

# Representations of Disability in the Old Testament and Their Implication for the Nexus between Poverty and Disability: Lessons for the Church in Contemporary Zimbabwe

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## ABSTRACT

*Historically, disability has been part of the human condition such that persons with disabilities have existed in virtually all societies from ancient to modern times. At the core of the experiences of persons with disabilities are contradictory perspectives which have essentially served as inclusion and exclusion mechanisms in the context of disability. The Old Testament (OT) presents such contradictory perspectives on disability in texts that discriminate against persons with disabilities (Lev 21:16–24; 22:17–22; Deut 28:28) as well as texts that call for non-discrimination (Lev 19:14; Deuteronomy 27:18). Accordingly, the negative and discriminatory perspectives on disability that provide the foundation for the systematic exclusion stigmatisation of and discrimination against persons with disabilities in African societies are partly rooted in the Church’s engagement with biblical texts on disability. Such exclusion is the primary mechanism that nurtures and perpetuates the connection between disability and poverty. Drawing insights from the Social Model of Disability, the chapter argues that there has to be a paradigm shift in the way that society has addressed the issue of disability. The Church should take appropriate action to guard against the systematic exclusion of persons with disabilities through a liberative reading of biblical texts that cultivate a social ideology of inclusion in the context of disability.*

**KEYWORDS:** Disability, Poverty, Contradictory Perspectives, Social Exclusion, Vulnerability, Church

## A INTRODUCTION

Disability is indeed a part of the human condition and persons with disabilities have existed in virtually all societies from ancient to modern times. In most societies, positive and negative perspectives on disability have served respectively as inclusion and exclusion mechanisms in the context of disability.

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This is the case with regard to the experience of disability in the OT context. The OT presents contradictory perspectives on disability as evidenced by texts such as Lev 21:16–24; 22:17–22, and Deut 28:28 that discriminate against persons with disabilities as well as texts such as Lev 19:14 and Deut 27:18 that call for non-discrimination. Ultimately, in the ancient context, such contradictory perspectives often served as inclusion and exclusion mechanisms in the context of disability.<sup>1</sup> Such exclusion mechanisms impacted both negatively and positively on the actual lived experiences of persons with disabilities. Thus, Olyan notes that persons with disabilities were subject to various forms of stigmatisation and marginalisation in the biblical texts, analogous in some respects to the common stigmatisation and marginalisation claimed for contemporary persons with disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

In the context of Africa, both discriminatory and non-discriminatory attitudes towards disability are common but discriminatory attitudes are predominant. Empirical studies by Benedicte Ingstad and Arne H. Eide, Nora Groce et al., Eide Arne and Ingstad Benedicte, Grech Shaun and Karen Soldatic and Chataika have established that persons with disabilities remain the most marginalised group, especially in many developing countries.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the World Health Organisation and World Bank's report on disability indicates that persons with disabilities constitute the largest population of the world's minority groups; yet, discrimination, stigmatising and exclusion are common.<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically, the Church in Africa has contributed substantially to the continuum of negative perspectives on disability through its interpretation of biblical texts on disability. Thus, the prevailing negative and discriminatory

<sup>1</sup> Staffan Bengtsson, "On the Borderline-representations of Disability in the Old Testament," *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* 16/3 (2014):290. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/10.1080/15017419.2013.873077>

<sup>2</sup> Saul M. Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>3</sup> For a nuanced discussion detailing the experiences of persons with disabilities in developing countries and particularly in the Zimbabwean context, see Benedicte Ingstad and Arne H. Eide, "Introduction," in *Disability and Poverty: A Global Challenge* (ed. H. A. Eide and B. Ingstad; Bristol: The Policy Press, 2011); Arne H. Eide and Benedicte Ingstad, "Disability and Poverty: Reflections on Research Experiences in Africa and Beyond," *African Journal of Disability* 2/1 (2013), 1–7; Nora Groce et al., "Disability and Poverty: The Need for a More Nuanced Understanding of Implications for Development Policy and Practice," *Third World Quarterly* 32/8 (2011):1493–1513 <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/10.1080/01436597.2011.604520>; Shaun Grech. and Karen Soldatic, *Disability in the Global South: The Critical Handbook* (Basel Switzerland: Springer, 2015); Tsitsi Chataika, "Introduction: Critical Connections and Gaps in Disability and Development," in *The Routledge Handbook of Disability In Southern Africa* (ed. Chataika Tsitsi; London and New York: Routledge Francis and Taylor, 2019), 3–13.

<sup>4</sup> Chataika, "Critical Connections and Gaps," 3.

perspectives on disability in African societies emanate primarily from the Church's interpretation of biblical texts that discriminate against persons with disabilities.<sup>5</sup> Such negative perspectives have provided the foundation for the systematic exclusion of and discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Exclusion is the primary mechanism that connects disability and poverty and perpetuates their relationship in contemporary Africa. Persons with disabilities continue to experience serious social suffering, which is felt in relation to the social condition of poverty.<sup>6</sup> Poverty is more severe and extensively crippling in its economic and humanitarian consequences, especially in the context of disability. The majority of persons with disability are deeply entangled in a cycle of abject poverty, as several factors influence their exclusion from the mainstream structures of society. Thus, there is a direct relationship between the prevailing negative perspectives on disability and the systematic exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream structures of society. Such discriminatory perspectives result in the undesirable treatment of persons with disabilities often culminating in their exclusion from the mainstream structures of society. The situation in Africa is very disheartening and it constitutes a serious social justice issue that must not be ignored if persons with disabilities are to be brought into mainstream development. It is incumbent upon the Church in Africa, which is founded on values of equality and justice, to spearhead the process of bringing such persons into mainstream development initiatives.

This study argues that there has to be a paradigm shift in the way that the Church addresses the issue of disability. It enunciates how the Church in Africa can engage positive and non-discriminatory perspectives on disability enshrined in the OT as a resource in the process of empowering persons with disabilities and ending the unjust social arrangements that cause and perpetuate their poverty. The study is premised on the thinking that if the Church's interpretation of biblical texts on disability is properly managed, the institution can certainly bring about the much-needed innovation in terms of ideas and societal attitudes that foster the inclusion of persons with disabilities in African societies. The Church must curtail the systematic marginalisation and stigmatisation of persons

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<sup>5</sup> For studies detailing how the Church, through biblical interpretation, has contributed to the continuum of negative and discriminatory perspectives on disability prevalent in the Zimbabwean context, see Nomatter Sande, "Pastoral Ministry and Persons with Disabilities: The Case of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe," *African Journal of Disability* 8 (2019): 1–8; Francis Machingura, "The 'Unholy Trinity' against Disabled people in Zimbabwe: Religion, Culture and the Bible," *The Routledge Handbook of Disability in Southern Africa* (ed. Chataika Tsitsi; London and New York: Routledge Francis and Taylor, 2019), 211–223.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Muredzi and Benedicte Ingstad, "Disability and Social Suffering in Zimbabwe," in *Disability and Poverty: A Global Challenge* (ed. H. A. Eide and B. Ingstad; Bristol: The Policy Press, 2011), 172, 176.

with disabilities in African societies through a liberative reading of biblical texts on disability. The Church needs to cultivate a social ideology of inclusion in the context of disability by focusing on texts that foster positive perspectives on disability in African societies.

## **B THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS**

Theoretically, the chapter draws on the Social Model of Disability, which is preferred by disability advocates, disability scholars and persons with disabilities for its relevance in unpacking issues related to disability and society.<sup>7</sup> This predilection is precisely anchored on the fact that the model is directly situated in the lived experiences of persons with disabilities.<sup>8</sup> The model pays attention to the role of non-material factors, such as negative attitudes and symbols in producing systematic disadvantages for persons with disabilities.<sup>9</sup> Thus, proponents of the model argue that the disadvantages suffered by persons with disabilities are socially produced by systematic patterns of exclusion and isolation that are built literally into the social fabric of society.<sup>10</sup> Such exclusionary social arrangements are nurtured and perpetuated by negative perspectives on disability.

Thus, in this study, the model provides a critical lens to appreciate the exclusionary processes that connect disability and poverty in Zimbabwe. As

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<sup>7</sup> Lorella Terzi, "The Social Model of Disability: A Philosophical Critique," *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 21/2 (2004):143; Bernabeu E. Mira, "The Social Model Analysis of Disability and the Majority World," *INTERSTICIOS: Revista Sociologica de Pensamiento Critico* 6/2 (2012):280. Samuel Kabue, "Disability: Post-modernity Challenges to the Theology," In *Disability in Africa, Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies* (ed. Samuel Kabue, James Amanze and Christine Landman; Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2016), 40; Mark P. Mostert, "Stereotypes Fomenting Hate: Perceptions, Stigma, and Real-world Consequences for Africans with Disabilities," in *Disability Hate Speech Social, Cultural and Political Contexts* (ed. Mark Sherry, Terje Olsen, Janikke Solstad Vedeler and John Eriksen; London: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 150.

<sup>8</sup> Terzi, "The Social Model of Disability," 143; S. Rajni, "Gender and Disability: Dual Marginalization," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 27/3 (2020):411. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/10.1177/0971521520939285>

<sup>9</sup> Brendan Gleeson, "Beyond Goodwill: The Materialist View of Disability," *Social Alternatives* 18/1 (1999):12; Carolyn Jackson-Brown, *Disability, the Media and the Paralympic Games* (Routledge: Taylor and Francis 2020), 36.

<sup>10</sup> Bill Hughes and Kevin Paterson, "The Social Model of Disability and the Disappearing Body: Towards a Sociology of Impairment," *Disability & Society* 12/3 (1997):328; Paul T. Jaeger and Cynthia A. Bowman, *Understanding Disability: Inclusion, Access, Diversity, and Civil Rights* (Praeger Publishers, 2005), 15; Iryna Babik and Elena S. Gardner, "Factors Affecting the Perception of Disability: A Developmental Perspective," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12/702166 (2021):2. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.702166>.

Ingstad and Eide argue, the model is well suited for analysing the problem of disability and poverty in that it pays attention to the context in which the poor person with a disability lives and thus makes it possible to focus on the relative as well as the relational aspects of poverty.<sup>11</sup> More importantly, the social model demands changes in attitudinal barriers and points to the need to remove stigmatising attitudes.<sup>12</sup> Such demands corroborate the fundamental argument advanced in this study that there has to be a paradigm shift in the way that society engages with disability, particularly at the attitudinal level. Indeed, with its emphasis on social willingness and action to implement fully inclusive communities at every level,<sup>13</sup> the model offers an opportunity to create a barrier-free society that promotes access for persons with disabilities and to reduce the dominant tendencies to exclude them.

This study is highly qualitative, as it employs qualitative research techniques for data collection and analysis. In order to facilitate the triangulation of results, this evaluative study employs a multi-method approach to data collection, which includes desk review and observations. First, the overall aim of desk review is to gather information relating to the Church's role in fomenting negative perspectives on disability. Second, the study conducts a comprehensive desk review of existing literature detailing the lived experiences of persons with disabilities, particularly in relation to issues of exclusion and poverty. Third, desk research allows us to examine representations of disability in the OT comprehensively and to establish the implications of such representations for the nexus between disability and poverty. To gain a holistic understanding of the experiences of persons with disabilities, the study also relies on information gathered through observation. As a rule, the goal of observation is to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under observation, that is, as objectively and accurately as possible, given the limitations of the method.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the study also uses observation to gather the information that either corroborates or disproves the findings in the existing literature on the experiences of persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe and beyond.

## **C HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CONTRADICTIONARY PERSPECTIVES ON DISABILITY IN THE OT AND THEIR SPECIFIC SOCIAL CONTEXTS**

Old Testament scholars such as Bengtsson, Vengeyi and Olyan demonstrate that both discriminatory and non-discriminatory perspectives on disability were

<sup>11</sup> Ingstad and Eide, "Introduction," 4–5.

<sup>12</sup> Mostert, "Stereotypes Fomenting Hate," 150; Rajni, "Gender and Disability," 411.

<sup>13</sup> Mostert, "Stereotypes Fomenting Hate," 150.

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Kawulich, "Participant Observation as Data Collection Method," *Qualitative Social Research* 6/2 (2005), 8.

common in ancient Israel.<sup>15</sup> The OT comprises texts such as Lev 21:16–23, 22:17–22, and Deut 28:28 depicting discrimination against persons and animals with disabilities, as well as texts such as Lev 19:14 and Deut 27:18 that call for non-discrimination.<sup>16</sup> Such contradictory perspectives on disability emerged and were indeed informed by specific social, political and religious contexts. Vengeyi demonstrates that societies that produced texts on both perspectives shifted from non-discriminatory to discriminatory attitudes.<sup>17</sup> In terms of their social setting, such conflicting perspectives on disability were anchored upon traditions and ideologies of different modes of production. Both perspectives had a bearing on the inclusion and exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream structures of society. This is precisely the context in which the development of such conflicting attitudes towards disability in ancient Israel must be understood. The ancient society was inconsistent throughout in terms of its perceptions of disability; as such, perspectives shifted at various stages in the history of its development.

Vengeyi stipulates that discriminatory perspectives on disability were occasioned exclusively by ideologies of the proto-capitalist mode of production, whereas the non-discriminatory attitudes were nurtured by the communal mode of production.<sup>18</sup> The positive and non-discriminatory conceptions of disability expressed in Lev 19:14 and Deut 27:18 were nurtured and perpetuated by ideologies that emanated from the context of specific socio-economic structures. For Vengeyi, there is a very strong possibility that positive perspectives on disability were predominant during the pre-monarchic period when Israel operated a communal mode of production, which was anchored on egalitarian ideologies.<sup>19</sup> The most commonly recognised aspect of Israel's pre-monarchic period is that measures of socio-economic levelling and sharing underpinned this egalitarian society.<sup>20</sup> Exclusionary and discriminatory perspectives on disability

<sup>15</sup> Bengtsson, "On the Borderline-representations of Disability," 290. Obvious Vengeyi, "The Interpretation of Biblical Texts on Disability: Then and Now," in *Disability in Africa, Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies* (ed. Samuel Kabue, James Amanze and Christine Landman; Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2016), 151, 152, 161. Cf. Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Vengeyi, "The Interpretation of Biblical Texts on Disability," 151, 152, 161; Kudzai Nyamidzi and Z. Mujaho, "Disability and the Beauty of Creation: An Analysis of the Old Testament Perceptions on Disability," in *Disability in Africa, Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies* (ed. Samuel Kabue, James Amanze and Christine Landman; Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2016), 78–90.

<sup>17</sup> Vengeyi, "The Interpretation of Biblical Texts on Disability," 135.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 151–152, 160.

<sup>19</sup> Vengeyi, "The Interpretation of Biblical Texts on Disability," 151, 152, 160.

<sup>20</sup> This position is clearly demonstrated in the works of Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1987) and Obvious Vengeyi, *Aluta Continua Biblical Hermeneutics for Liberation: Interpreting Biblical Texts on Slavery for Liberation of Zimbabwean Underclasses* (Bamberg:

were less likely to thrive in such an environment where egalitarian ideologies were dominant. There was a general sense of respect for all persons, both disabled and able-bodied. The egalitarian agenda remained intact and measures of socio-economic levelling and sharing were implemented across the board without segregating any group of people. Vengeyi observes that Israelite society did not discriminate against any individual on the basis of disability prior to the introduction of the monarchy.<sup>21</sup> This, strongly suggests that there was a general recognition of the other as diversity was embraced without discrimination and stigmatisation.

The presence of negative perspectives on disability in Lev 21:16–24 and Deut 28:28 demonstrates that such discriminatory perspectives became dominant at a certain point in the historical development of ancient Israel. Vengeyi argues that biblical texts that discriminate against persons with disabilities were created at the time of the monarchy to legitimate the status of certain people by discriminating against others.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, society's social and cultural ways of viewing and dealing with disability also changed to align with the fundamental ideological underpinnings of the monarchy. Thus, the change of attitudes witnessed in the context of disability corresponded with Israel's transition from the communalistic mode of production to the proto-capitalistic mode of production. As Vengeyi observes, the dominance of the proto-capitalistic mode of production during Israel's monarchic period necessitated the change of attitudes towards people with disabilities.<sup>23</sup> The proto-capitalistic mode of production had its own set of exclusionary ideologies that influenced and necessitated the shift from non-discriminatory to discriminatory attitudes towards disability, primarily in the religious, socio-cultural, political and economic spheres of ancient Israel.

#### **D CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE NEXUS BETWEEN POVERTY AND DISABILITY IN OT REPRESENTATIONS OF DISABILITY**

Economic modes of production influence societal attitudes towards disability, which also have a bearing on the inclusion or exclusion of persons with disabilities from mainstream society.<sup>24</sup> In ancient Israel, both negative and positive perceptions of disability led to the categorisation of persons with disabilities. This categorisation could be non-discriminatory or discriminatory and had a direct bearing on the inclusion and exclusion of persons with

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Bamberg University Press, 2013). The major argument advanced by these scholars is that pre-monarchic Israel was highly egalitarian.

<sup>21</sup> Vengeyi, "The Interpretation of Biblical Texts on Disability," 151.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 151, 152.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 151–152, 161.



disabilities. It is in this respect that Bengtsson asserts that, exclusion (Lev 21:16–24; 22:17–22; Deut 28:28) and inclusion (Lev 19:14; Deut 27:18) mechanisms were interwoven in the OT to the extent that even if there were exclusion processes derived from disability, these were also countered by mechanisms of inclusion.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the socio-economic circumstances of persons with disabilities were largely dependent on the degree to which they were included or excluded from the mainstream structures of Israelite society. In other words, the actual lived experiences of persons with disabilities were directly proportional to the prevailing social attitudes towards and perspectives on disability in their respective social contexts.

On the whole, negative perspectives on disability nurture and certainly foster the systematic exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream structures of social organisation.<sup>26</sup> The discriminatory perspectives on disability presented in Lev 21:16–24, 22:17–22 and Deut 28:28 promoted the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream structures of society. What is clear from such texts is that negative perceptions of disability led to the discriminatory categorisation of persons with disabilities, hence, their exclusion. Olyan argues that texts like Lev 21:16–23 demonstrate that the Hebrew Bible did categorise people based on their physical and mental condition and such classifications resulted in the demand for the exclusion of the affected persons from all dimensions of the ancient society's social, economic, political and religious life.<sup>27</sup> According to Lev 21:16–23, it was unthinkable that a person with a disability could ever serve as a high priest and take a leading role in the highest rituals of the cult; thus, disability became a clear marker for institutional exclusion and barriers.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, this system of exclusion permeated into other spheres of life and obviously worked to the detriment of persons with disabilities who were relegated to the fringes of society.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, ideas of purity and the perfect body espoused in Lev 21:16–23 also worked to the detriment of persons with disabilities, as their bodies were seen as impure and defective; hence, they were excluded on the basis of their disabilities. There is also a strong possibility that the discriminatory attitudes towards animals with disabilities in Lev 22:17–22 also influenced the general attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

On the contrary, positive perspectives on disability led to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in structures of social organisation. The OT includes exhortations to assist those with disabilities as well as other marginalised figures

<sup>25</sup> Bengtsson, "On the Borderline-representations of Disability," 290.

<sup>26</sup> World Health Organization [WHO] and the World Bank, *World Report on Disability* (Geneva: WHO; 2011), 6. Online: [https://www.who.int/disabilities/world\\_report/2011/report.pdf](https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Bengtsson, "On the Borderline-representations of Disability," 284.

<sup>29</sup> Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible*, 4.



and to ensure that such vulnerable members of the ancient community were not exposed to injustice.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, it features texts that command the Israelites to treat persons with disabilities as one would treat those without.<sup>31</sup> Leviticus 19:14 and Deut 27:18 are prime examples of such texts. The exhortations in such texts reflect positive perspectives presented in the OT, which served as mechanisms for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Ultimately, the objective of such measures was that of protecting persons with disabilities against systematic stigmatisation and discrimination, which culminated in their exclusion from the mainstream structures of social organisation.

Respectively, it can be deduced from Lev 19:14 and Deut 27:18 that such exhortations were given in response to prevailing social attitudes that were in sharp contrast to what the texts prohibit. A deconstructive reading of these texts indicates that persons with disabilities were victims of stigmatisation. Thus, Olyan concludes that persons with disabilities were subject to various forms of stigmatisation and marginalisation in biblical communities.<sup>32</sup> Vengeyi also reiterates that it is pointless to command people not to discriminate against people with disabilities if they are not being discriminated against.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, texts such as Lev 19:14 speak against discriminatory attitudes that led to the exclusion of persons with disabilities. The exclusion was a threat to social justice, and solidarity and the systematic exclusion of persons with disabilities must have violated the maintenance of social solidarity in ancient Israel. As such, Frick contends that regulations concerning social relationships are included in Lev19, and the basis for such regulations rested in the maintenance of social solidarity and mutual religious responsibility.<sup>34</sup> In this respect, texts such as Lev 19:14 offered an alternate perspective on disability by protecting persons with disabilities against stigmatisation and discrimination.

When considering the relationship between poverty and disability, the focus should be on the negative perspectives on disability since it is commonly acknowledged that such perspectives provide the foundation for the stigmatisation of and discrimination against persons with disabilities.<sup>35</sup> Respectively, the degree to which persons with disabilities were included in or excluded from ancient Israel's mainstream society had a bearing on whether their actual lived experiences were characterised by poverty or not. Therefore, persons with disabilities were most likely to experience serious social suffering and

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<sup>30</sup> Louise A. Gosbell, *The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind and The Lame: Physical and Sensory Disability in the Gospels of the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018)

<sup>31</sup> Vengeyi, "The Interpretation of Biblical Texts on Disability," 135.

<sup>32</sup> Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible*, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Vengeyi, "The Interpretation of Biblical Texts on Disability," 160.

<sup>34</sup> Frank S. Frick, *A Journey through the Hebrew Scriptures* (Belmont: Thompson Wadsworth, 2003), 229.

<sup>35</sup> Nyamidzi and Mujaho, "Disability and the Beauty of Creation," 78.

systematic exclusion when negative and discriminatory perspectives on disability were predominant in ancient Israel. It is in this context that the possibility of persons with disabilities living in poverty is very high, especially considering that social exclusion through marginalisation leads to poverty and deprivation.<sup>36</sup> The relationship between social exclusion and poverty is such that poverty is seen as a consequence of social exclusion, and social exclusion is a vulnerability factor leading to poverty.<sup>37</sup> Based on this argument, the conclusion that negative perspectives on disability nurtured and perpetuated the exclusion of persons with disabilities in ancient Israel is sustainable and that this exclusion became the primary mechanism that connected disability and poverty.

Social exclusion confers disadvantages on certain groups and involves the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities available to the majority of people in society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas.<sup>38</sup> The negative and discriminatory perspectives on disability had the same effect on persons with disabilities in ancient Israel. For instance, Lev 21:16–24 and Lev 22:17–22 emphasise that physical anomalies were regarded as signs of cultic impurity and only the unblemished had access to the priests, temple and offerings while those with disabilities were excluded.<sup>39</sup> Such perspectives led to the systematic exclusion of persons with disabilities from the social dimensions of the cult. This had devastating and far-reaching consequences on their social and economic well-being. Another prime example is Deut 28:28, which strongly suggests that some disabilities were punishments and curses imposed on people for disobedience, among other life diminishments such as crop failure etcetera. The overall effect of this system of thought was that it conferred several disadvantages on persons with disabilities, thereby, making them vulnerable and susceptible to exclusion. Certainly, exclusion became a form of disempowerment in that it inhibited their integration into the mainstream structures of society. In this respect, Olyan concludes that the social marginalisation and stigmatisation experienced by persons with disabilities who were excluded and alienated from the sanctuary were far more severe.<sup>40</sup> It is this lack of participation in mainstream activities of society that disempowered persons with disabilities and made them susceptible to poverty in all its multifaceted dimensions.

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<sup>36</sup> Elina I. Tobias and Sourav Mukhopadhyay, "Disability and Social Exclusion: Experiences of Individuals with Visual Impairments in the Oshikoto and Oshala Regions of Namibia," *Psychology and Developing Societies* 29/1 (2017):25.

<sup>37</sup> Mallika Ramachadran, "Poverty, Social Exclusion and the Role of a Comprehensive Human Rights Framework," *ILI Law Review* (2016):30.

<sup>38</sup> Ramachadran, "Poverty, Social Exclusion,"26.

<sup>39</sup> David Rosalie, "Egyptian Medicine and Disabilities: From Pharaonic to Greco-Roman Egypt," in *Disability in Antiquity* (ed. Christian Laes; New York: Routledge Publishers, 2017), 85.

<sup>40</sup> Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible*, 32.

## **E AN AFRICAN UNDERSTANDING OF OT TEXTS ON DISABILITY—PERSPECTIVES FROM THE CHURCH IN ZIMBABWE**

The Church has played a major role in shaping attitudes towards and perspectives on disability across the globe. It has nurtured and perpetuated perspectives on disability in African societies through its literal interpretation of biblical texts on disability. Some churches in Zimbabwe and in other African countries have had a long history of practices that exclude persons with disabilities from their mainstream structures. Indeed, the exclusion of persons with disabilities in the Church is a common practice that continuously negates the purpose of a "Church of All and for All."<sup>41</sup> This practice is primarily rooted in the Church's reading and interpretation of biblical texts on disability. As Machingura argues, the discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities manifest primarily at the intersection of cultural traditions and biblical texts on disability.<sup>42</sup> The Church has contributed to the prevalence of negative perspectives on disability in African societies through its theological representations of disability. Apart from indigenous cultural traditions that foster discriminatory perspectives on disability, the Church's role in shaping such perspectives is too significant to ignore. This is not to say that indigenous cultural traditions have not contributed to the attitudes towards disability on the African continent but the argument is that the Church has also played a substantial role in shaping and moulding attitudes towards disability.

The exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream structures of the Church is evident in the African context. Sande notes that when it comes to integration into the mainstream activities of the Church, persons with disabilities continue to experience serious exclusion and stigmatisation.<sup>43</sup> For instance, very few Churches in Africa have Braille Bibles and other facilities like ramps for persons with disabilities to use.<sup>44</sup> It is also extremely difficult to find any mainline Church in which persons with disabilities are ordained as priests, as such persons are rarely considered in the larger scheme of things of the Church.<sup>45</sup> Such exclusionary tendencies emanate from the Church's interpretation of texts like Lev 21:16–24 and 22:17–22 that regard physical anomalies as signs of cultic impurity and thus prohibit persons with disabilities from being ordained as priests. Consequently, the prevalence of such discriminatory attitudes fosters the exclusion of persons with disabilities from some activities of the Church. It is on the basis of such interpretations that it is

<sup>41</sup> Celine Osukwu, "Disability, Performance, and Discrimination," *International Review of Mission* 108/1 (2019):61. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/10.1111/rom.12261>

<sup>42</sup> Machingura, "The 'Unholy Trinity' against disabled people," 212.

<sup>43</sup> Sande, "Pastoral Ministry," 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Osukwu, "Disability, Performance, and Discrimination," 62.

rare to see persons with disabilities ordained as priests, not only in mainline Churches like the Anglican and the Roman Catholic but also in most Pentecostal Churches in Zimbabwe. Thus, the exclusion of persons with disabilities can only be explained in the context of negative perceptions of disability in the Church. For instance, in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe, the association between disability and sin is rooted in the Church's interpretation of texts such as Deut 28:28, which depicts disability as a punishment from God. As such, biblical interpretation is undoubtedly at the centre of denigrating persons with disabilities in the Church and, consequently, in the broader society.<sup>46</sup> The fundamental implication is that most churches have, in some instances, provided the ideological foundation, which fosters the marginalisation of persons with disabilities.<sup>47</sup> The Church's interpretation of biblical texts on disability has thus nurtured and perpetuated discriminatory perspectives on disability in most African societies. As Machingura observes, biblical texts, like African traditions, beliefs and cultures, must never be taken for granted when it comes to how they shape attitudes, values and beliefs towards disabilities.<sup>48</sup>

Historically, the Church in Africa has tended to focus on texts such as Lev 21:16–23 and Deut 28:28 that portray negative and discriminatory perspectives of disability despite other texts that capture positive representations of disability. For instance, texts such as Lev 19:14 and Deut 27:18 call for non-discrimination in the context of disability.<sup>49</sup> The Church's interpretation of biblical texts that proffer negative representations of disability has resulted in the development of a theology that fosters the exclusion of persons with disabilities. This theology of exclusion has often influenced the Church's response to disability through the ministry of healing and charity.<sup>50</sup> Although such responses seem plausible, they are quite problematic on two levels. First, the theology of healing in the context of disability develops from a faulty interpretation of texts that associate disability with sin (Deut 28:28).<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, this system of thought has contributed substantially to the social marginalisation and rejection of persons with

<sup>46</sup> Sande, "Pastoral Ministry," 3.

<sup>47</sup> Machingura, "The 'Unholy Trinity' against disabled people," 212; Nancy L. Eiesland, "Sacramental Bodies," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 13/3–4 (2009): 240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228960902931830>.

<sup>48</sup> Machingura, "The 'Unholy Trinity' against disabled people," 220.

<sup>49</sup> Vengeyi, "The Interpretation of Biblical Texts on Disability: Then and Now," 151, 152, 160; Nyamidzi and Mujaho, "Disability and the Beauty of Creation," 78–90.

<sup>50</sup> Lovemore Togarasei, "Paul's 'Thorn in the Flesh' and Christian Mission to People with Disabilities," *International Review of Mission* 108/1 (2019): 147. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/10.1111/rom.12268>; Eiesland, "Sacramental Bodies," 240.

<sup>51</sup> Craig A. Satterlee, "The Eye Made Blind by Sin": The Language of Disability in Worship," *Liturgy* 25/2 (2009): 34. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/10.1080/04580630903476152>

Machingura, "The 'Unholy Trinity' against Disabled People," 214.

disabilities, as they are often accused of being sinners or lacking faith if their disabilities are not healed.<sup>52</sup>

Second, as Wolfenberger has indicated, persons with disabilities are often marginalised when society views them as objects of charity.<sup>53</sup> This fosters the development of the institution of begging in the context of disability. As such, several problems arise from the Church's healing and charity responses to disability because such approaches subtly and explicitly perpetuate discrimination against persons with disabilities within the main structures of the church and society. This challenge is presently bedevilling the Church in Africa in its engagement with disability, which has its roots in the Church's interpretation of biblical texts on disability. Machingura argues that it is unfortunate that the Bible is intermingled with texts that have been interpreted in oppressive ways and continue to reinforce the marginalisation, discrimination and systematic exclusion of persons with disabilities.<sup>54</sup> This situation demands that the Church in Africa revisits its approach to disability with the view of interpreting biblical texts on disability in a manner that nurtures and perpetuates non-discriminatory perspectives on disability in contemporary African societies.

## **F NEGATIVE PERSPECTIVES EMANATING FROM THE CHURCH'S INTERPRETATION OF OT TEXTS ON DISABILITY AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NEXUS BETWEEN POVERTY AND DISABILITY**

The living conditions of persons with disabilities in contemporary Africa, especially in Zimbabwe, are disheartening due to the prevalence of negative perspectives on disability which emanate primarily from the Church's literal interpretation of biblical texts on disability like Lev 21:16–23; 22:17–22 and Deut 28:28. The Church has indeed shaped societal attitudes towards disability through its literal interpretation of such texts. In this regard, Machingura argues that biblical texts must never be taken for granted regarding how they shape societal attitudes, values and beliefs towards disabilities.<sup>55</sup> The negative perspectives emanating primarily from the Church's interpretation have fostered the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream structures of the Church and the broader society. The exclusion of persons with disabilities has in turn nurtured and perpetuated a vicious connection between poverty and

<sup>52</sup> Gosbell, *The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind and the Lame*, 9. Togarasei, "Paul's 'Thorn in the Flesh,'" 138,142; Kabue, "Disability," 228.

<sup>53</sup> Wolf Wolfensberger, *A Brief Introduction to Social Role Valorization: A High-order Concept for Addressing the Plight of Societally Devalued People, and for Structuring Human Services* (New York; Syracuse University: Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership and Change Agency, 1998), 15–16.

<sup>54</sup> Machingura, "The 'Unholy Trinity' against Disabled People," 220.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

disability.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, the majority of persons with disabilities and their families are deeply entangled in a cycle of abject and perpetual poverty.

In developing countries such as Zimbabwe, persons with disabilities belong to the poorest segments of society and their level of economic and social deprivation is hardly experienced by other sectors of society.<sup>57</sup> Nyamidzi and Mujaho indicate that persons with disabilities in contemporary societies suffer not only on account of their disability but also because of the social and psychological exclusion that characterises their lives.<sup>58</sup> The exclusion is nurtured and perpetuated by the negative and discriminatory perspectives on disability, which emanate from the Church's interpretation of biblical texts on disability. Since, in any given context, social exclusion leads to poverty and deprivation,<sup>59</sup> poverty, therefore, becomes the major consequence of the exclusion of persons with disabilities from mainstream structures of society. It is in this respect that Muredzi and Ingstad have noted with great concern how persons with disabilities continue to experience severe social suffering due to the social condition of poverty in developing countries.<sup>60</sup>

Certainly, exclusion from the mainstream socio-economic and political life of society is a defining characteristic of both disability and poverty.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the history of disability has predominantly been one of social suffering, particularly for persons with disabilities. To put this into perspective, Jaeger and Bowman argue that persons with disabilities have faced a tremendous amount of socially imposed suffering in virtually every culture around the world and throughout human history.<sup>62</sup> This social suffering has been nurtured by negative perspectives on disability which have emerged precisely from the Church's literal interpretation of texts that proffer negative and discriminatory perspectives on disability. Persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe are certainly not an exception to the social suffering that is induced by negative perspectives on disability. They are exposed to extreme levels of poverty and hunger, and the situation has been exacerbated by the failing Zimbabwean economy.<sup>63</sup> It is estimated that there are about 1.4 million persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe

<sup>56</sup> Chataika, "Critical Connections and Gaps," 3.

<sup>57</sup> Muredzi and Ingstad, "Disability and Social Suffering in Zimbabwe," 172, 176.

<sup>58</sup> Nyamidzi and Mujaho, "Disability and the Beauty of Creation," 85.

<sup>59</sup> Tobias and Mukhopadhyay, "Disability and Social Exclusion," 25.

<sup>60</sup> Muredzi and Ingstad, "Disability and Social Suffering in Zimbabwe," 172, 176.

<sup>61</sup> Ajit K. Dalal, "Disability–Poverty Nexus: Psycho-social Impediments to Participatory Development," *Psychology and Developing Societies* 22/2 (ed. Rama Charan Tripathi, 2010):420. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/097133361002200208>

<sup>62</sup> Jaeger and Bowman, *Understanding Disability*, 23.

<sup>63</sup> Christine Peta, "Poverty, Disability Go Hand in Hand." *The Sunday Mail*, 2017. <https://www.sundaymail.co.zw/poverty-disability-go-hand-in-hand#:~:text=Research%20has%20indicated%20that%20about,go%20hand%2Din%2Dhand>

and despite such a significant number, this group continues to be an extremely marginalised constituency facing a myriad of challenges, especially exclusion from mainstream society. This is a significant constituency that should be recognised enough in mainstream development agendas. However, the reality in Zimbabwe points to the contrary. As a result, Biri et al. argue that disability is a common condition in Zimbabwe but despite its prevalence, persons with disabilities continue to suffer discrimination and are deemed inferior to their able-bodied counterparts.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, their material, cultural and social resources are so inadequate that they are precluded from attaining acceptable standards of living.<sup>65</sup>

The institution of begging definitely attests to the existence of abject poverty among persons with disabilities, who have become a common sight on the streets and in public transport facilities, where they spend most of their time seeking support from those sympathetic to their predicament. Evidently, such persons are deprived of the ability to meet their basic needs, and they resort to begging to get food and other necessities.<sup>66</sup> They have become objects of charity, yet charity can never and will never be the panacea to the woes that persons with disabilities experience in contemporary Zimbabwe.<sup>67</sup> The Church has certainly contributed to the development of the institution of begging especially considering that healing and charity have often characterised the Church's primary response to disability.<sup>68</sup> The Church's response is premised on negative and discriminatory perspectives on disability, which have resulted in the systematic exclusion of persons with disabilities from mainstream structures of social organisation. Thus, negative perspectives on disability emanating from the Church's interpretation have set in motion processes that keep recycling poverty among the families of persons with disabilities. The continued prevalence of negative perspectives on disability impedes efforts to break the nexus between poverty and disability. Therefore, it is critical to pay attention to the factors that perpetuate poverty in the generations of families of persons with disabilities.<sup>69</sup> Certainly, primary attention must be given to negative perspectives on disability, which are the primary mechanism by which the poverty experienced by persons

<sup>64</sup> Kudzai Biri et al., "Personhood and Disability in Zimbabwe: A Philosophical analysis," in *Disability in Africa, Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies* (ed. Samuel Kabue, James Amanze, Christine Landman; Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2016), 387.

<sup>65</sup> Tsitsi Choruma, *The Forgotten Tribe: People with Disabilities in Zimbabwe* (London: Progressio, 2007), 12.  
<https://www.progressio.org.uk/sites/default/files/Forgotten-tribe.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> Peta, "Poverty, Disability Go Hand in Hand."

<sup>67</sup> Mandipa Esau, "Addressing Disability Issues Needs More than Charity." *The Herald*, 2018. <https://www.herald.co.zw/addressing-disability-issues-needs-more-than-charity/>

<sup>68</sup> Togarasei, "Paul's 'Thorn in the Flesh,'" 147; Eiesland, "Sacramental Bodies," 240.

<sup>69</sup> Peta, "Poverty, Disability Go Hand in Hand."



with disabilities is produced and reproduced in contemporary African churches and communities.

## **G CHALLENGING AND CHANGING THE DISABILITY NARRATIVE IN AFRICA—LESSONS FROM THE OT FOR THE CHURCH IN CONTEMPORARY ZIMBABWE**

There is a need to find pragmatic and enduring solutions to the challenge of poverty among persons with disabilities in Africa in terms of their outlook and capacity to end the connection between poverty and disability. Given that the challenge of poverty among persons with disabilities in Africa and particularly in Zimbabwe, is nurtured and perpetuated by negative perspectives on disability, it, therefore, follows that solutions to this challenge must be anchored on positive perspectives on disability. In this respect, the Church is certainly an important stakeholder in any effort to cultivate a social ideology of inclusion which will facilitate the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the mainstream structures of society. The Church must challenge negative and discriminatory perspectives on disability in African societies by engaging with and drawing lessons from OT texts on disability that enunciate positive representations of disability. There has to be a paradigm shift in the manner in which the Church addresses issues relating to disability through its interpretation of biblical texts on disability. It is incumbent upon the Church to offer alternate perspectives on disability that protect persons with disability against discrimination and systematic exclusion from the mainstream structures of society.

Ndlovu argues that there is a need to rethink all religious attitudes, doctrines and practices emanating from Christianity that militate against the full participation of persons with disabilities in the mainstream activities of the society.<sup>70</sup> This is a call to the Church to reform, especially with regard to how it has been reading biblical texts on disability. Historically, the Church has tended to focus on texts such as Lev 21:16–23; 22:17–22 and Deut 28:28 that portray disability negatively and the literal interpretation of such texts has fostered the development of discriminatory perspectives on disability. For instance, Nyamidzi and Mujaho are convinced that in the context of the OT, the negative and commonly held perspective on disability expressed in such texts particularly provided the foundation for the stigmatisation of and discrimination against persons with disabilities.<sup>71</sup> Such negative social attitudes made persons with disabilities susceptible to social exclusion and alienation from mainstream society. The negative social attitudes breed a culture of stigmatisation and

<sup>70</sup> Hebron L. Ndlovu, "African Beliefs Concerning People with Disabilities: Implications for Theological Education," *Journal of Disability & Religion* 20/1–2 (2016):36. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/10.1080/23312521.2016.1152942>

<sup>71</sup> Nyamidzi and Mujaho, "Disability and the Beauty of Creation," 78.

discrimination against persons with disabilities in contemporary societies.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, negative attitudes towards disability have the same exclusionary effect, which results in the manifestation of poverty in the lives of persons with disabilities. Therefore, this disheartening social reality calls for the Church to engage positive perspectives on disability to counter the negative and discriminatory perspectives prevailing in contemporary African societies.

Negative perspectives on disability are detrimental to the social and economic well-being of persons with disabilities in Africa. This was also the situation in the ancient OT context. As Machingura shows, disabilities were broadly judged as impurities that disqualified persons with disabilities from actively participating in society and such discriminatory attitudes resulted in a very skewed world for persons with disabilities, firstly, as physically or mentally disabled and secondly, as economically disabled.<sup>73</sup> Conversely, the positive and non-discriminatory perspectives on disability in Deut 27:18 and Lev 19:14 emerged to counter the discriminatory perspectives on disability and their accompanying destructive consequences. Deuteronomy 27:18 pronounces curses on those who take advantage of persons with disabilities, particularly persons with visual disabilities. Similarly, Lev 19:14 forbids people from cursing the deaf and putting a stumbling block in front of the blind. Olyan, Vengeyi and Frick indicate that the positive perspectives expressed in such texts were designed to respond to prevailing discriminatory social attitudes that fostered the stigmatisation and marginalisation of persons with disabilities in ancient society.<sup>74</sup> Such positive perspectives fostered the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the mainstream structures of society. Thus, the positive perspectives expressed in such texts can be employed to protect persons with disabilities against stigmatisation and marginalisation in contemporary societies. Accordingly, the Church in Zimbabwe must engage the positive perspectives on disability in Deut 27:18 and Lev 19:14 to counter the negative and discriminatory perspectives on disability prevailing in African societies.

It is incumbent upon the Church to cultivate positive perspectives on disability by focusing on Deut 27:18 and Lev 19:14, which principally promote the interests of persons with disabilities. The Church must engage the liberation hermeneutics that harnesses the positive perspectives in such texts to counter the negative perspectives on disability that are associated historically with its literal interpretation of texts like Lev 21:16–23; 22:21–22 and Deut 28:28. The Church

<sup>72</sup> Vengeyi, "The Interpretation of Biblical Texts on Disability," 137.

<sup>73</sup> Francis Machingura, "Disability and the Bible: The New Testament Narratives on Disability," in *Disability in Africa, Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies* (ed. Samuel Kabue, James Amanze and Christine Landman; Kenya: Acton Publishers, 2016), 66.

<sup>74</sup> Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible*, 1.

Vengeyi, "The Interpretation of Biblical Texts on Disability," 160; Frick, *Journey through the Hebrew Scriptures*, 229.

must interpret Deut 27:18 and Lev 19:14 with the primary goal of liberating persons with disabilities from systematic and institutionalised marginalisation. Certainly, such positive texts are a useful resource that will enable the Church to develop an alternate social ideology of inclusion, which counters the negative and exclusionary perspectives that lead to stigmatisation and discrimination in relation to persons with disabilities. This social ideology must be anchored on a sound theology of liberation which advances the interests of persons with disabilities. As Machingura argues, the theological engagement of the Bible must help challenge our theological understandings and misunderstandings that promote the exclusion of persons with disabilities.<sup>75</sup> As such, the Church must develop a theology of liberation, which endeavours to free persons with disabilities from all oppressive structures and systems that contribute to their material deprivation and discrimination.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the thinking of belonging must be at the centre of the Church's theology of disability to ensure that persons with disabilities are accepted for who they are without having to conform to faulty relational social and legal norms that are defined by society.<sup>77</sup>

Given that the relationship between poverty and disability is fostered by negative perspectives on disability, it is imperative for the Church in the African context to restructure and remodel its approach to disability. Ndlovu argues that the Church has to endorse all positive perspectives on disability in the Bible that can be appropriated in the creation of a more just and inclusive society,<sup>78</sup> which is an important step towards breaking the connection between disability, vulnerability and poverty in Africa. The Church's mission towards persons with disabilities must be transformed to enforce the empowerment and integration of persons with disabilities into society and should not necessarily be limited to healing and charity.<sup>79</sup> The process to transform and reorient the mission of the Church must be rooted in a liberative reading of biblical texts on disability which will enable the Church to champion the cause of persons with disabilities in the broader society. As Togarasei argues, the mission of the Church in the context of disability must go as far as advocating for the welfare of persons with disabilities in society and ensuring that they are fully included and participate in the mainstream activities of society.<sup>80</sup>

However, the mission of the Church must not end with advocating for the inclusion of persons with disabilities but also extend to fostering practices of

<sup>75</sup> Machingura, "The 'Unholy Trinity' against disabled people," 220.

<sup>76</sup> Ndlovu, "African Beliefs Concerning People with Disabilities," 37.

<sup>77</sup> John Swinton, "From Inclusion to Belonging: A Practical Theology of Community, Disability and Humanness," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 16/2 (2012):184. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/10.1080/15228967.2012.676243>

<sup>78</sup> Ndlovu, "African Beliefs Concerning People with Disabilities," 36, 37.

<sup>79</sup> Togarasei, "Paul's 'Thorn in the Flesh,'" 136, 138; Satterlee, "The Eye Made Blind by Sin," 37.

<sup>80</sup> Togarasei, "Paul's 'Thorn in the Flesh,'" 138, 147.

belonging. For Swinton, the idea of including persons with disabilities does not go far enough in overcoming the alienation, stigmatisation and exclusion of such persons; thus, the Church should move from ideas of inclusion to the practice of belonging.<sup>81</sup> Certainly, the Church must engage with the positive perspectives in Deut 27:18 and Lev 19:14 in order to move from ideas of inclusion to the practices of belonging, in its response to disability.

## H CONCLUSION

In most developing African countries, including Zimbabwe, persons with disabilities are subjected to severe social suffering due to negative and discriminatory attitudes emanating primarily from the institution of the Church. This social suffering is largely felt in relation to the condition of poverty, which results from negative perspectives on disability that foster the discrimination and systematic exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream structures of society. The development has given birth to the vicious nexus between poverty and disability in Africa. This vicious connection can be dismantled by positive perspectives on disability which have the capacity to cultivate a social ideology of inclusion that will facilitate the inclusion and integration of persons with disabilities into the mainstream social and economic structures. Undoubtedly, inclusion and integration will inevitably curb the occurrence of poverty among persons with disabilities. It is in this context that the positive perspectives on disability in texts such as Deut 27:18 and Lev 19:14 can indeed serve as resources to curb the systematic and institutionalised marginalisation of persons with disabilities in contemporary African societies. The Church must harness the positive perspectives expressed in such texts in fighting the systematic exclusion of persons with disabilities. Inevitably, such an initiative will contribute to breaking the causal intersection between poverty and disability in African societies, which is a product of the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the mainstream social, political, religious and, more importantly, economic structures.

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<sup>81</sup> Swinton, "From Inclusion to Belonging," 172.

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