

## Research Article

## Defreezing the Frozen People of God (A Christian Public Theological Approach)

By

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**Abstract:** The evident maltreatment and more often, summarily dismissal of people with disabilities as nobodies in issues of nation building, social transformation and development constitutes the fulcrum on which the nexus of the strings of the concern of this paper connect and revolves. It reflects on such unethical (or even inhuman) treatment of these victims of society as 'freezing up the people of God in the deep freezers of ungodly cultural, philosophical, social and religious cold rooms.' The paper thus calls for a change of heart towards these people who it describes as 'fearfully and wonderfully made' creatures of God who are divinely graced to be celebrated as embodiments of God's sovereign and gracious revelation of the beautiful diversities of divine bequest. This position, the objective of the paper as well as the challenging states of affairs which this unethical treatment installs in our social orders and significant ways forward to a better society are explained. The paper concludes with a call to 'de-freezing the frozen people of God' to fulfill their divine mandates.

**Keywords:** Victims of society, Development, Differently Abled, Human Dignity, Conscientization, Defreeze, Diversities, Divine Bequest, Embodiments, Development, Social Transformation

### Introduction/Background

A reflection on decades of summarily dismissal and neglect as well as the often misconception and maltreatment of the personalities, lives and works of the 'differently abled persons' (DAPs) often confronts one with embarrassing discovery in many African societies. Such embarrassing discovery reveals that they are increasingly seen and treated as objects of pity and exploitation in public affairs/spheres. These ugly phenomena provides this paper with the impetus to describe such unethical/ungodly thoughts and practices as freezing the people of God in the deep freezers of ungodly cultural philosophies, spiritualities and practices. Wati Longchar has said, many abled-body people try to avoid their company, treat them as second class people, objects of charity or even abandoned. The DAPs are often subjected to prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory acts by the abled-body majority, who in most cases, also deny them education and employment opportunities. This article reasons that such ungodly practices towards these 'victims of society' often arise as by-products of deformed public opinion about such *loastou Theou* (Greek for 'people of God').

From a theological anthropological perspective, Ndukwe describes 'victims of society' as people who suffer from the stereotype of society, or those whom the structures of

society questions and demeans their human dignity inordinately. They also include people who bear the brunt of the associated pains of science and scientific reflections/dispositions as well as technology and technocracy which reduces them to objects of pity and exploitation.<sup>3</sup> In most cases, society fails to see, recognize, celebrate and promote these 'fearfully and wonderfully made' creatures of God (whom it often banish to the margins as objects of pity and exploitations) as embodiments of God's sovereign and gracious revelation of the beautiful diversities of divine bequest. This is not supposed to be. Disability as Reynolds has shown is about difference; it is one of the characteristics that contribute to the diversity, the plurality of life. It is such difference that God creates as good and blessed, that through encountering it we meet traces of the divine.<sup>4</sup>

Although most DAPs do not like to be described as 'victims,' it has become necessary to use the expression 'victims of society' to highlight the extent, which society disrespects, stigmatizes, dehumanizes and even demonize these embodied revelations of God's sovereign and gracious gifts of beautiful diversities of divine bequest. Society scarcely recognizes, celebrate and reflect on them as parts of God's sovereign and gracious revelation of the beautiful diversities of divine freedom and wisdom. Furthermore, society hardly sees or treats these victims of society as indispensable stakeholders in mission, nation building, social transformation and development in many African societies.

The Church who is supposed to be the voice of the voiceless, strength of the weak as well as advocate of the abused, is not left out of these ungodly phenomena. In many cases, the Church rather becomes inclusive of the perpetrators, or exhibits a salient complicity to these ungodly and inhuman cultural philosophies, spiritualities and practices. Samuel Kabuel writing from his experience as a blind man notes that there are three cultural perspectives that perpetuate these ungodly phenomena in the church: paternalistic and patronizing attitudes, exclusion from participation and unjustified emphasis on physical healing.<sup>5</sup> Longchar underscored that there are Christians who think that disability is related to sin and the work of demons, that it is a curse and punishment

from God. Such Christians also understand healing as a sign of faith hence; those who do not receive healing are seen to be weak in faith. <sup>6</sup> These issues are simply, a vexation.

Swart reinterprets the Church to mean, 'a facilitator, enabler and catalyst of others' agenda, a servant of the people's or social movements, the movements of the poor, who are the authentic agents of development.' <sup>7</sup> The Church is constitutive of the religious communities, to whom Reynolds pleads to see themselves as models of 'accessible communities,' points of entry into God's love radiating through the lives of their members: the body of Christ that presumes a place for everyone.<sup>8</sup>

### Objective(s)/Concerns of the Paper

Given these insights, this paper inter alia (among other things), argues and calls for a complete de-freezing of these frozen people of God, a change of heart from these ungodly phenomena and for the celebration of these victims of society as indispensable stakeholders in mission, nation building, social transformation and development. The legacies of such ungodly phenomena are outlined/discussed with a view to paving ways for reflections on the ways forward from these ungodly phenomena. The paper expects Christian faith practitioners in particular, to embody their confessions of faith as lived, living and livable historical realities in order to serve as *lumiengentium*<sup>9</sup> in this dark world (cf. Matt. 5: 14-16; Phil 2: 15). Such God fearing/ faith practitioners are summoned to participate actively in the struggle to defreeze these frozen people of God who for decades have been banished to the fringes of social affairs, as objects of pity and exploitations. It sues for a change of heart on both the perpetrators and victims of society themselves.

On the one hand, these ungodly phenomena deceive its perpetrators to exhibit complacent attitudes towards these victims of society. These complacent attitudes often dismiss and relocate the identity and status of the victims of society to those of unhealthy dependents/consumers as well as mere objects of pity and exploitations. On the other hand, it also breeds despondent attitudes and reflections as well as practices in the philosophies and spiritualities of many of these victims of society themselves. In many cases, these ungodly phenomena also reduce their lives and services to dependency, consumerism, utilitarianism and opportunism. These ought not to be sustained in contemporary African societies where the religiocultural<sup>10</sup> philosophy 'to be is to belong and to belong involves active participation in social affairs' is fundamental to life. What is needed is a bunch of rebranded Africans to serve as royal priests who can embody the fullness of the biblical Christ as a theology of grace.

Elsewhere, this author presented the expression the fullness of Christ as theology of grace as follows: "This is about re-presenting the witness of the biblical Jesus Christ as a visionary reflection and practice of godliness that seeks to recover, empower and release every human being to become a beneficiary and dispenser of God's grace in

history. Human progress is also concerned with the burning issue of how to influence others while at the same time being open to welcome meaningful influences from such others. Talking about the fullness of Christ as a theology of grace is about emphasis on how God's people as beneficiaries of the Sovereign and gracious bequests of God, can doxologically assist the victims of the society to celebrate their humanities. Talking about the fullness of Christ in this sense speaks about a theological response.'<sup>11</sup>

Talking about the fullness of Christ as a theology of grace in this sense also speaks about rediscovering, empowering, creating necessary spaces and releasing these formerly frozen people of God to participate in social affairs as reintegrated people. And this as this paper presents it as one of its objectives, demands the celebration of their lives, gifts/giftings and ministries as indispensable stake holders in mission, nation building, social transformation and development.

### The Challenging States of Affairs of these Unethical Phenomena

As a matter of facts, these unethical/ungodly phenomena plague our society with many legacies of challenging states of affairs. Such challenging states of affairs include **Disrespect for the 'Human Dignity'** <sup>12</sup> **of the DAPs:** The thorny issue of disrespect/abuse of the human dignity of the DAPs is a common phenomenon in many African societies especially, in rural environment wheresocial, culture and economic discrimination remain uncompromising issues on the matter, till date. For instance, apart from Ekiti State, it is doubtful if there is any other functional desk in a Governor's Office that takes praxis-based demonstration on the need to re-humanize and re-integrate these revelations of divine sovereignty, wisdom and the beauties of diversity as indispensable stakeholders in mission, nation building, social transformation and development in Nigeria today.

These unethical/ungodly state of affairs are even worsened by ungodly cultural philosophies, spiritualities and practices which are often rooted in the common misconceptions that a DAP is cursed and is a disgrace to his or her family hence, a burden to their families. For instance, it is not uncommon to hear relations of the DAPs at the slightest provocation by a member of these revelations of divine sovereignty, wisdom and the beauties of diversity as indispensable stakeholders in mission, nation building, social transformation and development in Nigeria today, say 'I don't blame you, but God who decided to suffer our family by giving you to us as a child.'

Kabue accuses these negative public attitudes towards the DAPs as the diligent midwife that delivers and nurtures these ungodly reflections and practices in our societies and social orders. Such unethical/ungodly reflections and practices range from overt prejudice and hostility, condescension and pity to ignorance and indifference, which affects the ways the DAPs see themselves and others. <sup>13</sup> As a result, many are increasingly neglected, mistreated, isolated, or hidden from the public's eye. In

extreme cases, these persons are even abused and exploited by family members in exchange for food or money. Such unethical/ungodly philosophies, spiritualities and practices towards these revelations of God's sovereign and gracious demonstration of the beautiful diversities of divine freedom and wisdom constitute human dignity abuse/disrespect of the DAPs. This is a vexation.

Although there seems to be an agreement among scholars that human dignity is a concept that cannot be easily defined, it is also believed that the term is suggestive of attempts to acquire cognitive grip on dignity by trying to define it in terms of the needs and anxiety of human beings and in terms of the violation of dignity. The concept of human dignity is one of the few philosophical notions that have gained popular currency beyond specialist academic discourse. Appeals to it constitute an important part of ethical, legal and political discourse nowadays. Such appeals appear frequently in national constitutions and UN documents, in newspapers, NGO publications and in human rights discourse.<sup>14</sup>

Wolbert of the University of Salzburg argued that in its fundamental sense, human dignity means a Sovereign bequest that is given, which cannot be lost; a Sovereign grace that must be respected. The human person has dignity simply because she/he is capable of morality as a theological given. In this sense, human dignity is an end in itself hence, something that should not be acted against. It inter alia, includes the health and rights (physical and spiritual) of a person.<sup>15</sup> Koopman describes such Sovereign and gracious bequest as alien dignity which comes from God. And because it comes from God it is inalienable. This dignity is expressed in especially the vulnerable ones in the human family. This notion of alien dignity implies that all human beings are equal, that we are to be treated with justice, so that we live in freedom.<sup>16</sup>

From the fore-going, it is evident that theologically, the term human dignity speaks about the worth of human beings as God has made and sees them, or even their special place in nature, as God has made it. Thus any injustice meted to the DAPs based on their embodied revelation of God's sovereign and gracious gifts of the beautiful diversities of divine bequest is summarily, an abuse of the imago Dei in them and an affront to the divine program for creation. In other words, humanity should recognize, celebrate and reflect on the DAPs as God's sovereign and gracious revelation of beautiful diversities of divine freedom and wisdom, and as indispensable stakeholders in mission, nation building, social transformation and development in African societies.

**Dehumanization of these Victims of Society:** This phrase speaks about treating these victims of society – who people should recognize, celebrate and reflect on as embodied revelation of God's sovereign and gracious gifts of the beautiful diversities of divine bequest – as though they are not human beings. The Freedictionary.com describes dehumanization as the act of degrading people with respect to their qualities; and this seems to be the lot of many DAPs in African societies.

For instance, Jonathan I. James writes on the treatment of People living with Disabilities (PWD) in rural Kenyan environments: "Persons with disabilities, also known as PWDs ....are often marginalized and face difficulties because of their disability. Most have limited or no access to medical services, education, and employment. In addition, PWDs often experience social, cultural and economic prejudice and discrimination which consequently prevents them from obtaining a better quality of life....This is a major reason why individuals with disabilities are among the lowest economic class, especially in developing countries."<sup>17</sup>

Pohl observed that 'when people are socially invisible, their needs and concerns are not acknowledged and no-one even notices the injustices they suffer.'<sup>18</sup> Most members of the society treat these embodiments God's sovereign and gracious revelation of beautiful diversities of divine freedom and wisdom as sub-human or present absent human beings. It is on this premise that this paper calls for defreezing these frozen people of God from the deep freezers of unethical/ungodly cultural philosophies, spiritualities and practices. Continuing to freezing them up as such also deprives the DAPs of their human rights and privileges.

**Deprivation of the Human Rights and Privileges of the DAPs:** This has to do with conscious denial or deprivation of the rights of the DAPs to function alongside or in the same capacity as other persons who are assumed to be without disabilities. In this light, Angeline Okola Charles notes that human rights abuses remain a daily reality for PWDs around the world. For instance, the Constitutional Court in Thailand recently ruled 8-3 to uphold the ban on PWD becoming judicial officers; in Honduras, there is a law prohibiting teachers with disabilities from practicing their professions; in Germany a court awarded damages to plaintiffs because they felt that their holidays have been ruined by the experience of sharing the hotel with disabled persons.<sup>19</sup> It could be from this understanding that Kabue reasoned that the PWDs are the most marginalized and impoverished groups within the society. They are often uneducated, unemployed, lack access to health care, vulnerable to abuse and socially marginalized.<sup>20</sup>

In the Nigerian experience, it is not even unusual to see employers of labour as well as heads of institutions deny some DAPs the rights to be employed or admitted into institutions of learning on equal basis as others even when such imago Dei bearers of different appearance are more qualified than others. In some cases where they are permitted, it is usually done on grounds compassion rather than merit and even in such instances, their wages are either paid accordingly, or even lowered.

Koopman for instance, has thus observed that in a culture of economization, commodification and the estimation of someone's worth in terms of economic value, the DAPs experience that their contributions are valued less because they are often presumed to have less value. In

such culture of economization, the DAPs often experience that they are scarcely seen to be making meaningful contributions. Consequently, they find it very difficult to believe and live as people with the knowledge that their lives have meaning, purpose or goal. <sup>21</sup>This is not supposed to be.

Platinga has said, it is very fitting for those who have received grace at so great a cost to offer it to others and by so doing build up both the Church and the Kingdom of God. It also encourages us to develop virtues which inspire us to see things for the benefit of others. Cultivation and embodiment of these virtues are constitutive of dying and rising with Christ and therefore an aspect of family uniform for the people of God.<sup>22</sup> This in many cases, also results in defensive behaviour, fatalism and self-stigmatization by the DAPs themselves because the so-called abled-bodies often lack concern for the feelings and emotions of the DAPs.

**Lack of Concern for the Feelings and Emotions of the DAPs:** This is constitutive of the most distressing treatments given to the DAPs by the larger society, the Church and other religious communities inclusive. Koopman writes in this regard, "people with disability experience vulnerability in ways which are different from those experienced by the general population. If we listen to their experiences, we will hear the various narratives of risk, predisposition, fragility, vulnerability and actual suffering and wrongs. People with disabilities...for instance, experience viscerally how buildings are constructed in an unfriendly manner. Most buildings in ...Africa do not cater for the variety of needs of people with disabilities....At a recent conference, I was saddened to see how people started to avoid those conference participants who were disabled. People with disabilities were excluded to some extent from some of the very important informal social interactions between sessions during the conferences."<sup>23</sup>

In addition, it is not uncommon in Nigeria for instance, to hear many insensitive preachers shout in the middle of worship services where the deaf/dumb, cripples and people suffering from stroke are participating, 'everybody jump up, wave your hands and shout a big halleluia! This is a glaring manifestation of insensibility to the feelings and emotions of the DAPs. This ought not to be so.

**Ungodly Stereotype, Stigmatization and Exclusion of the DAPs:** Claassens from her South African and widely traveled experience has observed that one of the most daunting challenges facing the DAPs is the stereotype and misguided perceptions regarding disability, which pervades society today. It portrays and stigmatizes DAPs as misfits in the society, who are not fully human. <sup>24</sup> This is a clear manifestation of ungodly stereotype: it often adopts a paranoid stance in its sustained exclusion of the DAPs as critical stakeholders in enterprises towards mission, nation building, social transformation and development. Characterized by stigmatization and discrimination, this unethical/ungodly stereotype also reduces the DAPs to objects of pity and exploitation

thereby pigeonholing them into the status of unhealthy consumers in a consumerist society. Its stigmatization often 'trades upon a faulty way of representing disability. Namely, that disability is "not normal" (abnormal), that it displays something different than the "standard" human body should, a stigma marking a deviance considered a deprivation.'<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere, this author has described stigmatization as an attribute that singles out individuals or groups of people as being different in a negative sense. It includes labeling a person negatively, due to either her/his health condition or behaviour that is considered socially unacceptable. The consequences of stigmatization often entail treating people negatively because of society's judgment of what they represent.<sup>26</sup>

**Victims' Inordinate Withdrawal from Public Affairs/Spheres:** From Koopman's view mentioned earlier, it is evident that being victims of the said ungodly cultural philosophies, spiritualities and practices, the DAPs find it very difficult to believe and live as people with the knowledge that their lives have meaning, purpose or goal. As a result, a majority of them often engage in inordinate withdrawal from public affairs. Most of these ungodly reflections and practices also breed despondent attitudes and reflections as well as practices in the philosophies and spiritualities of many of these victims of society themselves.

**Ways Forward:** Given the foregoing, this article suggests the following as its ways forward towards defreezing these frozen people of God:

**Conscientization (Public Opinion [Re]formation):** We begin this discussion by attempting to define public opinion itself, which can mean the dominating opinion that compels compliance of attitude and behavior within a given environment. The Encyclopedia Britannica online <sup>27</sup>says that public opinion can also represent an aggregate of the individual views, attitudes, and beliefs about a particular topic, expressed by a significant proportion of a community. Some scholars treat the aggregate as a synthesis of the views of all or a certain segment of society; while others regard it as a collection of many differing or opposing views. From this background, we proceed to reflect on conscientization as that, which describes the learning process by which a person, community or group moves from magic thinking towards critical consciousness as a way forward in this discourse.

Conscientization refers to a type of learning which is focused on perceiving and exposing social and political contradictions. It takes action against the oppressive elements in one's life in the process of that learning. Through conscientization, individual consciousness helps to end the culture of silence in which the socially dispossessed internalize the negative images of themselves. Often these negative images of one's self are created and propagated by the oppressor in especially, situations of extreme poverty. Liberating learners from this mimicry of the powerful is a major goal of conscientization.<sup>28</sup>

Conscientization is an indispensable component of the process of changing the world and in this case, the world of persons, structures and policies which freeze up and treat the DAPs as abnormal human beings. It can play crucial roles in dealing with the issues of human dignity abuse as well as deprivation of the human rights and privileges of the DAPs, which were earlier discussed. According to Jurgens Moltmann, the dignity of the human being is that one indivisible, inalienable and shared quality of the human being. It is a source and ground for all human rights, which promotes respect for the worth of human beings. Human dignity lies in the fact that each particular human being and all human beings are, in common, human.<sup>29</sup>

Reynolds thus pleads that we conscientize people to learn that 'disabilities can be included through accommodation, so that persons with disabilities can participate with others as a contributory part of a community's life. This means recognizing difference and diversity, bodily and neurologically, and welcoming it as part of 'us' – not something "other" and abnormal, to be remade in the image of the "same" as "normal."<sup>30</sup> Conscientization as a way of reconstituting and recovering human dignity as well as the deprived human rights and privileges of the DAPs is not so much a matter of accommodating the DAPs to be part of "us" on "our" terms. It is rather about the quest for celebrating the beautiful diversities of divine sovereign and gracious bequests to humanity which empowers the DAPs to be with and augment "us" differently, accessing on their terms and being a formative part of who "we" are. Conscientization in this sense is critical for this discussion on de-freezing the frozen people of God, in which the Church is expected to play a leading role.

Swart has pointed out that conscientization is critical in the Church's calling and mandate to participate actively and responsibly in mission, nation building, social transformation and development. It can also play significant roles in dealing decisively with the three cultural perspectives that perpetuates the said ungodly reflections and practices towards the DAPs, which Kabue has pointed out. Conscientization conveys the idea that an explicit and distinctive role of the Church in mission, nation building, social transformation and development is the creation of an alternative (or restorative) consciousness at large. Conscientization insists that the powers of corruption, of moral disintegration, of undisguised evil, have to be overcome in the presence of our structures if we are to begin to see in our institutions and systems the possibility of covenant quality relationships. It places significant emphasis on continuing critique of the demonic structural arrangement of the power factors within a given environment.<sup>31</sup>

Conscientization as an act breaks down imposed mythologies in order to reach new levels of awareness through dialogue with the human heart and psyche. It is thus a necessary theological mandate and practice for the Nigerian Church in her sustained quest to make her calling and election sure as the salt of the earth, and the light of

the world even in this issue of the DAPs. Its witness will seek a new concern for spiritual renewal against the said negative public attitudes which Kabue has said, influences both the perpetrators and victims of these ungodly phenomena. Conscientization as a theological witness insists that, to use the words of Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, 'although there is undoubtedly much evil about, we human beings have a wonderful capacity for good. We can be very good. We would have been there but for the grace of God.'<sup>32</sup> It will also lead to a change of heart in favour of Longchar's lamentation earlier discussed: many abled-body people try to avoid their company, treat them as second class people, objects of charity or even abandoned. Conscientization challenges the Church's way to mission, nation building, social transformation and development to emphasize more on metanoia, (repentance or conversion, directed first and foremost at the complacent persons) in its preaching, actions and structures. It is about what Darrell L. Guder has described as the continuing conversion of the Church, with a view to empowering the DAPs for the celebration of their lives, ministries, gifts/giftings as critical in Christian approach to mission, nation building, social transformation and development.

**Empowerment of the DAPs:** This section draws from the Pauline phrase the fullness of Christ which was discussed above to mean a theology of grace, to present empowering and releasing these frozen people of God to mean recognizing, re-humanizing and reintegrating them to have indispensable decision-making powers in social affairs. Swanepoel & De Beer reflects and re-presents empowerment to mean having decision-making power as well. Although in its fundamental sense, empowerment refers to mobilization to political power, we must be very careful to ensure that such mobilization does not lead to tokenism. Tokenism (or window dressing) means that people are apparently mobilized, involved or placed on communities just so to look good. Such people are mobilized just to do physical work and taught various skills or given a token representation. This is critical for this discussion on de-freezing the frozen people of God.

As a matter of facts, the DAPs need certain skills to play crucial roles in such decision-making process albeit; such skill acquisition must be seen as simply, a tool of enablement rather than the primary ingredient of empowerment. Such an approach will play crucial roles in dealing with the issues of reducing the DAPs to objects of pity and exploitation; as discussed above. It will not also permit despondent withdrawal of the DAPs from social affairs/spheres. Associated with the skills needed for decision making is the fact that people can begin to make informed decisions, which can also re-present them as substantive stakeholders in Christian approach to mission, nation building, social transformation and development if they have the correct information. Thus empowerment in this sense includes information or knowledge in service of the DAPs' responsibility to make wise and informed decisions. This is about reflecting and re-presenting the biblical Pauline the fullness of Christ as theology of grace,

which develops and empowers the DAPs to realize their full citizenship potentials.

Okola on International Obligations on Disability Concerns has shown that through human resource development, the DAPs can be enabled to exercise their rights of full citizenship. As full citizens, they have the same rights and responsibilities as other members of society to be involved in the decision making process as equal partners. Thus empowered, the abilities of the DAPs are strengthened to promote self-determination and the necessary enablement to participate in the development of society.<sup>34</sup> Such concerns have to do with embodied commitment to represent the witness of the biblical Jesus Christ as a visionary reflection and practice of godliness that seeks to recover, empower and release every human being to become a beneficiary and dispenser of God's grace in history. Talking about the fullness of Christ as a theology of grace is about emphasis on how God's people as beneficiaries of the Sovereign and gracious bequests of God, can doxologically assist the victims of the society to celebrate their divine-bequeathed humanities. In this sense, reflecting on and re-presenting the Pauline phrase the fullness of Christ to mean a theology of grace speaks about a restorative theological response to the plights of the DAPs.

This approach to empowerment represents a restorative approach to healing which seeks to empower and re-present the DAPs as creative agents or indispensable stakeholders in mission, nation building, social transformation and development. It does so by opening a physical/social space of non-domination and mutuality, which also demands the celebration of their lives, gifts/giftings and ministries as indispensable stakeholders in mission, nation building, social transformation and development. The guiding principle is that the mobilization of the DAPs must seek to activate them to take up the responsibilities of ownership and management of their future through programs and projects they are actively involved in their planning and execution.

**Release of the Empowered laostouTheou :** Reflecting on and re-presenting the fullness of Christ to mean a theology of grace as discussed above, does not simply make the DAPs creative agents or indispensable stakeholders in mission, nation building, social transformation and development. It also conscientizes, repackages and re-presents the DAPs as revelations of God's sovereign and gracious demonstration of the beautiful diversities of divine freedom and wisdom, who must also be released to demonstrate such revealed wisdom and aesthetics as lived, living and livable historical realities in our time.

This can go a long way to help in transforming the aforementioned despondent and fatalistic philosophies which often lead the DAPs into inordinate withdrawal from public affairs/spheres. As a result of the afore mentioned unethical/ungodly stereotype, victimization and exclusion of these revelations of the beautiful diversities of divine wisdom and freedom, a majority of them often engage in inordinate withdrawal from public affairs. This is not

supposed to be: the real goal of empowerment as discussed above is to bring radical change in development of human beings; or (to reflect the concern of this article) using the phrase of Reynolds, 'changing the conversation' on the DAPs.

In his perspective, changing the conversation means seeing and engaging in the disability discourse in three ways: '(1) beyond disability as a bodily deprivation or problem to be cured or done away with; (2) beyond the able-disabled binary that pits "inside" versus "outside"; and (3) beyond mere inclusive 'accommodation' of disability, but a receiving of its difference as a gift. One that disrupts and pre-empts easy closures, and in the end opens up a new transformative possibilities of being in mutual relation....life radiating with its own preciousness, an excess that constantly disrupts the pretence of normalcy, and accordingly becomes a gift of grace....' This is critical for dealing with the issues of ungodly stereotypes, victimization and exclusion of the DAPs from public affairs/spheres as discussed above. It is about human (capital) development.

Anya O. Anya has shown that human capital development implies building an appropriate balance and critical mass of human resource base. It is an approach to social transformation and development, which also seeks to provide an enabling environment for all individuals to be fully engaged in contributing to national development efforts. Human capital development also provides opportunities for all persons to develop to their fullest potentials through education, training and motivation while creating the enabling environment for everyone to become somebody in national development. For him, any effort to increase human knowledge, enhance skills and productivity and to stimulate innovativeness, creativity and resourcefulness of persons is an effort towards human capital development.<sup>36</sup>

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Development as Swanepoel & De Beer have shown it seeks to free people from deprivation trap so that they (in this case, the DAPs) can become free in public affairs. Development is not simply, an effort to bring some relief to poor people or to improve their situation somewhat. True development focuses on the whole person in his/her environment and on a total transformation so that his/her

situation as a whole can be drastically changed or transformed. In this sense, development becomes an effort at releasing the whole person from the deprivation trap and in our case, de-freezing and releasing the DAPs from the deep freezers of unethical/ungodly cultural philosophies, spiritualities and practices which banishes and traps them to the margins of public affairs.

**Generous Hospitality towards The DAPs:** This is constitutive of the greatest gifts the society especially, the religious communities can give to the DAPs. Generous hospitality demands welcoming the DAPs without camouflaging differences as management and control or rejecting differences as utterly other, as has often been the case. The bulks of most attempts to offer hospitality to the DAPs have been more of tolerance in which they are often seen and treated as 'unable to fully participate;' or that of assimilative gestures of inclusion in which romanticized notions of 'special' or 'gifted' are attached to the DAPs as an ironic way of normalizing powers.

Generous hospitality can thus play substantive roles in dealing with the issues of lack of concern for the feelings and emotions of the DAPs discussed earlier. It will reveal and dismiss such false pretense or romanticized approach to giving hospitality to the DAPs as one that is summarily, a product of logic of identity. Logic of identity speaks about a process in which efforts to provide a level playing ground for all participants including the DAPs ends up either reducing differences to the same through management and control, or completely rejecting differences as utterly other. This approach to hospitality or welcoming the DAPs as Reynolds has shown does not concern itself so much with the challenges of re-humanizing the dehumanized people of God.

Interestingly, in this vision of generous hospitality towards the DAPs, the so-called able-body persons have much to learn. For instance, they can learn that 'caring for others as different is not a matter of "helping," of giving position of strength, but of recognizing my vulnerability and becoming open to the ways I receive from others. Others – in ways that include their disabilities – become essential not only to my own flourishing, but also to the common good of the communities in which I flourish...Receiving others in such a manner is...the practice of hospitality at its best.'<sup>38</sup>

In this vision for generous hospitality, there is no inside/outside binary, but rather a round table gathering into which each guest is invited as host to the other. Both the acclaimed host (able body persons) and the said guest (the DAPs) are joined in relationships of mutual partnership, and giving and receiving rather than dependence relationships of unilateral caring giving. It is a transformational process through which communities of genuine partnership are built. Its vision for partnerships also entail a commitment to justice work by confronting enduring systems of power on micro and communal levels, because vulnerability is often not parceled out equally within such "ongoing exchange of mutual welcome."

Generous hospitality gives birth to what Koopman has described as responsible hope which according to him, is about hope in action that compels all of us to work for the realization of dignity and compassionate justice to all people, in a special way to the DAPs. Responsible hope means that we can give account of the hope living in us by responding faithfully to God's call to seek a life of wellbeing and wholeness for God's people and all of creation; a life of dignity, justice and freedom. Responsible hope is responsive to, answers to, this vision of dignity. Responsible hope is also responsible to the betrayals of this dignity especially with regard to the most vulnerable in society. Responsible hope comes to expression in the quest for justice for all.<sup>39</sup>

**Conclusion:** Decades of summarily dismissal and neglect of the personalities, lives and works of the DAPs often confronts one with embarrassing discovery in many African societies: a reductionism of the DAPs to objects of pity and exploitation in public affairs. In most cases, society fail to see, recognize, celebrate and promote these 'fearfully and wonderfully made' creatures of God as embodiments of divine sovereign and gracious revelation of the beautiful diversities of divine bequest.

This article thus commits itself to suggesting meaningful ways of de-freezing these frozen DAPs from the deep freezers of unethical/ungodly cultural philosophies, spiritualities and practices, which bedevil African societies, policies and structures with many disturbing and dehumanizing states of affairs. Such ways forward include conscientization; empowerment of the DAPs; creation of spaces/platforms for them to function as indispensable stakeholders for mission; nation building, social transformation and development, releasing them to contribute to full capacity in public affairs; and offering them the grace of generous hospitality. These ways forward will be realized through the adoption of a catechism of the head, the heart, the hand and the feet; in words, in actions, in ethos, in policies and structures as well as every sphere of human endeavours as faith seeking understanding.

To such God fearing people and faith practitioners, it means what Guder has describes as a political responsibility which also defines the identity of Christian witness as martyrs (personality/identity), martyrion (testimony); and the martyreion or diamartyresthai (act of bearing witness).<sup>40</sup> They embrace and celebrate it as a public theologically rooted effort towards human capital/community development, ecological protection, promotion and preservation, among other things. For them, doing theology also speaks about rediscovering and restoring the original vision for community development, which also labours to strengthen the capacity of institutions and agencies to work in dialogue with citizens irrespective of their creedal/religious affiliations with a view to shape and determine change in their communities.<sup>41</sup> One therefore wonders if this cannot be described as a startling revelation.



Daniel Migliore said that a revelation of this sort may humble or elate us, disturb or even shock us. The effect of such revelatory insight or experience may be dramatic, possibly changing the way we think about the world or the way we live our lives. It has much to do with the knowledge of God and ourselves that is utterly surprising and disturbing. Revelation of this sort is an event that shakes us to the core. Although it comes as a gift, offering us the very heart of mystery, this sort revelation inspires us to momentous decisions about who God is and how we are to understand the world and ourselves. Here God breaks into human life as a surprising gift,<sup>42</sup> challenging us to confess and to embody wholeness and fullness as lumiengentium in this perverse and crooked dark world (Phil 2: 15). Defreezing the frozen people of God demands an embodied confession of faith as a lived, living and livable historical reality in order to serve as lumiengentium today.

To confess and to embody wholeness and fullness Koopman<sup>43</sup> has argued, is to explicitly communicate and commend such visionary theological enterprises to especially, the suffering; and in this case, the DAPs. To confess and embody are more than merely discerning the implications and imperatives of God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, they speak more about concrete cooperation with God to form, inform, reform and re-present a gracious community as a community of character, which embodies theology of hope<sup>44</sup> as a lived, living and livable historical reality.

As Koopman has also said, to confess and to embody are more than merely determining the challenges of wholeness today. To confess and to embody demands more than discerning the implications and imperatives of this confession to contemporary churches. To confess and to embody is to confess in word and deed, to embody in ethos and structures, and in every sphere of life wholeness and fullness – albeit in imperfect, preliminary and penultimate forms.<sup>45</sup> True knowledge of the Will of God also involves readiness to embrace in every situation the need to discern and engage in something do-able that conforms and constitutes a confession of faith to the claims of Jesus Christ.

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