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## **Chapter 6 Special Olympians as a ‘Prophetic Sign’ to the Modern Sporting Babel**

Nick J. Watson

### **Introduction**

This is after all a time that cries out for the Special Olympics. The world is hungry for what we have. Look around. Everywhere you look, people are hungry for authenticity. Everywhere you look there is a crisis in trust. Everyone is asking: where are the role models of optimism and peace. How can I make a difference and feel a part of something bigger? ... the lesson is clear: we’re sports rebels [prophets?] and we need to be sports rebels with spirit and fight forever!

Timothy Shriver, CEO, *Special Olympics* (2010a: 4-6)

American commercial sports ... represent a prominent and aggressive principality—and one might suppose—a more or less innocuous one. Yet the operation of this demonic power has significant *political* importance ... markedly similar to that of circuses and athletic spectacles in Imperial Rome.

William Stringfellow (2004/1973: 90)

Amidst the generic growth of publications on the relationships between sport and all major world religions, there has been a particular groundswell of academic publications on sport and the Christian faith (see Watson and Parker, 2012a). However, a comprehensive review of the literature in the disciplines of ‘theology of disability’ and ‘disability sport’ indicates that there is virtually no empirical research or scholarship on the Christian theology of

disability sport. Exceptions here include, recent essays and empirical work (Watson, 2012; Watson and Parker, 2012b), a short chapter on the uses of leisure and sport in a *L'Arche* community (O'Keefe, 2006), reflections on the *Special Olympics* (SO) in Yong's (2007: 114-115) book on the theology of Down Syndrome, a handful of papal addresses (John Paul II, 2000, 1985), a conference presentation (Watts, 2007) and empirical research and essays on women's disability sport from an Islamic perspective (Gaad, 2011, 2006).

The overarching aim of this chapter is to begin a discussion on this topic by synthesising ideas and literature from both these areas. While no academic literature exists that has addressed the Christian theological dimensions of disability sport, there are some helpful popular books (Hoyt and Yaeger, 2010; Strike, 2010; St John, 2009; Papievis, 2008; Molsberry, 2004; Nall, 2002; Driscoll, 2001; Stallings and Cook, 1997)<sup>i</sup> and media sources (e.g., Ironman, 2006) that tell inspirational stories of those with a Christian faith who are involved in disability sport. There is also a significant body of empirical research and scholarship on disability sport that should not be neglected when undertaking theological reflection, in order to contextualize analysis (e.g., Smith and Sparkes, 2012; Le Clair, 2012; Winnick, 2011; Brittain, 2010; Fitzgerald, 2009; Jespersen and McNamee, 2009; Horne and Howe, 2009; Thomas and Smith, 2009; Bailey, 2008; Howe, 2009a, 2008a). Issues of embodiment, social exclusion, governance, media and cinematic representations of disability sports and competitive classification of athletes are some of the topics that have been examined.

The on-going debate concerning the classification and inclusion (Howe and Jones, 2006), or not, of athletes with intellectual disabilities (ID), in the 2012 London Paralympics, is also a

controversial topic, not least due to violation of eligibility rights by the Spanish disability (ID) male basketball team at the 2000 Sydney Paralympics (Jobling, Jobling and Fitzgerald, 2008), where it was found that 10 out of 12 players did not have an ID. Generally speaking, it can be argued that the level of media coverage, funding and empirical research on athletes with ID and the events in which they participate and compete, the SO being the most well-known, is far less than for athletes with physical disabilities (PD). There are deeply embedded socio-cultural, historical and theological reasons for this situation that I will explore in more detail. Due to the growing profile of the SO and the recent re-inclusion of athletes with ID in the 2012 London Paralympics and beyond,<sup>ii</sup> there is a growing literature in the sports and leisure disciplines but again, nothing that addresses the religious or spiritual dimension of athletes with ID and the SO.

In addition to literature that provides a summary of the history<sup>iii</sup>, governance, nature and issues surrounding the SO movement (Lenox, 2012), including the SO relation to the Olympics and Paralympics (Brittain, 2010)<sup>iv</sup>, there is an excellent range of systematic empirical research studies (2004-) and information on programme monitoring and evaluation (see Siperstein, Kersh and Bardon, 2007) published mainly by staff from the *Special Olympics Global Collaborating Centre* (University of Massachusetts, Boston) that are available on the official SO website<sup>v</sup>. In addition, there is recent peer-review research on ID in sport, which has examined physical activity levels and behaviours of youths (Smith and Sparkes, 2012; Frey, Stanish and Temple, 2008), leisure patterns (Patterson and Pegg, 2009), the motivations of Special Olympians (Farrell et al., 2004) and a national survey exploring the general sporting experience of athletes with ID and their families (Harada and Siperstein, 2009). It is interesting to note at the outset that those studies that explore the motives for participation and long-term adherence, show that although external rewards are of some

importance (e.g., medals, winning and the perception of others), the intrinsic motives of fun, friendship and relationships are by far the most important reasons.

This, however, does not mean that Special Olympians are not motivated to excel, win and achieve, as historically there has been a gradual shift toward a more achievement orientated model in the SO movement (Songster et al., 1997; Bale, 1994). This is not dissimilar to the ethos of the Paralympics, that is, ‘building on and celebrating ability, which Howe (2008: i) suggests, has been the ‘... politicised raison d’être for [elite] disability sport for more than twenty years ...’, since the evolution of physical disability sport from rehabilitative and participatory models pre-1960s. Thus, it is crucial to note, that irrespective of the presence or absence of a disability, a major principle of the SO (and Paralympics) has always been that, ‘athletes are athletes’ (Harada and Siperstein, 2009). Notwithstanding, some of the commonalities in the motivations and experiences of individual able-bodied and disabled athletes, there are, however, marked differences in the institutional structures and the economic basis of the modern commercialised sport model and the SO<sup>vi</sup>. It is, nonetheless, important to acknowledge that the SO movement has not been devoid of criticism in regard to financial issues, claims of segregation, paternalism, the promotion of national corporations and negative disability images that reinforce stereotypes (Storey, 2004; Wolfensberger, 1995; Hourcade, 1989; Brickley, 1984).<sup>vii</sup> This does not, however, mean that a legitimate comparison of these institutions cannot be made to highlight the prophetic potential of the SO movement and athletes with intellectual disabilities, a central aim of this essay.

While adding a theological caveat, this follows the work of Howe (2008: 108), a former paralympic athlete, anthropologist and disability scholar, who suggests that ‘paralympians can challenge the prejudices that restrain the impaired in sport and the society it mirrors’. I

will seek to illustrate how the dominant motivations of athletes in the SO and the movement itself, as described above, are often diametrically opposed to able-bodied professional sport, in which external motivations, such as financial gain, celebrity status and winning-at-all-costs often hold sway. It is hoped that this brief overview of key research and interest areas from the discipline of disability sport is helpful in providing some initial resources to enable reflection upon the multi-faceted nature of disability sport.

To ensure a clear start point to my discussion, it is pertinent to clarify a number of key terms, issues and concepts, which underpin the remainder of the chapter. I will adopt ‘person first’ terminology when describing someone with a PD or ID, as is generally the norm in the UK, Australian and North American contexts. The scope of my deliberations in terms of what ‘sport’ means will focus mainly, yet not exclusively, on competitive sport. Clifford and Feezel’s (1997:11), definition of sport is useful: ‘... a form of play [or should be], a competitive, rule-governed activity that human beings freely choose to engage in’. Indeed, participation in sport might ideally include a strong emphasis on fun and play (e.g., Thoennes, 2008; Moltmann, 1972; Huizinga, 1950) and, in turn, an accurate understanding and application of the etymology of the word ‘competition’, which renders a sport contest as a ‘mutually acceptable quest for excellence’ (Weir, 2008; Hyland, 1988), in which excitement, courage, physical and mental endurance, dedication, aesthetic beauty, and emotional intensity are all possible. This ‘intense passion’, however, also presents the risk that ‘such intensity will devolve into alienation ... violence’ (Hyland, 1988: 177) and mental and physical harm, for example, through cheating, drug abuse, greed and trash-talk on an individual, team or national level. These commonly recognised elements of corruption will form a major part of my critique of the nature of modern professional sport and how persons

with disability, in particular those with ID, arguably can be viewed as one prophetic sign<sup>viii</sup> of God's kingdom in the current age.

Hence, what follows is highly critical of the values and institutions of modern-day professional and commercialised sport (Hoffman, 2010; Watson and White, 2007; Higgs and Braswell, 2004) and therefore I would like to emphasise from the outset that I am in no way decrying the quest for human excellence and success, determined performances and displays of aesthetic beauty in able-bodied or disabled sport. I have been a life-long sports participant, spectator and more recently, sports coach and university lecturer. This raises the 'insider-versus-outsider' question that sports disability scholars (e.g., Macbeth, 2010) and theologians note has been controversial for some time: 'What qualifies one as an expert?' (Creamer, 2009: 21). Is some degree of personal involvement with disability a prerequisite if one wishes to authentically write about this topic? For the record, I am involved in coaching disability sport and have experienced life in a *L'Arche* community (Liverpool, UK) to familiarise myself with the research context (Watson and Parker, 2012b) and those about whom I would be writing. Hopefully, my experiences in the disability community will provide some degree of authenticity and insight beyond my academic analysis.

There are two principal aims to my exploratory discussion. First, to provide a foundation for theological analysis of ID sport, I briefly outline some of the key themes that emerge from the literature on the 'theology of disability' and will identify key readings for those wishing to further explore these topics and apply them to the sports world. Second, I attempt to establish the beginnings of a 'theology of disability sport' by contextualising my discussion within the socio-cultural and historical context of modern sport. This is followed by an examination of how persons with disabilities, especially ID, are one prophetic sign to the

multi-billion dollar business of sport, which it has been argued is a major edifice in the modern ‘Tower of Babel’<sup>ix</sup>, alongside other cultural idols such as scientism, healthism, intellectualism, unhealthy perfectionism, commercialism and materialism (Watson and White, 2007). Finally, in an extended conclusion, I identify areas within disability sport that may benefit from further theological reflection and highlight current church and para-church initiatives that seek to raise awareness and affect change in this area. It is my hope that this will encourage scholars and empirical researchers from sports studies and theology alike to take this discussion forward.

### **Theologies of Disability**

This is how the *Christian community prepares for the Lord’s second coming*: by focusing on those persons whom Jesus himself favoured, those who are often excluded and ignored by society ... By your situation you call into question those conceptions of life that are solely concerned with satisfaction, appearances ... success or well-being ... speed and efficiency ... “Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake”, for great will be their reward in heaven! This is the paradox of Christian hope: *what seems humanly a ruin, is in the divine plan always a plan of salvation* ... its profound reason in the mystery of the cross (Phil. 2: 6-8) ... bearing witness in the world to human dignity, whose source is not the outward condition of the body but the primordial likeness to the Creator. God bless you!

Pope John Paul II (2000)<sup>x</sup>



Following the publication of Nancy Eiesland's now classic book, *The Disabled God* (1994), there has been a growing literature on the theology of PD and ID (e.g., Brock and Swinton, 2012; Yong, 2011, 2007; Reinders, 2010, 2008; Reynolds, 2008; Swinton and Hauerwas, 2005; McCloughry and Morris, 2002; Hauerwas, 1986). This body of empirical research and scholarship has evolved from all the major Christian denominations and numerous disciplines outside of traditional theologies, such as sociology, ethics, education and psychology (Swinton, 2011). There was, of course, theological reflection on disability, more so from the Catholic church (Watts, 2009), prior to the mid-1990s borne out of the disability rights and other civil rights movements of the 1970s but one could argue that this was, and still is, viewed as a 'specialist interest' area. Hauerwas and Vanier (2009: 18), however, argue that the biblical themes of weakness, vulnerability, mutuality, hospitality, humility and love are at '...the heart of the gospel', and thus all good theological reflection. Of course, all these gospel values flow from the cross of Christ and as Moltmann (1974: 7) notes by drawing on Martin Luther's 'theology of the cross', 'the inner criterion of whether or not a theology is *Christian* lies in the crucified Christ...the Cross is the test of everything' but 'to many it sounds unattractive and unmodern'.

Perhaps what follows will sound unattractive to those wedded to the win-at-all-costs mentality of modern-day commercialised sport, in which the character traits of humility, weakness and vulnerability (all experienced in the cross) in an athlete's make-up are most often viewed as an 'anathema', suggests consultant sport psychiatrist, Begel (2000). This does not mean that we should not actively seek and experience excellence and joy in sports, the focus of a book by the theologian, Null (2004). But as Martin Luther emphasised, there are two ways of thinking about God in Christ (McGrath, 1985). These two ways encompasses the whole breadth of human experience and salvation, including sport: a *theologia gloriae*

(theology of glory, the 'risen Christ') that points to the joy of sport and a *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross, the 'crucified Christ') that emphasizes suffering, humility, dependence and vulnerability in sport.

The reasons for the relative lack of theological reflection on disability are many but as Reynolds (2008: 68) states, a major determinant is that theology has been '... taken captive by the cult of normalcy', that is, it has often adopted a starting point rooted in enlightenment philosophies and ideas, especially utilitarianism, rationalism, free-market capitalism, abelism and intellectualism. In thinking about and interacting with those people in society who have disabilities, it may well be that we are also confronted with our own fragilities and weaknesses (bodily and mental) and therefore, disability can 'disturb us' (Yong, 2007). The pervasive influence of Kantian rationality and Platonic-Cartesian dualism in theology (Wilson, 1989) and sport (Twietmeyer, 2008; Watson, 2007) has also been a factor in de-emphasising and devaluing the role of the body, and able-bodied and disabled sport as a whole, in western culture. Theological reflection on the '... full diversity of experiences of human embodiment' has in turn been sorely lacking in theology (Creamer, 2009: 117), until the recent 'body craze' in the discipline, as is the case in the sports studies field since the 1990s due to the central importance of the appearance (i.e., athletic beauty and muscularity) and physical condition of the body in modern sport and exercise contexts (Wellard, 2009; Howe, 2008b; Messner and Sabo, 1990).

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a more in-depth analysis of theologies of disability and/or issues of embodiment and I will leave this to others. In short, some of the most well-researched topics include: analyses of biblical passages on disability and their

relationship to gospel narratives of healing; examination of theological anthropology—*imago Dei*, and its importance for accurately assessing the worth/identity, value and dignity of all human beings, regardless of disability or difference; spiritual and psychological struggle with disablement and transition to disablement; exploration of fundamental gospel values, such as hospitality, friendship, humility, mutuality, vulnerability and weakness that are often experienced in disability contexts and communities, such as *L'Arche*; how persons with disabilities (particularly, persons with ID), can be seen as prophets to the modern age, and finally; the socio-cultural, political and ecclesiological structures that marginalise and oppress people with disabilities.

To varying degrees publications on the theology of disability critique the socio-cultural structures and institutions that marginalise, alienate, oppress and devalue the disabled, principally because, ‘... we are creatures that fear difference’ (Hauerwas, 2004: 40). To be sure, disability sport scholars following the foundational work of the Marxist sociologist, Oliver (2009 / 1996, 1990), mainly advocating the social constructivist model of disability, have analysed how access, provision of facilities in schools and communities, funding, media and cinematic representations and the overall status and perceived importance of disability sports, is hugely different to able-bodied sport, for example, the Olympic Games (Thomas and Smith, 2009; Howe, 2008a). A particularly thorough and nuanced analysis of negative and ungodly socio-cultural structures, presented by Reynolds (2008: 56-70), who by drawing insights from sociology (Goffman), philosophy (Foucault), psychology and theology, discusses the ‘Economics of Exchange’ that fuel the ‘Cult of Normalcy’ and ultimately configure the lens through which moderns view the disabled. It is worth quoting him at length to set the scene for my analysis of modern sporting subculture:

Consciousness of worth is something that transpires according to what I call an ‘*economy of exchange*’, a system of reciprocity that regulates interactions in a community ... The attribution of worth never occurs in isolated form as an individual’s thought process, but rather within a complex set of social arrangements and reciprocal relationships that distribute, and appraise values ... Bodily practices form the supportive scaffolding ... this point is not trivial. Our bodies always negotiate social space by participating in an exchange of goods, whether going to school, playing on a sports team, working ... Each social context – school, sports, employment, family, and friendship – involves its own performance expectations and criteria of value measurement ... Physical appearance is probably the most obvious marker ... A social identity is written on the body ... Economics of exchange, therefore, revolve around identification markers that display what I call *body capital* ... All kinds of cultural productions are involved, such as beauty, athleticism and intelligence ... The body is an icon representing the effects of power ... cast in the form of the dominant culture’s sense of the good.

The dominant culture of our age borne from the enlightenment modernist principles of individuality, self-sufficiency and determination, materialism, rationalism, free-market capitalism and power, then encourage a ‘cult of normalcy’ that ‘... tells people with disabilities who they are, forcing them by various societal rituals to bear a name that is depersonalizing’, and this leads to ‘alienation, both socially and personally’ (Reynolds, 2008: 62). This dangerous ‘Tyranny of Normality’, as Hauerwas (2004) has called it, so grips our culture that we are often in denial to its existence, preferring to suppress our own fears and insecurities and thus maintain the status quo. This unconscious denial is what Kierkegaard

(1989/1849:74) called a ‘spiritless sense of security’, a ‘fictitious health’ that maintains itself through the legion of principalities and powers<sup>xi</sup>, that is, evil spiritual forces (Luke 8:29-33; Gal. 4:3; Eph. 1:21; 6:12; Col 1:15-16; 2:15)<sup>xii</sup> that govern (are behind) many of the ungodly and idolatrous institutions of our society, including sport and the Olympic Games (see Brueggemann, 2010; Stringfellow, 2004/1973; Stott, 1980; Ellul, 1977; Schlier, 1962).<sup>xiii</sup> This empirical reality will be explored in the following section as I examine the character of the modern sporting institution and then discuss the role of the disabled, within it, and prophetically against it.

### **Setting the Scene: The Modern Sporting Institution**

If Christ came to the Olympics, He would be impressed with the quasi-religious aspects of the Olympic rituals and sterling athletic performances on the field, but He would also be uneasy with some less positive features of the Games. He might well be inspired to bring out His whip against the modern scene, for he would most certainly recognise some idolatrous tendencies embedded in today’s Olympism.

William Baker (2000: 44)

Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not.

The Prophet Jeremiah (45: 5)

Recent scholarly debate surrounding the relationship between Christianity and modern-day sport has often included a critique, of the ungodly values of the ‘win-at-all-costs ethic’ of global commercialised sport that is driven by unbridled free-market capitalism (e.g., Hamilton, 2011; Overman, 2011; Hoffman, 2010; Higgs and Braswell, 2004; Stevenson,

1997; Watson and White, 2007). It is interesting, however, that Savage's (2004)<sup>xiv</sup> analysis of Paul's paradoxical ministry of 'power through weakness' (the self-emptying gospel of Christ), described in 2 Corinthians, and the self-exalting cultural setting of first-century Corinth, is I would argue, a mirror image of the decadent western culture of today:

It was a time when everyone yearned for an admiring public ... The pursuit of upward mobility thus turned into a quest for applause and esteem ... and self-glorification ... The first century AD was intensely competitive ... It was an era of ... great accomplishment, but also anxiety and uncertainty ... The practice of setting athletes on pedestals sheds penetrating light on what people in the first century valued most ... The games [Isthmian] thus reflected in microcosm, and more intensely, the competitive spirit of the first century ... The actor, runner or rhetorician won adulation in the same way as the merchant banker or tanner – by excelling his rivals ... Indeed the drive to show oneself better than one's neighbour was perhaps more pronounced in Corinth than anywhere else ... Competition for honour had two important side-effects. First, it encouraged outward expressions of pride and arrogance. For many boasting itself became an activity worthy of honour. Humility on the other hand was scorned. The lowly had no self-respect, no public standing ... individuals grew indifferent to the needs of others.

An accurate description of twenty-first century sport? As with any human activity or institution such as sport, the underlying belief system '...may be used for other purposes, with the danger of corruption and decadence', suggests the late Pope John Paul II (1980: 64), a champion of sport when played in the right spirit. I would agree and contend that the multi-

billion dollar institute of sport that is often (certainly not always) characterized by prideful attitudes and behaviors--self-promotion, financial greed and corruption, drug doping, cheating, violence, trash-talk and looming on the horizon, genetic performance enhancement technologies for athletes (Trothen, 2011)--is so encultured that pride of heart ‘... is now synonymous with virtue’ (Higgs and Braswell, 2004: 372), as is the case in other institutions, such as media, government and religion. We would do well to heed the warning of the medieval monk, Thomas Á Kempis (1380-1471), who warns that we must ‘... carefully observe the impulses of nature and grace, for these are opposed one to another, and work in so subtle manner that even a spiritual, holy and enlightened man can hardly distinguish them ... many are deceived by ... appearance of virtue’ (1952: 53).

Indeed, to ‘get on’ in our society and professional sports it seems that one must practice unbridled self-promotion, which is diametrically opposed to the consistent biblical teaching of humbling oneself, as Muhammad Ali (1963) clearly understood in stating that: ‘at home I am nice guy: but I don’t want the world to know. Humble people, I’ve found, don’t get very far’.<sup>xv</sup> ‘Pride is *essentially* competitive above all other vices’, C.S. Lewis (1997/1952: 101) suggested<sup>xvi</sup>. Therefore, any human activity such as sport that involves competition presents the temptation to become proud. Kohn (1992: 2-3), in his book-length treatment of competition in the west, notes that this striving to be ‘better than’ has reached ‘exaggerated, often ludicrous proportions’. In the sports domain, the legendary American football coach, Vince Lombardi, supports this in stating that ‘the zeal to be first in everything has always been American, to win and win and to win’ (cited in Overman, 1997: 226). Importantly, C.S. Lewis points out that not all forms of pride are evil and unhealthy. For example, having pride in a good performance, as long as it does not slip into vanity and the pleasure of being praised by parents, coaches, fans, what Lewis calls a ‘warm-hearted admiration for’. Similarly, in his

analysis of spiritual pride, the psychiatrist, Karl Menninger (1973: 136), notes that ‘... self-respect, self-approval and self-confidence are favourable aspects of a normal self-concern’ and I would add are vital for a healthy pursuit of excellence and success in able-bodied or disabled sport.

Nevertheless, it has been strongly argued that pride and its empirical outworking are endemic in modern sports and that ‘... sport is a major edifice in’ the ‘modern tower of Babel’ (Watson and White, 2007: 76). If pride is endemic and ‘those embedded in the ... world of sport, which is constructed from socio-cultural norms and reinforced and manipulated by the mass media’ (78); why on the whole are people blind to this disturbing reality? Spiritual blindness of heart, stemming from idolatry of the institution of sport and the moral decadence it manifests, the bible instructs is the principal reason (Matthew 13:14-15; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Isaiah 6: 9-10).

Adopting the metaphor of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9; Revelation 18) and the moral death<sup>xvii</sup> that characterises it, William Stringfellow (2004/1973)<sup>xviii</sup> states that ‘the principality, insinuating itself in the place of God, deceives humans into thinking as if the moral worth or justification of human beings is defined and determined by commitment ... to the survival interest, grandeur and vanity of the principality’. For many it seems, the idol of sport operates as a surrogate religion (Ward, 2011; Evans, 2002) in that it provides significance, self-worth and therefore is a major source of their identity (Watson, 2011; Harris and Parker, 2009). From a Christian standpoint, it could therefore be argued that sport has become an idol in the hearts of millions of people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this regard, soccer is undoubtedly the chief deity of the English whilst in America and the ‘holy trinity’ of baseball, basketball and football are



shot through with religious zeal and commitment (Forney, 2010). The biographer of basketballing demi-god<sup>xix</sup>, Michael Jordan, Halberstam (2001), perhaps unknowingly conveys this when he describes him as, ‘Jesus in Nikes’, the saviour of the sports world.

The founder and chairperson of *Nike*, the company that essentially made Jordan a demi-god, acknowledges that sports ‘define the culture of the world’ (cited in Smart, 2005:1) and it could be argued they are the most popular global cultural pastime, surpassing the previously dominant cultural expressions, such as music and the arts. The magazine, *Sports Illustrated*, sells 13.2 million copies a month, Americans in 2005 spent \$89 billion on the purchase of sports goods and more than 7.6 billion admission tickets were sold at sport spectator events (Hoffman, 2010: 2-3). The voluminous amount of space given to sports in newspapers, on the web and on our television screens is further evidence of the importance of sports in our culture. Not that I in any way denigrate sport itself but I would strongly support Stringfellow’s (2004/1973: 77) contention that principalities and powers drive this fallen idolatrous institution and that ‘... an ethics which ignores or omits the principalities ... is, biblically speaking, so deficient as to be either no ethics categorically or to be, as has been suggested, an anti-ethics’. Stringfellow (2004/1973: 76-78) describes our current situation:

The fall concerns the alienation of the whole of Creation from God...

Human beings are fallen indeed! But all other creatures suffer

fallenness too ... corporations ... the nations, the institutions, the

principalities and powers ... the principalities become recognizable and all too

familiar: they include institutions...ideologies ... corporations ... bureaucracies ...

... the Olympics ... sports ... the puritan work ethic ... humanism ... capitalism ...

the principalities are legion.

The fact that the founder of the Modern Olympic Games (1896-), Baron de Coubertin, writes in his *Olympic Memoirs*, ‘the first essential characteristic of ancient and of modern Olympism alike is that of being a religion ...’, is then pertinent (cited in Parry, 2007: 206). This notion of the *religio athletae*, has led Null (2008: 325) to affirm that ‘... Coubertin’s vision of sport is completely antithetical to Christian doctrine’. De Coubertin’s Olympic vision was built on a mix of the amateur ideals of 19<sup>th</sup> century sport—*esprit de corps*—the 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian movement of Muscular Christianity, the philosophy of the Ancient Greek Olympics, a desire to reconcile warring nations and promote world peace and to restore French pride and masculinity in the nation’s youth after defeat in the Franco-Prussian war (Young, 2005; Guttmann, 2002). This said, he was staunchly against today’s commercialised professional sport model that permeates the modern Olympic games and which Baker (2000: 48) contends, perhaps too harshly, was ‘from the outset ... conceived in the womb of rabid nationalism’.<sup>xx</sup> Specific examples of modern Olympia and football World cups that have been marred by nationalistic fervour (e.g., 1936 Berlin, the so-called Nazi Olympics), political and financial corruption, human rights abuses (e.g., Beijing, 2008), exploitation and terrorism (e.g., 1972, Munich Olympics) are described in Tomlinson and Young’s (2006) and Lenskyj’s (2008) research.

The ‘coming out’ of China as an emerging global superpower, in-part through the vehicle of the Beijing 2008 Olympiad (Close, Askew and Xin, 2007) and their so-called ‘celebration of the Paralympics’ (and thus persons with disabilities), is perhaps the most pertinent example here. In light of communist China’s bleak history of human rights abuses that includes the systematic abuse of child athletes (Hong, 2006), many scholars (Oliver, 2009/1996; Lenskyj,

2008), activists (Human Rights Watch, 2008) and sports administrators, were incredulous that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) were ever awarded China the Olympics. Indeed, Kidd (2010) has subsequently suggested that the IOC should require host nations to meet a standard human rights criterion to reduce the risk of the Olympic Movement (and its governing body: IOC) losing its oft-stated, but questionable, 'moral authority', as a force for global peace (Kidd, 2010). The continued discrimination of the disabled despite new legislation and some positive changes from the Chinese government in the run-up to the 2008 Olympics (Human Rights Watch, 2008), the practice of sex-selective abortion (Junhong, 2001) and genetic testing to detect foetal disabilities, usually with the goal of abortion ('the new eugenics') or rejecting children who are then commonly sent to orphanages (Ingstad and Whyte, 2007; Saxton, 2006), and harassment of athletes with intellectual disabilities<sup>xxi</sup>, is all suggestive that the celebration of the Paralympics is somewhat of smokescreen. This provides substantive evidence of Chinese nationalism, a lack of respect for individual human dignity, unhealthy pride and idolatry, founded in an atheistic communist ideology (Hong, 2006). Of course, it is important to recognise that some of these ungodly values, such as pride, idolatry and nationalism, also characterise much of the western sports model (Watson and White, 2012, 2007).

The evidence provided in this section that encompasses professional commercialised sport across the globe, goes some way to supporting the claim that it is '... immediately obvious that Olympia as a religion is an idolatry...the classic example of an artificially constructed modern worship of false gods ... for in Olympia human beings extol themselves, adore themselves, sacrifice themselves and reward themselves' (Moltmann, 1989: 104). To be sure, this extends to the 'nations', as the previous century shows, in that '... whether communist,

democratic, or fascist, modern governments have one thing in common – a reliance upon sports to define and bolster national pride’ (Higgs, 1982: 179; also see Brohm, 1971). So, returning to Stringfellow’s (2004/1973) notion that the idolatrous institution of sport is fuelled by the ‘... principalities and powers’ that ‘*are legion*’, let us consider how group pride (e.g., Hong, 2006)<sup>xxii</sup>—nationalism, tribalism (consider football hooliganism) and racism that is widespread in sport—in addition to individual pride and self-glorification manifests itself:

Collective pride is ... man’s last, and in some respects most pathetic, effort to deny the determinate and contingent character of his existence: The very essence of human sin is in it. This form of human sin is also most fruitful of human guilt, that is, of objective social and historical evil. Prophetic religion had its very inception in a conflict with national self-deification. Beginning with Amos, all the great Hebrew prophets challenged the simple deification between God and the nation, or the naïve confidence of the nation in its exclusive relation to God ... Judgement would overtake not only Israel but every nation, including the great nations who were used for the moment to execute divine judgment upon Israel but were also equally guilty of exalting themselves beyond measure (Is. 47; Jer. 25: 15; Ez. 24-39).

(Niebuhr, 1949, cited in Menninger, 1973: 135-136)

For readers wishing to understand ‘group pride’ and the other themes analysed above, the historical shift from amateurism to professionalism in modern sport, sporting nationalism and idolatry and concomitant identity issues, they would do well to watch the award winning movie, *Chariots of Fire* (1981) that is based on real life-events at the 1924 Paris Olympics

(see Cashmore, 2008). During the film, one of principal characters of the movie, Eric Liddle, prophetically reads from Isaiah (40: 15, 17) declaring, ‘surely the nations are like a drop in the bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales ... Before him all nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing’. To some degree, this scripture portrays the foundation of Liddle’s stand under national pressure<sup>xxiii</sup> not to compete on the Sabbath and thus miss the 100 meters qualifying race. In explaining the dynamics of group pride, Menninger (1973: 136) notes that ‘soon individuals have identified themselves with the group (and thus with God) and ... Anything the group leaders decide to do is right’. Liddle stood against the group and avoided the ‘herd mentality’ that Kierkegaard often wrote of-- ‘the crowd is untruth’ (Moore, 1999: 243).

Having briefly surveyed the values of the modern professional able-bodied sports scene, it is important to consider disability sport and thus avoid romanticizing about disability sport as ‘innocent and pure’ (Howe, 2008: 10), as the media is often guilty of, as the sin of pride, nationalism and the win-at-all-costs ethic is also present in some activities in the disability sport realm. In their paper on the sport-disability docu-movie, *Murderball* (2005), which narrates an enduring rivalry between the USA and Canadian men’s national wheelchair rugby teams, Gard and Fitzgerald (2008:135-6) find that:

... wheelchair rugby is presented as an extremely competitive sport requiring the same aggressive outlook and physical excellence of non-disabled elite sport performers ... *Murderball* offers viewers a window into a world of almost apocalyptic competitive intensity. Team huddles involve red-faced screaming team chants while coaches ‘candidly’ claim

‘we’re going to kick the shit out of them’...in the film’s climax. The build-up to the Athens Paralympics ... in a collage of short sections of footage accompanied by the obligatory heavy metal music, fans are shown with national emblems tattooed on their face; the Olympic flame burns; lycra-clad athletes carry a USA flag in victory ... The message is clear: This is *real sport*. There is no ‘feel-good’ here. This is about winning.

Gard and Fitzgerald (2008:139) note that some viewers of the film will be alarmed and worried about the ‘corrupting influence of corporatized sport on disability sport’, something that Howe (2008a) has also identified. Indeed, I am one of them and from watching the film had further anxieties about the explicit marginalization and devaluing of athletes with ID who compete in the SO. The film’s main characters used derogatory language about special Olympians and clearly viewed their form of disability sport (Paralympics, PD) as far superior to the SO, the authors concluded. This discriminatory hierarchy is widely documented in the theology of disability literature (Yong, 2007; Young, 1990) and is documented in ethnographic research of the Paralympics by Howe (2008a: 31), who observed that ‘... athletes with intellectual disability were at the bottom of the hierarchy’. Hierarchies of worth based on PD or ID do not exist in the eyes of God. This truth is based on the biblical concept of *imago Dei*, that is, that we are all in essence (our spiritual nature) made in the image of God (Gen. 1: 27). Niebuhr (1943: 32) conveys this in stating that it ‘is the assurance that because I am, I am valued, and because you are, you are beloved, and because whatever is has being, therefore is worthy of love’. Developing the notion that those with ID in sport (and other aspects of life) are commonly devalued and marginalised, raises the possibility that such people might be considered, at least to some degree, to be prophets to the sporting Babel of our age. As Swinton (2009: 16, cited in Hauerwas and Vanier) has intimated, central to

much theological work on disability is the biblical mandate that the ‘... weakest, and least presentable people are indispensable to the Church’ (1 Corinthians 12:22), and I would add the sports realm.

### **Athletes with Intellectual Disabilities: A ‘Prophetic Sign’?**

We’re not leading a program; We’re leading a movement – some say a civil rights movement of the heart—powered by sport.

Timothy Shriver, CEO, Special Olympics (2010a: 2)

... God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

1 Corinthians (1:27-29)<sup>xxiv</sup>

Over the years, theologians have to varying degrees suggested that persons with disabilities, in particular ID, are a prophetic sign to the age of modernity and the present era that exalts self, celebrity, wealth, outward beauty, the intellect, success and the need to be perfect in all that we do (Harshaw, 2010). These cultural values reflect what we think about ourselves, who we are – our identity and self-worth – and thus how we think and act towards those who do not exhibit these qualities. The controversial figure of Wolf Wolfensberger who is perhaps most well-known for the concept of ‘normalization’ that he advocates in mainstream

disability studies and the SO (Wolfensberger, 1995, 1972) and which Oliver (2009 / 1996) has strongly critiqued, has been a major proponent of the idea that those with ID carry a prophetic message. Responses to his work reflect those received by the Old Testament prophets, who attempted to call the nation of Israel to repentance over its idolatry. As the modern system of competitive sport is arguably an ‘idol factory’ in which athletes, fans, coaches and parents have a ‘... misplaced trust ... false worship in something other than God’ (White, 2008:127), Wolfensberger’s ideas are applicable here. Some of Wolfensberger’s (2001, a,b) reasons for interpreting those with ID as a ‘Prophetic Voice and Presence ... in the World Today’ that link to the sports world are discussed below (also see Brock, 2011; Abl, 2007).

*People with ID (and PD) are much more public and visible*, which is reflected in the sports community, with the birth and development of the *Special Olympics* (1968-) that is ‘... the world’s largest organization for people with intellectual disabilities (Siperstein, Kersh and Bardon, 2007: 1) and is a global movement that ‘... serves 3.1 million Special Olympic athletes [children from 8yrs old and adults] and their families in 175 countries’ (Special Olympics, 2010: 1). The SO have evolved from a “nice” sport organization for persons with Down syndrome, into a global “movement” that champions the cause and dignity of those with intellectual disabilities, suggests Timothy Shriver, the CEO since 1996 (Shriver, 2010a). It is worth noting that the SO is understood as a ‘movement’. Harshaw (2010: 316) notes that all those who have advocated that those with ID are a prophetic sign to the modern world, Jean Vanier, Wolf Wolfensberger and Amos Yong, do so in plurality, ‘advancing the idea that the most important aspect of their prophetic activity centres on the role that they hold in common ...’. The SO has more than 805,000 volunteers, 244, 000 coaches, 500, 000



officials, and organises 44, 136 international and regional competitions around the globe each year (Brittain, 2010; Shriver, 2010a). The SO Summer Games were held in Athens, 2011, and 7,500 SO athletes from 185 nations competed in 22 Olympic-type sports. Increasing visibility of athletes with ID is also shown in the organisation of the first *SO Global Congress* (Marrakech, Morocco, 2010), at which SO leaders from around the world developed the 2011-2015 strategic plan of what Shriver (2010a: 2), calls a ‘civil rights movement of the heart—powered by sport’. Similarly, athletes with PD now have high media visibility. Brittain (2010) projects that there will be 4,200 athletes from 150 nations participating in 480 events in the London 2012 Paralympics.

*People with ID (and PD) are internationally recognised*, following the civil and disability rights movement, subsequent changes in legislation of the 1960-70s and the rise of ‘normalisation’ and ‘social role valorisation’ theories (Wolfsenberger, 1972). Again, this is mirrored in the birth of the *Paralympic Games* (1960, Rome) and the SO (1968, Chicago), which has led to the exponential growth of disability sports provision, global public awareness through increased media- coverage (Thomas and Smith, 2009) and government and corporate funding. Under the leadership of Shriver, the SO have undoubtedly also seen exponential growth and international recognition,<sup>xxv</sup> not unlike the *L’Arche* movement that has, Wolfsenberger (2001a: 18) argues, ‘... unequivocally gained international visibility’.

Further evidence is provided by the fact that some disabled—note they are only physically disabled—have attained ‘celebrity status’, for example, British paralympian, Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson (Howe and Parker, 2005), Mark Zupan, one of the main characters of the documentary, *Murderball* (Gard and Fitzgerald, 2008) and Ade Adepitan MBE, a wheelchair basketball paralympian and well-known UK television presenter. Of course, these are not in

the same world as current able-bodied demi-gods, such Tiger Woods (until recently), Roger Federer and Lionel Messi. Brittain (2010: 19), inadvertently, summarises the first two dimensions of Wolfensberger's thesis I have selected and applied to sport, by stating that:

International disability sport has come an amazingly long way since its early beginnings as a rehabilitative tool at a hospital in England over sixty years ago. It has developed into a huge international mega-event that has done a great deal to raise awareness of what people with disabilities are capable of and is increasingly making disability sport and athletes with disabilities an important visible part of the international sporting calendar.

*Non-Disabled and Disabled Persons are sharing their lives, often living together.* This is personified in *L'Arche* communities where those with disabilities (especially ID) and 'assistants', live together in a 'spirit of mutuality', learning from one another. Jean Vanier, the founder of what many see as a prophetic movement (Harshaw, 2010), agrees in principle with Wolfensberger that '... people with handicaps are prophetic' (Vanier, 1995:114). Disability sport organisations and events, for example, the SO and Paralympics that have spawned thousands of regional and local events worldwide, to some degree offer this community spirit through relationships and social support. This is supported by the results of Farrell et al's (2004: 160, 164) study of motivations for athletes participation in the SO, in which they found that '... athletes identified friendships in the program as the key reason they enjoyed Special Olympics ... the importance placed on relatedness by these participants was striking'.

*People with ID may be Parodying Intellectualism.* Since the European enlightenment arid intellectualism has slowly pervaded our culture. Not in any way to decry the intellect itself, the university or education and research but it is a well-known maxim that academics often ‘talk to themselves’ and operate in a ‘publish or perish’ ethos that is characterized by ‘... arid scholasticism, crass careerism’ and ‘pompous posturing’ (Steele, 2000: 90), that is just as destructive as the ‘win at all costs’ sporting attitude. Wolfensberger (2001a: 27) in line with numerous biblical themes that parody the fallible wisdom and intelligence of humans, in relation to Gods wisdom (e.g., 1 Corinthians 1: 17-31; 2: 1-16) provides a critique:

... many of the behaviours emitted by ... [disabled] ... people irritate and aggravate bright people, and that some of these behaviours may constitute a parodying of some of the intellectualisms of a culture that elevates the intellect and secular achievement to an extreme. Such parodying would not be malicious, but an innocent acting out of God’s derision, so to speak, at our efforts to build intellectual towers of Babel.

God’s derision? Is not the multi-billion dollar business of sport, with its financial corruption, boasting and exaltation of human ability and strength, celebrity status and bodily beauty, a focus of God’s derision? There is a ‘strange logic of Christian witness’, Reynolds (2008: 19) suggests, in that ‘... the Christological implications of Paul’s paradoxical proclamation 2 Corinthians 12: 9-10; namely ...’ that ‘...the saving power of God is made manifest and perfected in weakness or the lack of ability ... a strength that comes through weakness, or wholeness that manifests itself in brokenness, a power that reveals itself through vulnerability’. While beyond the scope of this study, it is worth noting the clear links here to conceptions of the ‘Holy Fool’ (for Christ, 1 Corinthians 4: 10) and ‘Holy Folly’ within the

Russian Christian tradition of the fourteenth and sixteenth century, desert monasticism and the writings of Dostoevsky<sup>xxvi</sup> (Phan, 2001), in which persons that were feeble-minded, vulnerable, weak and idiotic in the eyes of the world, ‘unconventionally ... might be a mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit’ (Trevett, 2009: 137). Perhaps then, athletes with ID do have a powerful embodied prophetic message for the modern sporting realm.

*Disabled People are Gentling Others*,<sup>xxvii</sup> through their vulnerability, weakness and presence. This, I would argue, is Wolfsenberger’s most pertinent point for the sports world. It is suggested that those with ID have a ‘gentling’ influence on others, making them more compassionate, patient and tender in relationships. Yong (2007: 221) calls this a humanizing influence on others, through which we ‘meet’ with the vulnerability and brokenness of others (see Watson and Parker, 2012b). Similarly, Timothy Shriver (2010b: 1), in recounting one of many stories from the SO, in which an athlete with intellectual disabilities has ‘... changed the way people think’, suggests that it is “soul power”<sup>xxviii</sup> that gentles others and leads them to consider spiritual and relational issues. Gabriel Marcel’s notion of ‘presence’ and Martin Buber’s Hasidic teaching of ‘hallowing the everyday’ and ‘healing through meeting’, in an ‘encounter’ with the other, is useful for understanding this relational mutuality in sport from a Judea-Christian standpoint (Watson, 2006).

In sport, the story of Gene Stallings, a highly competitive professional American football coach who has a son with Down syndrome, provides a good example. Through his relationship with his son, Stallings quickly realised that he ‘... was becoming more tolerant, more compassionate, and it was carrying over into work [professional sport coaching]’ (Stallings and Cook, 1997: 66). This is supported by research that has explored *The Positive*

*Contributions of the Special Olympics on the Family* (Kersh and Siperstein, 2010: 4), which showed increased patience, benevolence, tolerance, appreciation of health and family, improved relationships/friendships and a ‘re-examination of personal values’ as the result of consistent interaction with a family member with ID. I also have experienced something of this in my coaching disability sport and spending time in a *L’Arche* community (Watson and Parker, 2012b). People with intellectual disabilities<sup>xxix</sup> often see beyond our masks and defences, in that they seem to have what Yong (2007: 189) calls a ‘spiritual antennae’ that is not determined by intellectual capacity (1 Cor. 1: 18-31). In their vulnerability and transparency (e.g., hugging others) they relationally touch recesses of our hearts that we may not normally reveal, for fear of appearing weak or incompetent in front of others that is often due to defensive pride and/or fear of difference. It is interesting to note, that in the tradition of the SO, each athlete is not only given a medal but also ‘a hug’ after competing (Bale, 1994), something that Storey (2004) has questioned because it may encourage ‘inappropriate social behaviour’ with strangers.

As described in the preceding section, able-bodied competitive sport is generally characterized by ‘being the best, ‘winning-at-all-costs’ through a physical and/or psychological domination of your opponent. Sports media perpetrate these notions claiming, ‘You don’t win silver, you lose gold’ (Nike ad), and ‘Nice guys finish last ... every time you lose you die a little’ (Kohn, 1992: 118). This understanding of modern sport is supported by Begel (2000: xiv-xvi), who illustrates how thoughts of humility, weakness and vulnerability are diametrically opposed to the identity of athletes:

If there is any character trait that is anathema to an athlete it is that of weakness.

Being unable to handle one's feelings, and confessing that inability to another human being in intimate conversation, is not usually concordant with an athlete's sense of mastery ... the role of professional athlete may increase the risk of suffering a specific narcissistic vulnerability, and retirement from sports at any level carries with it an increased risk of clinical depression, especially if the retirement is forced by injury, or waning abilities ... .

This risk of depression is fundamentally tied to the athlete's sense of identity, an idolatrous trust and hope in the vehicle of sport instead of God to provide life meaning (Watson, 2011). When this is taken away a 'symbolic death' occurs in the heart of the athlete and they experience what Martin Buber called a 'shudder of identity' (Katz, 1975). On retiring from sport, Dean Macey, British Olympic decathlete, clearly articulated this: 'Fourth in the Olympics hurt, but retirement is like a death in the family ... I'd lost a major part of my life, something was dead. Everything I'd lived for was over' (Slot, 2008: 98). This is a description of what sport psychologists call the 'hero-to-zero' syndrome. More often than not an athlete's sense of identity is based on culturally bound hegemonic definitions of masculinity and femininity (the gendered body) that are linked to demonstrations of power, performance and bodily beauty and muscularity (e.g., Wellard, 2009; Hargreaves, 1994; Messner and Sabo, 1990), as is also the case in some physical disability sports (Hardin and Hardin, 2005; Gard and Fitzgerald, 2008). Indeed, as Weiss (2007: 107) notes, 'this glorification of the physical body has had implications for the devaluation of the disabled body'.

In their analysis of constructions of masculinity and disability in recent movies that have a Christian subtext, that is, a battle between good and evil, such as the *Superman* films, Koosed and Schumm (2009) discuss the concept of a 'Super Jesus', (i.e., a Superman character, such as the late Christopher Reeve) and how this 'American ideal' rooted in the Protestant work ethic shapes modern understandings of Jesus: a 'Super Jesus'. Similarly, some Christians (especially Protestants) involved in modern sport have pedalled a utilitarian 'winning a championship for Christ' mentality (Hoffman, 2010) that often values and adopts the values of sports culture, in which pride is erroneously oft understood as virtue, due to the process of enculturation. I have argued elsewhere (Watson, 2012, 2007) that those who adopt this approach to sport and view Jesus as a competitive 'super-hero' or 'team-mate', should consider the message of Isaiah 53 and Philippians 2:1-11 and adopt a less utilitarian and more playful approach to sport, while still pursuing excellence and success (see Null, 2008). Perhaps by adopting St. Francis' maxim, 'preach the gospel ... and when necessary use words', so that the witness of their lives would bear fruit, rather than always trying to exalt Jesus through winning for him. He does not need us to be the most 'winningest' athlete or coach, as they say in America (an ethic that is evident in most nations), to advance His kingdom.

The Christian story teaches that God's kingdom advances through human beings first accepting his extravagant offer of grace and salvation and then following the author of salvation, Jesus Christ, in all aspects of their lives. Winning in any aspect of life, including sport, is not a prerequisite. When Pontius Pilate asked Jesus if He was the King of Jews, Jesus replied 'You are right in saying I am a King' but 'My Kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:33-39). The values of God's kingdom, unselfishness, humility, sacrificial love, patience,

kindness, peace, long-suffering, righteousness and moral purity are seldom observed in modern culture and the microcosm of sport. 'I tell you the truth', Jesus says, '... many who are first will be last, and the last first' (Mark 10: 29, 31). Herein lies the rationale for examining narratives of disability sport from a Christian perspective, to uncover any hidden prophetic message.

In summary, it is predictable that there are many dissenters of Wolfensberger's polemical ideas and his contention that Satan (i.e., demonic forces) is involved in some part in people's disablements and worldly affairs. I would concur with Yong (2007: 221-222), however, that Wolfensberger calls '... into question our taken-for-granted assumptions of "normalcy" in exclusive ways' and that his argument '... has to do with Paul's claim that God confounds the wisdom of the world with what the world considers foolishness'. This is not to suggest that persons with ID are in any way foolish but as Yong goes on to say that '... their lives embody the wisdom of God in ways that interrogate, critique, and undermine the status quo' (221). Thus, Wolfensberger's thesis is an excellent foundation to critique and theologically deconstruct the win-at-all-costs culture of sport. An important point to stress at this juncture, is that while we can learn much about the heart of Jesus from relating to those with disabilities, and we can, with strong biblical justification, view them as prophets to this age, we must never see them as 'objects' of ministry, or as a means of developing virtuous character traits in ourselves. As Professor Michael Bérubé (2010: 48) notes in reflecting on his relationship with his son, who has Down syndrome and loves competitive sport, '...I've long since grown immune to clichés about children with Down syndrome. Jamie is not an angel sent to humanise the rest of us; not a sweet dollop of smiles and passivity. He is an ordinary human being, full of passions and desires that are ... admirable'. Following this, any



utilitarian, self-pitying and hierarchical mind-set must be avoided and we must view all persons with disabilities as equals in relationships of mutuality, where both the non-disabled and disabled have something to offer and receive as a gift, for example, time, presence and sacrificial love.

### **Conclusive Remarks and Further Research**

... we need to get even more serious about sharing the gifts of our athletes with the world. To do so, we need to fight harder to get attention for our story while we are confronting the most persistent and stubborn prejudice against our athletes.

Timothy Shriver, CEO, Special Olympics (2010a: 6)

In the last days ... their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands ... So man will be brought low and mankind humbled ... The arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day, and the idols will totally disappear ... Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?

The Prophet Isaiah (2: 2, 8, 17-18, 22)

I have argued through the presentation of empirical evidence and the application of biblical ethics two things: (i) The institution of professional competitive sport, especially professional big-business sport, is to some degree underpinned by ungodly ideologies and values and thus is an institution that is in-part controlled by principalities and powers, that is, demonic

spiritual forces (ii) Sportspeople with ID and the global organisation that represents them the *Special Olympics*, are arguably one prophetic sign (see endnote 8), not a panacea, to the modern sporting institution that is an idol for many athletes, fans and coaches. It is important to re-emphasize that of course there are many individuals in amateur and professional competitive sport (able-bodied and disabled) that play free from the sinful bondage of selfishness, narcissism, alienating others, pride-fully seeking self-glorification and status. Indeed, due to critical tenor of my study some readers may think that I am demonizing all elite able-bodied sportspeople. On the contrary, I strongly support Barry Smart (2005: 198-199) who states that regardless of celebrity status of our sports stars:

... the achievements of high profile professional sporting figures possess a quality that is increasingly rare in a world made cynical (corruption in sport) ... the excitement and emotion aroused by the uncertainty of sporting encounters ... the pleasure derived, and frequently collectively shared ... as a spectator or viewer.

Sports are good, or perhaps more accurately have the potential to be and I am in agreement with the spiritual writer, Brennan Manning (2005: 104), who acknowledges that due to their own insecurities and need to feel good about themselves, some ‘... hypercritical Christians quickly deny the presence of any value anywhere and overemphasize the dark and ugly aspects of a person, situation, or institution at the expense of their noble and valuable facets’. Therefore, while acknowledging the many positive aspects of modern sports institutions such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games (Watson and White, 2012; Ryken, 2004; Moltmann, 1989), when gazing through a Christian theological lens, I argue that much of the idolatrous institution of sport built on free-market capitalist and enlightenment principles (Guttman,

1994), is shot through with sin and corruption and is in need of spiritual rehabilitation and redemption.

Why are some Christians, as well as non-Christians, blind to the state of the sports world?

Wolfensberger (2001a: 92) suggests the biggest ‘obstacle to reading the signs of the time is idolatry, i.e. having excessive attachments to things created rather than to the Creator’, such as sport, as an idolatrous surrogate religion. A ‘hardness of heart’, that leads to a lack of moral discernment and individual and corporate conscience. Wolfensberger goes on to note that if you are able to detach yourself (in your heart) from these attachments because of intimacy, dependency and trust in God, ‘the more apt one is to read the signs and perceive their meaning’. Spiritual blindness of the heart is of course a common occurrence in the history of humanity and of God’s chosen people (Keller, 2009), as the prophet Jonah (2: 8) proclaimed to the nation of Israel in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., ‘those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs’. So, as Swinton and Brock (2007: 243) contend, ‘our sinfulness ... is our true disability; all human beings are disabled for all have sinned [Rom. 3: 10-12]’ and it is sin<sup>xxx</sup> (especially the primal sin of pride) and ignorance (often unconscious) that makes us blind to the realities of the modern sporting Babel and the many other forms of idolatry in the modern world. Biblical scholar John Stott (1986: 161) sheds light on this and expounds how the doctrine of ‘substitution’<sup>xxxi</sup> is an offence to the modern heart: ‘This is the great ‘scandal’, the stumbling block, of the cross. For our proud hearts rebel against it. We cannot bear to acknowledge either the seriousness of our sin and guilt or our indebtedness to the cross’.

If spiritual blindness is then the norm, and sin in this age is, ‘as it was in the days of Noah’ (Matt. 24: 37)<sup>xxxii</sup>, where the majority of people were unaware of and desensitized to the sin that pervades their culture and reject God; what is the solution? The general vision of the SO is to ‘... transform communities by inspiring people throughout the world to open their minds, accept and include people with intellectual disabilities and thereby celebrate the similarities common to all people’ (Brittain, 2010: 147). This is a noble and worthy vision and yet one I argue has limitations from a spiritual perspective. Encouragingly, however, in his opening address of the 2010 SO Global Congress, Timothy Shriver (CEO), seems to extend this vision to the heart and perhaps the spiritual message of the SO: ‘We’re not leading a program; We’re leading a movement – some say a civil rights movement of the heart—powered by sport’ (2). It would seem that Shriver as a catholic Christian<sup>xxxiii</sup> is referring to the biblical teaching, that the ‘heart...is the wellspring of life’ and healthy relationships (Pv. 4: 23). So, in addition to ‘opening our minds’, we must also open our hearts to God and then each other and follow what Jesus said to be the most important commandments:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and

with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself. (Mk.12:28-31)

Notice that love of God precedes love of others: ‘we love because he first loved us’ (1 Jn. 4: 19). Hence, Christian doctrine teaches that health and vitality of our ‘vertical relationship’ with a Father God (in a *fatherless generation*)<sup>xxxiv</sup>, through belief in Jesus Christ, will directly impact upon our depth and effectiveness of our ‘horizontal relationships’ with others, on an

individual, familial and national level. In turn, it will determine, along with sound biblical teaching, how we receive, or not, understand and relate to those with disabilities in all walks of life, including sport.

Authentic loving relationships are at the heart of the gospel and Jesus ministry to all, including the disabled. Most writings on the theology of disability give significant space to relational concepts, such as, friendship, mutuality, hospitality, vulnerability, humility and giving and receiving love (e.g., Reimer, 2009; Reinders, 2008; Reynolds, 2008; Hauerwas, 1986; Webb-Mitchell, 1994; Young, 1990; McCloughry and Morris, 2002). However, interpersonal relationships in sport settings remains largely ‘unexplored territory’ (Jowett and Wylleman, 2006; Watson and Nesti, 2005). The importance of building and managing healthy relationships in secular sport coaching and physical education texts has received some attention (e.g., Martens, 2004). Nonetheless, with a handful of exceptions (Rieke, Hammermeister and Chase, 2008; Fellowship of Christian Athletes, 2008; Gallagher, 2008; Dungy, 2008; Wooden, 2005<sup>xxxv</sup>; McCown and Gin, 2003; Boyers, 2000) there has been very limited Christian reflection on relationships on able-bodied sport and certainly not for disabled sport.

In this regard, Jean Vanier (cited in Reimer, 2009:53) the founder of *L’Arche*, suggests that we need to ‘...rediscover what is essential: Committed relationships, openness and the acceptance of weakness’ in a ‘world of competition’, if we are to understand the prophetic message of persons with ID, which includes athletes with ID and the SO. As O’Keefe (2006: 113) found in her study of the use of leisure and sport in *L’Arche*, leisure can be used to foster community and ‘the Christian focus of love in L’Arche is to announce the ridiculous—

that we NEED them to teach us to trust, laugh easily, live more in the moment, enjoy the presence of others, and accept one another unconditionally'. Indeed, sharing and celebrating life and relationships is a central motif of *L'Arche*, which maps closely to the experience of athletes at the SO (Corman, 2003). It is through Jesus' relationships that he ministered God's love and grace to the world and prophetically spoke into people's hearts, for example, the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:7-26) and the healing of the disabled man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn. 5:1-15). Why has the sports world largely neglected the importance of relationships and how can a Christian understanding of athletes with ID speak into this situation?

Due to the continued secularization and scientization of sport since the evolution of professional sport in the 1960's and the resultant win-at-all-costs ethic (Beamish and Ritchie 2006; Hoberman 1992), I would argue that relationships and especially the discussion of relational dynamics, such as love, humility and vulnerability have been neglected. This said, it has been argued that athletes can authentically love one another, even in aggressive physical contact sports, when love is properly understood.<sup>xxxvi</sup> In Swinton and Brock's (2007) theological analysis of genetic science and its effect on the disabled, they were '... struck by the lack of a rhetoric of love' (18), as I am in the scientized sports world. In light of the fact that genetic performance enhancement technologies have been identified as a '... potential threat to the London 2012 Olympics' (House of Commons, 2007: 40) and secular analyses of genetic science in sport have pedalled trans-humanist ideas (e.g., Miah, 2004), I strongly support Trothen's (2011) contention that scholars need to adopt a 'Relational theological Ethic' rooted in Mark 12:28-31, and sound biblical anthropology when theologizing on both able-bodied and disabled sport. Also, of vital importance to all theological writing, research

and praxis in the area of disability sport is to reflect on all the key theological themes and doctrines, that is, the biblical narrative as a whole. For example the Creation narrative has been often ‘glossed over’ in disability research and yet these narratives are ‘...crucial to understand the creation as the context of human love, this being part of a matrix of other theological themes, such as the nature of God, revelation, covenant, providence, salvation, and so on’ (Reynolds, 2008: 138). Ontologically, if we are created then we are also dependent (on God and others), which rejects the modern mantra of individualism, self-actualization and freedom that characterizes modern sports (Swinton, 2011; Watson, 2011). How then is the power of God’s love in human relationships in the world of sport practically worked out?

The father of a son with Down syndrome, and well-known American professional football coach, Gene Stallings, suggests that ‘...sport provides a common bond’ for the able-bodied and disabled to meet (Stallings and Cook, 1997: 213). Indeed, it is through the vehicle of sport that *Team Hoyt*, a father and son team (the son has disabilities) has received global media coverage, been awarded multiple honours,<sup>xxxvii</sup> inspired millions of people from around the world and has been heavily involved in changing people’s attitudes of the disabled and government legislation. It is also interesting to note that the parents of both Rick Hoyt and Johnny Stallings were advised by doctors at the birth of their sons to institutionalize them due to their ‘uselessness’ – the scientized, medicalized, and utilitarian ideology of the modern world that marginalizes and rejects the disabled. If we reject the disabled though, we miss out on the possibility of learning to love, and in turn ‘... we suffer because it is only in relationships with other persons that we are most fully alive, whole, and human’ (Reynolds, 2008:112). Perhaps then, relationships with persons with disabilities in sport (ID and PD) can prophetically speak to others and allow them to ‘... see with their eyes, hear with their ears,

understand with their hearts and turn ...' and enter into a relationship with God the Father (Matt. 13: 15). As Moltmann (1998:121) intimates; 'a person with disabilities gives others the precious insight into the woundedness and weakness of human life', and I would add, the heart of Jesus for the world of sport.

Surprisingly then, with some very encouraging exceptions from some of those organizations listed below<sup>xxxviii</sup>, para-church sports ministry organizations, such as *The Fellowship of Christian Athletes* (USA), *Christians in Sport* (UK), *Athletes in Action* (USA), *Church Sport Recreation Ministries* (USA), and *Verite Sport* (Europe) have not formally engaged with disabled sportspersons in terms of ministry focus (i.e., camps, seminars and athlete support), writings, or any acknowledgement on websites. This is not a direct criticism of these organisations that do untold good in the sports domain but it is perhaps a wake-up call and it certainly reflects the abelist and utilitarian ideology and mind-set of the modern sport and Christian sport organisations. It is then interesting to note that '... evangelical Protestants in the 1940-50's initially had little interest in sports and athletics per se, until they realised the power of sport to attract an audience of potential converts to the faith' (Mathisen, 2002:10); which is in part, a utilitarian approach that has historical reasons (see Watson, 2007: 90-94).

Recently, however, there has been promising signs that the acknowledgement and inclusion of the disabled in the sports world is on the radar of the world church. For example, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales appointed James Parker, *Catholic Executive Coordinator* for the London 2012 Games, who has worked with Olympic and Paralympic athletes and engaged with the *Special Olympics* movement, recognising that for Catholics (and all Christian believers) every human life contains unexplored potential, made most



visibly evident in the pursuit of excellence by disabled sports.<sup>xxxix</sup> Additionally, in support of the recent United Nations *Treaty of Rights for the Disabled* (2006) that highlighted the importance of increased access and provision of sport and leisure activities for those with disabilities (article 30)<sup>xl</sup>, let us hope that as the *L'Arche* worldwide network of communities and the Vatican's 'Church and Sport' office, may consider helping to develop more sport and leisure provision for those with ID. For empirical researchers seeking to explore the role of sport and recreation in *L'Arche* communities, the theological ethnographies of Reimer (2009) and Webb-Mitchell (1993), disability sport research of Howe (2009b, 2008) and methodological reflections of Macbeth (2010) and Swinton and Mowat (2006) are excellent resources, with many methodological insights and powerful interview narratives.

In conclusion, there is a real need for further empirical research and scholarship on the theology of intellectual and physical disability sport and, most importantly, change in practice and legislation of sport (Macbeth, 2010). An important caveat though is that while 'disability rights are important' in so far 'as they relate to the coming of the kingdom ... rights without love won't work' (Swinton, 2011: 305). What is required is a radical vulnerability of heart from those involved in sport, a heart that will be open to 'hear and see' the beauty and prophetic message of those with intellectual disabilities, whilst also acting to bring liberation within the political and institutional structures that they inhabit.

This study has focussed on athletes with ID, however, following the recent craze of 'body studies' across the disciplines, including the sociology and philosophy of sport (e.g., Wellard, 2009; Howe, 2008b; Schilling, 2003), research synthesising this literature with Eiesland's (1995) embodiment theology of the 'disabled God'<sup>xli</sup> and subsequent developments and

alternatives of this idea (Swinton, 2011; Creamer, 2009, Yong, 2007; Reynolds, 2008; Reinders, 2008; Monteith, 2005; Hull, 2003), will be one important area of enquiry. Perhaps the question that this study has posed is best summed up by Swinton and Brock (2007: 241), who ask, ‘What does their coming among us require of us?’

There is a beautiful story of a young man with a disability who wanted to win the Special Olympics; he got to the hundred meter race and was running like crazy to get the gold medal. One of the others running with him slipped and fell; he turned round and picked him up and they ran across the finishing line together last. Are we prepared to sacrifice the prize for solidarity? It’s a big question. Do we want to be in solidarity with others? ... We have to look at the poorest and the weakest. They have a message to give us.

Jean Vanier<sup>xlii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup>Hoyt and Yaeger (2010), Nall (2002) and Stallings and Cook (1997) are father and son (both sons have disabilities) sports stories that have a religious angle. Anne Wafula Strike's (2010) biography tells the inspirational story of how a Kenyan girl who contracted Polio at the age of two-and-a half, was consequently disabled from the waist down and as a result was ostracized by the African village community in which she lived. Through terrible adversity and barriers, Anne became a paralympian representing Kenya in 2004 and is now training to represent Britain in the London 2012 Paralympics. Robert Molsberry (2004), who is a pastor, father and triathlete, provides an insightful narrative that documents his disablement (paraplegic) following a traffic accident and the journey back to an active athletic life. Bonnie St John's (2009) book, details how her faith in God has been the "outrigger" (foundation) for her life as a paralympian and how to live a life of joy amidst the challenges and limitations of disability. The book written by Julie Papievis (2008), an athlete, who suffered a severe brain-stem injury in a car accident and experienced deep depression and helplessness due to her disablement, narrates her miraculous and inspirational journey of recovery, in which she ran 5K race, five years later.

<sup>ii</sup>The most recent memorandum (15<sup>th</sup> December 2009)--*Re-Inclusion of Athletes with Intellectual Impairment in Paralympic Sports*--published on the *International Paralympic Committee* (IPC) website, indicates that '...the IPC General Assembly (Working Group) voted in favour of the re-inclusion of athletes [after the exclusion following the scandal at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Athletes with intellectual disabilities were first included in the Athens 1996 Paralympic games] with intellectual impairment in the London 2012 Paralympic games and beyond'. The memorandum is available from:

[http://www.paralympic.org/export/sites/default/Sport/Classification/2009\\_12\\_15\\_Memo\\_IPC\\_Membership\\_ID\\_Athlete\\_Reinclusion\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.paralympic.org/export/sites/default/Sport/Classification/2009_12_15_Memo_IPC_Membership_ID_Athlete_Reinclusion_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup>For a general history of the *Special Olympics*, see Bueno (1994).

<sup>iv</sup>See chapter 10, *The Special Olympics, Intellectual Disability and the Paralympic Games*, of Britain's (2010) book, which is a good starting point to explore this topic.

<sup>v</sup>For SO research studies, see: [http://www.specialolympics.org/research\\_studies.aspx](http://www.specialolympics.org/research_studies.aspx)

<sup>vi</sup>The *Special Olympics* are a non-profit organization, have an amateur basis, and are most often run and organized on a community level, through after-school and community based programmes. Rarely, is training and competition, at a national or international level, and the concept of “participation” and community are key principles for the SO.

<sup>vii</sup>For example, considering the SO is a non-profit organization, Hong (2007: 114) notes: ‘Economically, does S.O promote corporations and their public-relations projects who support/finance S.O rather than people it is designed to serve (witness the high financial salaries of the top S.O executives who make upwards of \$200,000 per year plus perks)?’

<sup>viii</sup>There are many different legitimate manifestations of the prophetic. First and foremost, the expository ‘prophetic preaching’ of God’s word (as a large proportion of scripture is prophetic: foretelling/predictive and forth-telling); prophetic writings, for example, those of Kierkegaard, C.S. Lewis, Chesterton, Pascal and Dostoevsky; prophetic painting, art, sculpture and poetry, for example, the work of mystic, William Blake; songs and hymns with a prophetic edge (e.g., John Newton’s *Amazing Grace*); prophetic signs (athletes with ID) and prophecy as a personal prophetic gifting (1 Corinthians 12 and 14) or as the ‘office of a prophet’, that is, when an individual is assigned this gift / calling by God (Eph. 4: 11). For further detail on this, point, see Harshaw (2010: 313-315) who provides an insightful and illuminating discussion of the prophetic in relation to those with intellectual disabilities and addresses the question, ‘What is a Prophet?’.

<sup>ix</sup>The ‘Tower of Babel’ metaphor that I adopt here, based on Genesis 11, describes the prideful and idolatrous attempt of humans to ‘build a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that’ they ‘...make a name for themselves (v.4). The footnote in the NIV study bible (2002) explains that ‘...the people’s plans were egotistical and proud...rebellious man undertook a united and godless effort to establish for himself, by titanic human enterprise, a world renown by which he would dominate God’s creation...’ a ‘...proud attempt to take its destiny into its own hands and, by its man-centered efforts, to seize the reigns of history...the kingdom of man would replace the kingdom of God’ (27). In the modern era, this manifests itself in supposed metanarratives, ‘myths of progress’, for example, the disciplines of anthropology (Feuerbach), psychology (Freud), sociology (Comte, Marx and Durkheim et al) and biology (Darwin and Dawkins). Following the ‘Genome project’ in 2000, genetic determinism has arguably become the latest mythic utopia for some. Undisputedly, all these ideas have in varying ways led to very positive scientific, technological, and some social, advancements that we should be most thankful for. However, the point is that the proponents and followers of these utopias have often

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slid into idolatry, seeing them *all-encompassing* explanations for social and cultural existence and in turn ignoring God's guidance for how humanity should live. The history of the twentieth century *and the state of the modern world* clearly shows the folly in this view, which we are warned about in the bible (1 Cor. 1: 18-31, 2). Some of this footnote is cited in Watson and White (2007: 219).

<sup>x</sup>This quotation is taken from John Paul II (2000b and 2000c).

<sup>xi</sup>Some scholars have confused (even supplanted) the meaning and spiritual reality of the 'principalities and powers' in their exegesis of these scriptures, with earthly forces/institutions themselves. But as John Stott (1980: 274) notes, if this is the case '...we become too negative towards society and its structures...we find it hard to believe or say anything good about them, so corrupt they do appear. Advocates of the new theory warn us against deifying structures; I want to warn them against demonizing them. Both are extremes to avoid.'

<sup>xii</sup>Unless otherwise stated, all Biblical citations are from NIV (International Bible Society, 2002).

<sup>xiii</sup>The Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggeman (2010), presents arguably the most nuanced and insightful contemporary analysis of the metaphor of Babylon in modern institutions and nations, especially focusing on America.

<sup>xiv</sup>This quote is constructed from pages 19, 23-24 and 44-45 of chapter 1: *The Social Setting of First-Century Corinth: An Historical Examination* (19-53).

<sup>xv</sup>Quote from the *Sunday Express* (London), January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1963, cited in Kluck (2009: 129).

<sup>xvi</sup>Within his chapter *The Great Sin*, Lewis does differentiate between 'diabolical pride' and what I would term 'defensive pride'. Lewis defines 'black diabolical pride' as 'when you look down on others so much that you do not care what they think of you' (104), which is often the root of power-mad dictators. Defensive pride is in some ways (however, a Christian should be able to forgive all sin however despicable, by the grace of God) more forgivable, as it is normally rooted in unconscious emotional and spiritual wounds of the individual acting out of a proud heart, due to their need to appear 'better' than their opponent, or who they have fantasized as their opponent in some human endeavor. This footnote is also cited in Watson and White (2007: 23).

<sup>xvii</sup>Moral death according to Stringfellow, relates to the empirical outworking of demonic forces (governing principalities and powers) in individuals and institutions—sin—that leads to moral and ethical decline, idolatry, corruption and suffering.

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<sup>xviii</sup>William Stringfellow (1928-1985) was a renowned and highly controversial American lay theologian, activist and practicing attorney, whose writings were highly critical of US social, economic and military policies and liberal Churches and consequently he was under government surveillance for a number of years. His biblical ethics were based around the influence of the ‘powers and principalities’, the metaphor of Babel and the systemic evil that characterizes western, in particular, American culture and governance. The importance of his theological ideas should not be underestimated. In a panel discussion at the University of Chicago in 1962 the great Protestant theologian Karl Barth, turned to the audience and famously said, ‘You should listen to this man!’ (cited in Johnston, 2007: 1). Wolf Wolfsenberger’s theories, which I rely on in this chapter, draws extensively on Stringfellow’s work to develop his ideas.

<sup>xix</sup>The term ‘demi-god’ is used here in the colloquial sense to denote a godlike person in the eyes of others (The Oxford Compact Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1997, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 192).

<sup>xx</sup>It is important to note that there are of course many very positive aspects of the Olympic Games, even when they are marred by nationalistic fervour (see Ryken, 2004). For example, Baker (2000: 50) provides the famous example of the friendship between German long-jumper Lutz Long (a true Aryan) and Jesse Owens the black American track and field star, which contradicted all that Hitler was trying to do—use the Olympics as a Nazi propaganda event.

<sup>xxi</sup>Meng Weina, founder of China’s Huiling Community Services, a nongovernmental organization which assists disabled people in eight major Chinese cities, complained of harassment by Shanghai police in a letter to the International Olympic and Paralympic Committees. A group of Meng’s mentally disabled students were harassed en route to the Special Olympics in Shanghai on October 11, 2007; Meng described the incident as evidence that Chinese police “believe that events initiated by civil society must be ‘dangerous’ and ‘destructive’” (Human Rights Watch, 2008, 1-2).

<sup>xxii</sup>In analyzing the Beijing 2008 Olympiad, Hong (2006: 55) provides a good example of how ‘group pride’ manifests itself in modern sport. ‘For the Chinese, shame means ‘losing face’ and loss of pride. For a person to ‘know no shame’ is equivalent to saying that he has no decency. In Chinese sport, results must satisfy the requirements of collective pride. It must make others respect and admire China. Chinese sport is concerned with the ‘best’, because above all it increase renown – the sense of pride – and avoids loss of face which Chinese people feel acutely’. This sense of pride is undoubtedly a significant dimension of China’s response to a ‘century of humiliation’, experienced mainly from Western imperialistic forces.

<sup>xxiii</sup>He was heavily ‘leaned upon’ to change his mind by the British Olympic Committee and members of the royalty, to guard against loss of national pride.

<sup>xxiv</sup>This bible quotation is taken from the *Holy Bible: New Living Translation*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (2004) Carol Stream, IL, USA: Tyndale Publishers, Inc.

<sup>xxv</sup>See Shriver (2010a) for evidence of this.

<sup>xxvi</sup>The character of the “holy fool” is personified in *The Idiot*, one of Dostoevsky’s religious masterpieces. Prince Myskin is the Christ-like figure who is mocked and berated by all for his simplicity and foolishness and yet as the story progresses is shown to be the most virtuous and wise of all of Dostoevsky’s characters.

<sup>xxvii</sup>It is important to note that while interaction with persons with intellectual disabilities may have a ‘gentling’ influence on some individuals, there is also potential for the ‘hardening of the heart’ due to challenging behaviours (i.e., verbal and physical violence). .

<sup>xxviii</sup>This term is borrowed from Dr Martin Luther King, who urged Americans to rely on “soul power” to fuel his *dream* during the race civil rights movement of the 1960s.

<sup>xxix</sup>Of course this spiritual sensitivity—the ‘spiritual antennae’—is not unique to persons with intellectual disabilities.

<sup>xxx</sup>While I have focused on ‘institutional sin’ in this study, it is important to remember that this of course stems from the individual sins of men and women within the institution.

<sup>xxxi</sup>The doctrine of ‘substitution’, as Stott (1986: 161) describes it: ‘The doctrine of substitution affirms not only a fact (God in Christ substituted himself for us) but its necessity (there was no other way by which God’s holy love could be satisfied and rebellious human beings could be saved). Therefore, as we stand before the cross, we begin to gain a clear view both of God and ourselves, especially in relation to each other. Instead of inflicting upon us the judgment we deserved, God in Christ endured it in our place’.

<sup>xxxii</sup>‘The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time’ (Gen. 6: 5). This verse describes the status of ancient society before the judgment of God fell on humankind—the flood. Perhaps we live in comparable times (see 2 Timothy 3: 1-9).

<sup>xxxiii</sup>Timothy Shriver was raised as a catholic and undertook a Masters degree in Religion and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America, WA (1988) and has a column in the *Washington Post*—Religion From the Heart—in which he describes himself as a catholic Christian (see Shriver, 2010c).

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<sup>xxxiv</sup>I have elsewhere noted how identity issues in sport and life are directly related to the *fatherless generation* in which we live (Watson, 2011). For an accessible and yet scholarly analyses of fatherlessness in our times, written from a Christian perspective, see Stibbe (2010) and Sowers (2010).

<sup>xxxv</sup>It is interesting that following England's disastrous performance at the Soccer World Cup 2010, Mike Atherton (2010: 84), ex-England Cricket captain and now sports journalist for the London *Times*, suggested that the England 'Footballers can Learn from Wooden's Gospel': importance of relationships, humility and self-sacrifice.

<sup>xxxvi</sup>Etymologically the word love has four root meanings (Greek) that are important to understand in the context of relations in sport competition. These are: *storge* (affection), the love we have for family, especially parents to children, but also children to parents; *philia* (platonic), love expressed towards our friends; *eros* (sexual desire), the state of 'being in love', a healthy sexual desire toward one's partner; and *agape* (unconditional love or charity), the unconditional love of God for humanity (divine gift-love) and the unconditional (as far as it can be) and *willed* love of humans towards others without expecting anything in return, esp. to those who do not deserve our love, our enemies, i.e., those who annoy/offend us. While all four aspects of love are interrelated and balance between them in relationships is vital, I would argue that *philia* and *agape* love are those most needed for virtuous and humble relations with others in sport competition, as often one would need to *wilfully choose* to love others even when wronged or incited to verbally or physically retaliate. If sport had become an *idol* in an athlete's life leading to familial relational problems, then it would be *storge* that is being neglected. For an overview, see, Lewis, C.S. (1960) *The Four Loves*, London: Fontanna Books. This footnote is also cited in Watson and White (2007: 217-218).

<sup>xxxvii</sup>For example, they have met President Ronald Regan and have been awarded the George Washington Honor Medal, an Honorary Doctor of Law degree for Dick Hoyt (Western New England College, Springfield MA), USA and the Superlative Performance for Courage in Sports *Arete* award.

<sup>xxxviii</sup>Further to an email correspondence (29<sup>th</sup> July, 2010) with the Executive Director of *CRSM*, Dr. Greg Linville, it is encouraging to know that some staff members of this organization work with those facing physical, emotional and intellectual challenges, which has included collaboration with *Joni and Friends*. Similarly, The Director of *Verite Sport*, Stuart Weir, has also informed me through email correspondence (12<sup>th</sup> August, 2010) of his awareness of Chaplaincy work and his engagement with Paralympic athletes. Email correspondence with staff from *Christians in Sport* (CIS), revealed that there was at present no formal work



with disabled athletes, although some Christian physiotherapists who work with paralympians and have contact with CIS do engage, when opportunities arise, with others in their sporting subculture on these issues.

<sup>xxxix</sup>James is also working in conjunction with *More Than Gold*, which is a multi-denominational initiative established to be a Christian voice and means of outreach, hospitality and service for the London Games and (see Hawkins, 2010).

<sup>xl</sup>Cited in Howe (2008: 1).

<sup>xli</sup>In brief, Eiesland argues that Jesus on the cross and through the resurrection is a ‘disabled God’, in that, even after his *bodily* resurrection and before his ascension to the father, when he appeared to his disciples and others, he was in some way disabled due to the wounds in his hands, feet and side (see Swinton, 2011, for an explanation and critique of this theory in light of subsequent writings) This obviously has significant ramifications for how those with disabilities understand God, themselves and others, in this life and the next. On this note, it is interesting that Rick Hoyt, of *Team Hoyt* (a father-son sports team, in which the son is physically disabled), a self-confessed Mormon, reported that ‘...the doctrine that ultimately drew him to the church was the idea that when we are resurrected, our bodies are perfect’ (Hoyt and Yaeger, 2010: 157).

<sup>xlii</sup>Cited in Whitney-Brown (2008:167-168).

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