

Research Article:

Disrespect of the Differently Aabled: A Kairos for Processus and Status Confessionis? (A Phenomenological Public Theological Approach)

By

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Abstract: From a phenomenological engagement, this paper worries and asks if the evident increasing location, pigeonholing and restriction of the differently abled persons to the margins of public affairs in our society do not reveal that a Kairos for the people of God to declare against such prevailing state of affairs has not dawned. The objective of the paper is to plead to the Church in particular, for a rethink and a redressing of the way the human dignity of these differently abled persons are abused in African countries especially Nigeria. The paper identifies and discusses the legacies of these ungodly phenomena as well as the ways forward. It concludes and presents status confessionis as true Christian visionary pursuit of orthopraxis in the 21st Century Nigeria.

Keywords: Disability, Sovereign, Social, Dehumanization, Stereotype, Processus Confessionis, Structuralism, Ubuntu, Transformation, Development, Nation Building

Introduction

The burning issue of disrespect, dehumanization and stereotyping of the people with disabilities (PWDs), which this presentation describes as 'differently abled persons' (DAPs)¹ in Africa especially Nigeria, is the major problem this paper seeks to address. It asks the question, what will it take the Church to address problem today? In other words, the paper asks the question: what will it take the Church to deal decisively with the plethora of controversies and injustices which arises from the issues of 'abilities' and 'disabilities' (that is, 'able' and 'disabled') of persons?

Even theological discourses on this issue often fall into the trap of 'communal identities based in binary systems of exclusion – able/disabled, "us" versus "them."² Theology as KC Abraham has argued is often a discourse that is predominantly done by able bodied people for the able bodied. As a result, there is scarcity of materials that reflect on the special hardships, social pressures, Even theological discourses on this issue often fall into the trap of 'communal identities based in binary systems of exclusion – able/disabled, "us" versus "them." Theology as KC Abraham has argued is often a discourse that is predominantly done by able bodied people for the able bodied. As a result, there is scarcity of materials that

reflect on the special hardships, social pressures, their emotional and spiritual problems, rights and struggles for justice and the peculiar gifts which the DAPs bring to faith and our understanding of spirituality. In addition, the ideas of perfection and of beauty that are often ingrained in our psyche and sanctioned by our culture tend to preclude any form of disability. As a result, the DAPs are increasingly excluded from society. Even in our churches, the buildings and atmosphere are usually not disabled friendly.³ Above all, these issues portray and stigmatize DAPs as misfits in the society, who are not fully human.⁴ These ungodly phenomena are constitutive of human dignity abuse which this paper pleads for a rethinking and a redressing of, in this 21st Century Nigeria. They often adopt a paranoid stance in their sustained dismissal of the DAPs as non-substantive stakeholders in mission, nation building, social transformation and development. These ungodly phenomena are usually grounded in the biting and dehumanizing effects of structuralism.⁵

Structuralism is a modernistic ethical concept which usually reduces and banishes its victims to the fringes of society due to its pseudo-ideological perspective which often grants people's prevailing circumstances or class the autonomy of determining human status and ability. It also speaks more of a theoretical paradigm which often rejects the concept of human freedom and choice. Structuralism rather concentrates more on how human experience and thus, behaviour, is determined by various structures. Until the recent interest in the rediscovery, recovery and celebration of the human dignity of persons especially the female gender, structuralism tends to celebrate Fredrich Nietzsche's philosophy which as this author has shown elsewhere, seems to preach sacrifice of the weak for the strong in order to transform human values.⁶ Under structuralism, human beings can only do what they are permitted to do by the overall circumstances or structures in which they operate.

Characterized by stigmatization and discrimination, these ungodly reflections and practices also reduce the DAPs to objects of pity and exploitation thereby pigeonholing them into the status of unhealthy consumers in the society. Such

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.'⁷ Against these backgrounds, this paper questions if such ungodly phenomena do not reveal that a Kairos (moment of truth or decision) for the people of God to declare a processus and status confessionis against such prevailing states of affairs has not dawned. Even the church whose prophetic witnesses ought to expose the ills of these prevailing states of affairs seems to live in salient complicity of the Christian faith with these ungodly phenomena. For clarity, we present a précis meaning of the terms processus and status confessionis.

Processus Confessionis: This represents approaches and methodologies which the church adopts to communicate a faith based positional stance or confession as a protest against a prevailing ungodly state of affairs in a given context. For instance, Alfred Rauhaus⁸ described it as a process of increasing perception, clarification and of confessing against a prevailing ungodly state of affairs. Reflecting against economic injustice and ecological destruction, as it is evident in the Accra Confession,⁹ he presented processus confessionis as a call on member churches to engage in 'committed process of recognition, education and confession regarding economic injustice and ecological destructing.'¹⁰

Milan Oponcesky observes that the declaration of processus confessionis envisages a longer process of recognition, education and a possible confession in a particular situation. From his perspective, the approach includes a call on churches to introduce the necessary programs, resources and practical steps to initiate a processus confessionis as a matter of priority to educate church members on how to develop a lifestyle that rejects the materialism and consumerism of our time.¹¹ H.S. Wilson says that processus confessionis means a process that will lead to an open confession by Christians that justice is a vital ingredient of the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹² Ernst Conradie observes that the term describes the Church's process of recognition, education, confession and action against injustice. It also speaks about the Church's work against human degradation¹³ as a demonstration of Christian concern for the wellbeing of the neighbour.

In summary, processus confessionis speaks about the processes of recognition, education and possible declaration of position, which the church adopts to communicate her faith based positional stance or confession as a protest against a prevailing ungodly state of affairs in a given context. Thus, it is crucial to this reflection which is meant to serve as a wakeup call on the Church to live up to its identity, *raison d'être*, vision and mission by thinking and working towards a status confessionis against these ungodly perception and treatment of the DAPs in this 21st Century.

Status Confessionis: The term can be described as an embodied demonstration of faith based confession as a protest against a prevailing ungodly state of affairs in a given context. It often arises from a realization that the *raison d'être* of a faith community is under weighty pressure from the prevailing state of affairs to declare that a Kairos for an embodied witness against such ungodly phenomenon has come. Status confessionis is usually a product of processus confessionis.

Dirkie Smit¹⁴ describes it as clearly, a strong expression applied to a very important issue and an extremely serious situation. Yet he argues that what exactly that issue is, or what the suppositions or implications may be, is less obvious. For him, the expression is in fact, not a technical term with a fixed and definite content, but one which must be understood in the light of the few occasions in history when it was used or when similar expressions played a part.¹⁵

Ernst Conradie from his South African apartheid experience presents status confessionis as that faith-based confession which can be understood as the Church's realization that a significant truth about its *raison d'être* is at stake. That truth is that a prevailing ungodly state of affairs has put a heavy pressure on the people of God to declare that the moment of truth to state her position against such ungodly state of affairs has arrived. It is a moment where nothing less than the confession of the Gospel in words and deeds is the spirituality and identity of the Church.¹⁶

Allan Audrey Boesak also drew from the decision of the 22 General Assembly (Seoul 1989) of the World Alliance of the Reformed Churches (WARC)¹⁷ to say that every declaration of the status confessionis based on the conviction that the integrity of the Gospel is at stake. It is a call from error to truth. It demands of the Church a clear and unambiguous decision on the truth of the Gospel and identifies the contrary view in doctrine and conduct of life as heretical. Such Allan Audrey Boesak also drew from the decision of the 22 General Assembly (Seoul 1989) of the World Alliance of the Reformed Churches (WARC) to say that every declaration of the status confessionis based on the conviction that the integrity of the Gospel is at stake. It is a call from error to truth. It demands of the Church a clear and unambiguous decision on the truth of the Gospel and identifies the contrary view in doctrine and conduct of life as heretical. Such declaration draws errors that threaten a particular church to light. Declaring the status confessionis in a specific situation is simultaneously aimed at all churches and calls them to join in the profession of faith.¹⁸

Status confessionis is an embodied confession of faith is proclaimed against false doctrines as well as ideological distortions which threaten the Gospel itself within the community of faith, and the larger society. In such ungodly environments, the integrity of the Gospel and its witness are at stake. The Belhar Confession which led to declaration of apartheid as heresy as well as the total collapse of apartheid in South Africa; and the Barmen

Declaration against Hitler and Nazism in Germany are its historical examples. For a better understanding, we proceed to consider the objective of the chapter.

Objective(s)

This reflection as earlier intuited is meant to serve as a wakeup call on the Church: to live up to its identity, *raison d'être*, vision and mission by thinking and working towards a status confessionis against this perplexing state of affairs which constitutes a serious affront to Ubuntu.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu says that Ubuntu describes the very essence of being human. Ubuntu in his perspective can be used to give high praise to someone by saying that such person has Ubuntu. According to him, 'a person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from the knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed or treated as if they were less than they are.'¹⁹

This thus means that a person with ubuntu is generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate and uses it as a way of saying that my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours. It is a way of living out the African religiocultural philosophy, which says, 'a person is a person through others.' It is not about 'I think, therefore I am.' Ubuntu rather stresses 'I am human because I belong, I participate, I share.' This is critical for this discourse.

The paper also calls for the reconstitution of the human dignity and a change of heart on both the perpetrators and victims of this social evil in order to rediscover, recover and reinstate the shalom of society. God as Jurgen Moltmann has shown wants to live with human beings in the kingdom of peace. Because of this the people of God are given their task of peace, which does not only mean the absence of war but also the overcoming of suffering, anxiety, threat, injustice and oppression. It is the commission of Christians to serve this peace in all dimensions of life, to promote it and protect it.²⁰ The concern here is to plead for a recognition, respect and creation of necessary platforms for the reintegration of the DAPs into the mainstream of public affairs – as substantive stakeholders.

Nico Koopman for instance, has lamented as follows, on the treatment meted to DAPs who try to participate with others in social/public affairs: 'People with disabilities also experience social vulnerability. At a recent conference I was saddened to see how people started to avoid these 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 conference. This social exclusion is an issue across the board for people with disabilities.... They are to some extent excluded from opportunities to make unique, indispensable contributions.'²¹ The bottom-line of this paper is about a plea that the lives, gifts/giftings and

ministries of the DAPs be celebrated as substantive divine sovereign and gracious bequests, which are crucial for Christian approach to mission, nation building, social transformation and development.

Lemuel S. Igdanes has underscored that in Jesus Christ, anyone including the DAPs, who accepts Him as Lord and Saviour does not merely receive or develop the gifts within. The Holy Spirit's indwelling takes the person's talents and develops them into abilities for service (1 Cor 12: 1-11). Thus PWDs are also persons bestowed with various gifts/giftings that can contribute towards the building up of the body of Christ and to transform it into a powerhouse for the ministry. The Holy Spirit apportions to each believer in Jesus Christ the DAPs included, the gifts/giftings as the Spirit wills. In God's kingdom vision, they are active participants in ushering in of divine reign of love, justice, peace and equality.²² Failure to meet these objectives often leaves our society with the undermentioned ungodly status quos among other things.

Finding: Some Ungodly Status Quos in the Society

Increasing Rape of the Human Dignity of the Differently Aabled: It is a common knowledge that the DAPs suffer increasing rape of their human dignity in forms of continuing exclusions from social/public affairs. Such sufferings are usually caused by especially, religious traditions' inability to cultivate in their followers' lives and reflections the crucial need to 'practice what they teach' and to ensure that 'before preaching, to make sure that they preach the right thing.' Koopman's afore-mentioned lamentation on the exclusion of PWDs from some of the very important informal social interactions between sessions during the conference is an example of increasing rape on the human dignity of the DAPs in African societies.

Such exclusion fails to recognize the fact that theologically as Hans S. Reinders has argued, human dignity lies in the fact that God bestows on all God's creatures – with or without disabilities – God's loving kindness. Human dignity is conferred on each and everyone one of us because of our equal relationship with God. This is not based on the relationship we have with God by virtue of our distinctive capacities but on the relationship God has with God's creatures, which is based on divine sovereignty, graciousness, freedom and wisdom. In this theologically rooted vision for human dignity, people stand equal before God without difference between them as God's creatures. Human dignity is conferred upon

human beings by the grace of God in which we all share equally. In other words, human dignity is dignitas aliena (alien dignity).²³

Koopman describes such Sovereign and gracious bequest as alien dignity which comes from God: it is inalienable. This dignity is expressed in especially the vulnerable ones in the human family and implies that all human beings are equal, that we are to be treated with justice, so that we live in freedom.²⁴ These insights make it 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 freedom and wisdom is summarily, an abuse of the *imago Dei* in them and an affront to the divine program for creation.

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Demonization of these Victims of Society: 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.²⁵ 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.²⁶ These ungodly perspective often ends up in demonization and deprivation of the human rights and privileges of the DAPs.

Deprivation of their Human Rights and Privileges: The DAPs face discrimination and barriers that restrict them from participating in society on an equal basis with others every day. They are increasingly denied of their rights to be included in for instance, the general school system; to be employed; to live independently in the community; to move freely; to vote; to participate in sport and cultural activities with the 'abled persons; to enjoy social protection; to access justice, to choose medical treatment and to enter freely into legal commitments such as buying and selling property. Angeline Okola underscores that such deprivation 'have been particularly severe in such fields as education, employment, housing, transport, cultural life and access to public places and services. This may result from distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference on the basis of disablement, which impairs the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of the rights of people with disabilities.'²⁷ In most cases, the DAPs have been forced to remain largely invisible, often side-lined in the rights

debate and unable to enjoy the full range of human rights. They are not only denied of their human rights/privileges but also banished/restricted to the margins of society.

Banishing/Restricting these victims of Society to the Margins: It has been earlier observed in this paper that one of the most daunting challenges facing the DAPs is the stereotype, victimization, exclusion and misguided perceptions regarding disability, which pervades especially, the Nigerian society today. These ungodly practices often portray and stigmatize the DAPs as misfits who are not fully human in our contemporary societies that bear the brunt of structuralism.

In this sense, structuralism constitutes an affront to a substantive realization of the SDGs²⁸ vision as a theological witness, which also permits the DAPs to participate meaningfully in improving the GNP,²⁹ GDP³⁰ or capita per income³¹ of Nigeria, which is bedeviled with a very distressing economic recession today. Rather than proclaiming the celebration of the human dignity, In this sense, structuralism constitutes an affront to a substantive realization of the SDGs vision as a theological witness, which also permits the DAPs to participate meaningfully in improving the GNP, GDP or capita per income of Nigeria, which is bedeviled with a very distressing economic recession today. Rather than proclaiming the celebration of the human dignity, gifts/giftings, rights and freedom of the DAPs as a theological witness, structuralism breeds, enthrones and sustains the distressing legacies of human dignity abuse and exclusion within a given social order. These ungodly phenomena often compel the DAPs to withdraw from public affairs/sphere, into despondency.

Despondence of the Victims towards Social Affairs: The DAPs being victims of the said ungodly cultural philosophies, spiritualities and practices often find it very difficult to believe and live as people with the knowledge of the fact that their lives have meaning, purpose or goal. As a result, a majority of them often engage in despondent attitudes towards public affairs/spheres. In many cases, they completely withdraw from the public in order to avoid embarrassments, exploitations and pity. Alternatively a majority of these victims of society resort to consumerism, opportunism, utilitarianism, etc. 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.

Implications: Transforming the Ungodly Status Quo Social Activism as a Processus Confessionis: This paper reflects on social activism to mean an action that is planned and taken with the intention of affecting the social norm of a given environment. In social activism, things like demonstrations, grass-roots political action committees and organizing groups can all be focused on an issue to bring it to the public's attention and change it for the better. Activism consists of intentional efforts to bring about social, political, economic, or environmental change. It can thus serve as a very meaningful approach to sound a

wakeup call on the Church to live up to its identity, *raison d'être*, vision and mission by thinking and working towards a status confessionis.

Social activism in this perspective also speaks about *processusconfessionis* as a Christian political witness. The Church engages in this process as a way of recognition, clarification, education, confession and action against the afore-mentioned unjust treatment of the DAPs. It further speaks about the Church's work against human degradation as a demonstration of Christian concern for the wellbeing of the neighbour. Thus social activism as *processusconfessionis* can include public criticism of the use of church/public buildings without sign language personnel, brail, ramps and hearing equipment. It can also include visible and loud prophetic criticisms against the activities of insensitive preachers/public speakers who often shout in the middle of worship services/public gatherings where the deaf/dumb, cripples and people suffering from stroke are participating, 'everybody jump up, wave your hands and shout a big halleluiah! Thus, it is crucial to this reflection which is meant to take a wide range of forms in the likes of letters to newspapers, political campaigning, economic activism, etc., such as boycotts, rallies, street marches, warning strikes, sit-ins, and hunger strikes, with a view to taming down or possibly suppressing the ferocious tides of the biting and dehumanizing legacies of structuralism in our social orders.

Structuralism seeks to create a superman to whom success culture is a celebrated approach to life and identity formation within a given social order. In its success culture celebration, even a reminiscent of the African altruistic philosophy, 'I am because you are' seems to be relegated to the background. Self-renunciation is hardly an issue for discussions in the anti-religious craze for social relevance of structuralism, hence the need for social activism as a *processusconfessionis* in order to expose and deal decisively with its biting and dehumanizing legacies, which injects its poisonous venoms into our social orders.

Social activism as a *processusconfessionis* can also take the form of persuasive communication by the church and other religious communities to correct the issues of human dignity abuse of the DAPs, caused by religious traditions. As Reinders has observed, since most of the hardships the DAPs suffer are caused or reinforced by how other people treat them, it is incumbent on Christians to support them to enable them (the DAPs) to regain trust in their lives. Their stories tell us that from a Christian perspective, there is no other substantive way for the abused to regain trust in life that does not proceed from God.³²

As a matter of facts, the emphasis here is on social activism as a faith based witness of the divine No! to injustice and God's appreciative Yes! to justice. The victims of society in Africa especially the DAPs in Nigeria, also need to be part of the prophetic throng singing the magnificat as it is expressed in Luke chapter 1 verses 46-55.³³ They are created in God's image as others hence their abused/battered human dignity must be sought for,

rediscovered, recovered, celebrated and promoted as a theological witness of the Church in the quest to understand and embody the revealed Will of God (*voluntasreveleta Dei*) as a lived, living and liveable historical reality in contexts.

One of the Church's greatest challenge or quest as this author has shown elsewhere is to discover and comprehend God's *sovereignvoluntasreveleta* which is a declaration of God's purpose and to celebrate/promote the human dignity of the victims of society as well. God's *voluntasreveleta* is the heart of the theological witness of the *missio Dei*, in contexts. The Bible teaches us that it is not the Will of God that any should perish but that everyone may come to repentance (cf 2 Pet 3: 9). Knowing God's *voluntasreveleta* also leads to engagement in moral discernment, which stresses that engaging in Christian pedagogy as a *processusconfessionis* is constitutive of the challenges of doing the Will of God today.

Christian Pedagogy as a Theological Political Enterprise: Theologically speaking, Christian pedagogy describes human participation in the rhythms of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14.26), which seeks faithful discipleship in a complex world. It is about Christian education as the ministry that engages people in the understanding of Jesus' commandments to love God and to love neighbor. This can take on many characteristics. Pedagogy speaks about the science or methodologies of teaching.

This paper thus presents Christian pedagogy as a science or approach to Christian education whose major concern is to appropriate the Bible in such a way that it comes alive in the contemporary settings of people's lives. This means that as a political witness, Christian pedagogy in forms of primary, post-primary and tertiary institutional programmes in Africa especially Nigeria must take a political stance: to ensure that educational curricula incorporates courses, subjects or modules which also exposes the biting and dehumanizing treatments meted to the DAPs as constituting serious affronts to the improvement of the GNP, GDP, per capital income and the realization of the SDGs. Such approach to Christian pedagogy can also substantiate the Church's attempts to ensure that all human beings experience abundant life in Jesus Christ, especially and in our case, the DAPs who suffer the biting and dehumanizing effects of structuralism.

Structuralism holds that the structure of a system or organization is more important than the individual, behaviour or position of its members. Rather than interpreting the meaning or value of a work or the agent, structuralism examines the structures that produce meaning. As a consequence, the lives and witnesses of the DAPs are dissolved into a series of systems, deprived of their role as a source of meaning, and thereby demonized and dehumanized. Central to structuralism is the notion that binary oppositions (e.g., male/female, public/private, and in this case, the disabled and the abled) reveal the unconscious logic or grammar of a system. This ought not to continue.

Reynolds has proposed for a change in conversations/practices towards issues of the DAPs to go 'beyond the abled-disabled binary that pits "inside" versus "outside," into a receiving of their difference as a gift, which disrupts and pre-empts easy closures and in the end opens up a new transformative possibilities for being in mutual relations.' For him, 'an attentive practice listens and receives, letting be the speaking voice of another and hearing how she or he perceives.' This is crucial for this discussion on Christian pedagogy as a theological political witness.

Christian pedagogy in this sense will seek to reproduce persons whose central concern is to transmit to the world a witness of love as it is expressed in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Christian education is a ministry that encompasses all the series of instruction and discipline which are intended to enlighten the understanding, correct the temper, form the manners and habits of persons, and fit them for usefulness in their life engagements. As a political witness, it must therefore stress the need for the Church's status and processus confessionis to seek to make shalom a historical reality in the lives of the suffering victims of society especially, the DAPs. Their human dignity needs to be celebrated as that of every other person whom God has engraced with the imago Dei; and it should take the form of public theology as a transformational developmental missional witness.

Public Theology as a Transforming Developmental Missional Witness: From a Christian perspective, William Storrar & Andrew R Morton have described public theology as one that has to do with the public relevance of a theology which has as at the core of its Christian identity a concern for the coming of God's kingdom in the public world of human history.³⁷ It also represents a renewed kind of language in the Church's critical engagement with the challenges of the larger society and Church traditions including the issues that have to do with the DAPs. Public theology can also be described as a transformational developmental Christian witness whose goal is shalom of society.

From a Christian perspective, Naudes Bowens Du Toit describes transformational development as every biblically based activity of the body of Christ, which assists in bringing human beings toward the place of complete reconciliation with God and complete reconciliation with their fellows and their environment. The goal of Christian transformation is that of shalom or the New Testament concept of the Kingdom where harmony, peace and justice reign under the Lordship of Christ. Shalom is also translated as: health, wholeness, prosperity, justice, harmony and general well-being. In essence it is peace within all relationships: with God, with self, with others and nature. Therefore public theology as a transformational developmental witness can play significant role in dealing decisively with the stereotyping, stigmatization and exclusion of the DAPs from public affairs/spheres.

Understanding and pursuing public theology as a transformational developmental witness can thus lead to reintegration of the DAPs into the centre of public affairs/spheres in the spirit of Ubuntu. A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened by another's difference. He or she embodies a spirituality and philosophy which reassure him or her that such a person belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are diminished or tortured or oppressed or treated as if they were less than they are. From a Christian perspective, it means that public theology is about living out Ubuntu as a transformational developmental witness of the life and works of Jesus Christ today. It is about the communication of every biblically based activity of the body of Christ, which seeks to bring human beings toward the place of complete reconciliation with God and complete reconciliation with their fellows and their environment. Public theology also describes the ways in which Christian truth claims function in a particular faith community's attempt to address issues that affect the larger society without compromising the historicity and the identity/spirituality of the faith in the process.³⁸

When interpreted from this perspective, public theology as transformational developmental witness can assist Christian education to engage in a more substantive public opinion formation and reformation on issues affecting the DAPs. It can also through Christian education, re-orient the Church with a renewed kind of language which non-Christian faith practitioners may find as a plausible and feasible speech for corporate public voice in addressing for instance, the afore-mentioned ungodly cultural philosophies, spiritualities and practices against the DAPs. Such re-orientation can re-present the Church's identity, spirituality and vision for theological engagements to reflect a Christocentric, trans-community people of God who are under mandate to be today what the larger world is called to become ultimately. That is, an assembly of various people from different abilities, backgrounds, socio-economic/political status, ethnicity, culture, etcetera. Their concern is on how to substantiate the Church's identity and spirituality as God's unique entrepreneurs, whose vision, spirituality as well as ethical reflections and practices of entrepreneurship can bring hope for the DAPs – victims of ungodly structuralism. In most African especially, in Nigerian experiences, a majority of these victims of society scarcely receive the needed platform to release or contribute their endowed potentials towards the development of society.

Thus, the question of how to create the necessary platforms for the DAPs to contribute towards improving the GNP, GDP and per capita income of the society will become an issue of public theological witness. Rather than stereotyping and pigeonholing them into dependency, such public theological witness will welcome and celebrate them as God's sovereign and gracious revelations of the beautiful diversities of divine freedom and wisdom. As a matter of facts, this will obviously challenge the DAPs to avoid withdrawing into

despondence and constrained to a life of consumerism – that is, from hand to mouth and wallowing in the stinking waters of ideological poverty.

This is an approach to transformational development, which seeks to re-present the Church as God's unique entrepreneur whose social ethics positions and proclaims her vision, mission, spirituality and *raison d'être* as that of a people serving God and ruling the world. Their ability to network without losing identity and focus in the melting pot of social interactions is one of the most crucial skills of a functional entrepreneur of Jesus Christ. These revelations thus yearn for a proclamation of *Kairos* for status confessionis against all forms of disrespect of the DAPs, as true visionary pursuit of orthopraxis.

Summary and Conclusion: This paper thus summarizes and concludes with a challenge on the Church to work towards proclaiming a *Kairos* for Status Confessionis as true Christian pursuit of orthopraxis. It represents a discerned *voluntas revelata Dei* and a *quarrens fides intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) as well as a *preparatio evangelica* or *euangelion* (Good News) to the DAPs.

As a more substantive theological approach to discerning the *voluntas revelata Dei*, status confessionis leads to substantive engagement in moral discernment as the challenge for doing the Will of God. God's revealed Will is something that needs to be known for it to be done as a fulfillment of the third petition in The Lord's Prayer, i.e., 'your Will be done on earth.' Knowledge as Thomas Watson³⁹ has shown is the eye which directs the foot of obedience. It is the pillar of fire that gives light to practice and in our case, practice of godliness. Knowledge in this sense has to do with a revelation of insight or experience which ends up in, to use the Latin phrase of John Macquarie,⁴⁰ *mysterium tremendum fascians*. That is, a mysterious encounter with God that is at once overwhelming and fascinating. Such a mystery breeds an instant and sometimes increasing transformation, which also serves as the standard for the recipient's subsequent approach to life and issues.

This will mean discerning that from the signs of the time, the decisive moment for proclaiming a faith based witness of the divine No! to all forms of injustice to the DAPs and God's appreciative Yes! to justice towards them in words, actions and in structures and policies is imminent. As an instance and a starter, this can include the public rejection of the use of the afore-stated DAPs unfriendly church/public buildings for worship services and public assemblies. It can also include visible and loud prophetic resistance of persons, gifts/giftings and services of the said insensitive preachers/public speakers. Above all, it will also mean outright rejection of all philosophies, spiritualities, practices, policies and structures which pigeonholes the DAPs to the status of 'outsiders' in the growth and development of mission, GNP, GDP and per capital income as well as the realization of the SDGs as faith based historical realities in our time. It might also mean agreeing with Okola that the subject of the rights of

the PWDs, which recognizes that the DAPs are entitled to a full range of guaranteed rights and freedom and do so without discrimination on the ground of disability is long overdue.⁴²

In seeking to recover and celebrate human dignity, the Church (as well as other religious communities) is challenged to show a preferential love of these often victims of the ungodly legacies of structuralism, social stigmatization/victimization and denial. The Lord has identified himself with them in special ways (cf. Mt 25:40). This is critical because the Gospel proclamation that is needed in especially, Nigerian societies is that which is under mandate to serve as a witness of the *voluntas revelata Dei* against these ungodliness, as an embodied approach to *fides quaerens intellectum*.

As *fides quaerens intellectum*, status confessionis also fights against inclinations to accept things the way they are as an unquestioned identity and spirituality. It will not therefore, continue to accommodate and translate such Church and other religious traditions as mentioned above, which banishes and pigeonholes the DAPs in the pits of consumerism, utilitarianism, opportunism and dependency syndrome as outsiders to issues that have to do with the growth and development of mission, GNP, GDP and per capital income as well as the realization of the SDGs. Status confessionis as *fides quaerens intellectum* will proclaim such traditions and practices as sinful.

One can thus say that status confessionis as *fides quaerens intellectum* is in agreement with the Anselm-Barthian description of faith seeking understanding as Daniel Migliore presents it. Knowledge of God as he argued is about faith which restlessly seeks deeper understanding of its conviction on the sovereignty and almightiness of God. It increasingly seeks answers to such rhetoric faith-based questions as: how could we ever be finished with the quest for a deeper understanding of God? How do I rightly understand and believe better that which I believe? It is about discerning the meaning and implication of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which as John Howard Yoder has argued does not ask for a blind faith. It calls for an increasing understanding of the truth: that the cross of Jesus Christ is in fact a new definition of truth, both as power and as wisdom.⁴⁴

From foundation of its Christian understanding and appropriation, power as *dunamis* (strength or vigour to act) or power as *exousia* (privilege, right, authority) connotes, seeks and works toward liberation. It speaks more about liberating creation especially human beings, and restoring them to serve their divine assigned purposes in order to enjoy God (Rom. 8: 19-21). This is central to the calling and mission as God's chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God who are called to proclaim the glory of our God (1 Pet 2: 9-10). Such liberative concept and pursuit of power represents a *preparatio evangelica* (fore runner of good news) to the DAPs in our time.

Status Confessionis as a preparatioevangelica to the DAPs means that as a matter of fact, the afore-mentioned insights places a serious obligation on the Church (as well as other religious organizations) as the hope for the hopeless and the voice of the voiceless today. Such obligation is to rediscover, recover, re-present and restore its identity and theological enterprises as a liberating social ethics for all –especially the DAPs – to touch, feel, see, hear and remember. The human spirit is also a sense making one hence, part of what the general human cognitive experience demands is what Macquarie following Martin Heidegger has described as primordial or essential thinking or knowledge.

Primordial knowledge in this sense represents an occurrence of being or a thinking which strives to answer to the demands of ontology (being), which involves a growing participation. That is, a thinking into the existence of the subject that is thought about. Primordial knowledge involves an element of appropriation that constitutes an essential element in the totality of the human cognitive experience.⁴⁵ Such knowledge is often rooted in, enriched and sustained by a substantive commitment which evokes liberating power. It also involves going into an experience in such a way that the given experience tries to bring back the knowledge of what ought to be into the present.

This is achieved by working hard to restore life to the insights and prospects of the said knowledge or memory of, as it is in this case, the DAPs. It is about an embodied commitment to discerning and living out the truth that the good news of Jesus Christ demands a broader grasp of what God's grace as revealed in Jesus Christ has accomplished, and still accomplishes. This also includes what God's grace demands by calling persons to be children of God. Else it becomes what the apostle Paul describes as receiving the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6: 1) in the Bible. This view on primordial knowledge is thus crucial in this discourse on status confessionis as preparatioevangelica in taming the ferocious tides of the ungodly philosophies, spiritualities and practices which (with the Church having been an active role player in many cases of these ungodly phenomena) reduce the DAPs to objects of pity, exploitation, exclusion, etc., in African societies.

From a Christian perspective, Anya O. Anya for instance, reechoing the Nobel Laureate Chinua Achebe on the Nigerian challenge, has said that we need to know not only where the rain started to beat us. Also of great importance to us is the point where we can take refuge from the rain and how to get there.⁴⁶ In the context of this paper, it is about finding ways for the Church to unlearn/undo what she had wrongly learnt/done against the DAPs over the years. Calvin had long cautioned that Christian faith is not reducible to a mere understanding of the Scripture, which often ends up fluttering in the brain without touching the heart. Christian faith is rather a firm and solid assurance of the heart, which further seeks to discover and to accept a new world order whose distinctiveness is itself the message (good news). It is about faith in Jesus Christ, in whom all of God's promises are confirmed and so to speak,

kept and accomplished.⁴⁷ Thus status *confessionis* as *preparatioevangelica* to the DAPs demands and insists that authentic faith in God revealed in Jesus Christ sets an inquiry in motion, against religious traditions that dehumanize and demonize these God's sovereign and gracious revelations of the beautiful diversities of divine freedom and wisdom. It will help a lot in dealing with the issues of religious traditions especially the Christian faith which thrives in salient complicity with persons, structures and policies that perpetuate and sustain such ungodly cultural philosophies, spiritualities and practices discussed in the views of Abraham, Koopman, Longchar, Kabue and Reinders above.

Given these insights, it becomes evident that the question 'what will it take the Church in Africa to deal decisively with the plethora of controversies and injustices which arises from the issues of 'abilities' and disabilities' (that is, 'able' and 'disabled') of persons' can be answered by proclaiming that a Kairos for declaring processus and status confessionis against all forms of disrespect of the DAPs, as a preparatioevangelica for these embodied revelation of God's sovereign and gracious gifts of the beautiful diversities of divine freedom and wisdom has dawned. Contemporary challenges within the African, especially the Nigerian socio-cultural context question the meaningfulness of the Church's missionary enterprises to the average person on the street.

In other words, declaration of status confessionis can be done! It has been done before!! And it can be done again in our time!!! The Germans proclaimed it against Hitler and Nazism in the Barmen Declaration in 1934; the United Reformed Churches in Southern Africa (URCSA) proclaimed it against apartheid in the Belhar Confession in 1986; and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) proclaimed it against economic and ecological injustice in the Accra Confession in 2004. Status confessionis represents a true practice of orthopraxis against a prevailing ungodly state of affairs and continuing disrespect of the DAPs is one of such prevailing ungodly state of affairs against which the Church is under mandate to confess her faith in words, deeds, spirituality, policies and structures; without claiming perfection.

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