perspective within Pentecostalism that relates believer’s faith to healing. Some Pentecostal preacher’s claim that it is necessary to have faith for one to be healed.⁵⁵ The results of this study do not explain what happens for those who were prayed for and healing does not happen. Of course, they feel disappointment but it was going to benefit the type of theology which PWD develops out of this experience. Pentecostals believe that Jesus gave the power of healing to the believers to do it on his behalf.⁵⁶ Therefore, believers feel that they have a mandate to direct healing towards believers. The idea of realized eschatology is sustained when there is a demonstration of healing because it shows that God is present.

Asking the importance of healing the physical body is critical to this study. Paul in 1 Cor.15:54 argues that this body is temporary. Therefore, both PWD and the person without a disability have temporary bodies. The church needs to accept that PWD are not people living in a different world, but disability is a characteristic of human experience. The church can demonstrate love and compassion by providing charitable works. The charity model of disability perceives that the persons without disability frequently channel sentiments of sensitivity and pity by providing for charity, as opposed to attempting to take out social and environmental barriers that limit PWD.⁵⁷ A better charitable work the church can do for PWD is including them in the community and give them space for participation.

Embracing PWD as believers with unique physiology but with sins healed could be critical rethinking for the church. PWD and persons without disabilities can be progressively viewed as interdependent through teamwork in the church. The church can develop a socially inclusive

⁵⁴ H. Knight, III. ‘God’s Faithfulness and God’s Freedom: A Comparison of Contemporary Theologies of Healing,’ *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1.2 (1993): pp.66-67.

⁵⁵ J.A. Cox, J.A, ‘A Re-examination of Faith and Healing in the Gospel: Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Healing and Disability,’ *Cyber-Journal for Pentecostal- Charismatic Research* p.24.

⁵⁶ K. Warrington, ‘The Role of Jesus as Presented in the Healing Praxis and Teaching of British Pentecostalism: A Re-Examination,’ *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 25.1 (2003), pp.66-92.

⁵⁷ Griffin, Peters and Smith, *Ableism Curriculum Design*, p.336.

community in which everyone is an asset, and there are no liabilities. The church should work in solidarity with PWD by recognising and addressing the needs of PWD. Persons without disabilities are not superior to PWD. Starting to appoint PWD to key leadership positions and making space for them to contribute to ministry are pragmatic means to show love and compassion. This approach is opposed to the Pentecostals belief of ‘name it and claim- it approaches’ to receive from God. This approach simply makes God a dispenser of things and it difficult to sustain theologically.

The primary forms of exclusion of PWD are based on culture, customs and Christian beliefs. Findings in this study show that focusing on Pentecostal ‘faith healing’ on PWD is a form of both exclusion and stigma. Different cross or multicultural contexts bring diverse perceptions about disabilities.⁵⁸ Therefore, in this study, the APC represents a cross-cultural platform informed by both the cultural and the Pentecostal hermeneutic of healing which promotes the conceptualisation of disability differently. The construction of disabilities is created through interpretations based on social values as well as beliefs.⁵⁹

Thus, love and compassion to PWD involve appreciating the inward work of God. The Pentecostals believe that God desires to heal every Christian. The reason for some believers not receiving their healing is associated with their failure to exercise their faith appropriately.⁶⁰ Although, this study is showing that most PWD, but it is not disputing that God cannot heal. Pentecostals and Charismatic have many testimonies of healings but it is clear in this study there are no recording of healings of physical disabilities. Pentecostals view healing as a virtue which signifies prosperity because of the abundance of the life of Christ within believers.

6. Conclusion

The main goal of the current study was to understand whether PWD need healing and do Pentecostals heal them? Through probing the lived experiences of PWD in the APCs in Zimbabwe; this study identified PWD needs as human dignity, recognition and compassion. However, Pentecostals have focused on the ‘faith healing’ to deal with physical disabilities.

⁵⁸ C. Haihambo, and E. Lightfoot, ‘Cultural Beliefs Regarding People with Disabilities in Namibia: Implications for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities,’ *International Journal of Special Education* 25.3 (2010), pp.76-87.

⁵⁹ G. Thomas, and A. Loxley, *Deconstructing Special Education and Constructing Education* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001).

⁶⁰ K. Warrington, ‘Healing and Exorcism: The Path to Wholeness’, in K. Warrington (ed), *Pentecostal Perspectives* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), p162.

The function of the Holy Spirit, which manifest through divine healings is one of the factors that distinguishes Pentecostalism from other forms of Christianity. The Pentecostal 'hermeneutic of healing' accentuate soteriological, revelation, confrontational and holistic elements disable PWD. To this end, it is therefore recommended that the church must focus holistically on both material and the psychosocial needs of PWD to create space for fellowship with PWD and desist from endlessly chasing the goose. A further study with more focus on developing an appropriate Pentecostal theology for PWD is therefore suggested.

