

## **DISABILITY AND NIGERIAN CHURCH: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN ORTHODOXY AND ORTHOPRAXIS**

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### **Abstract**

Notwithstanding the varied robust Christian theological views on disability, the Church in Nigeria evidently falls short of orthopraxis in matters of same. Most Christian churches in Nigeria still distinguish and indoctrinate people with disabilities as vulnerable objects of charity, philanthropy and ‘miracle’. This paper juxtaposes the Christian theological theories and beliefs about disability with some ecclesiastical attitudes that point to the oppression, dehumanizing, stigmatization and marginalization people with disabilities. With hermeneutical study approach, the paper examines the anomalies and provides the much-needed scriptural resources for analyzing and rejecting religious denigration of people with disabilities. The paper not only discovers scantiness of theological resources that repudiate ‘shame’, ‘sin’, or ‘mistakes’ in disability discourses and involvements, but also the Nigerian church’s complexities in connecting the worlds of the ‘able-bodied’ and the ‘disabled’ indiscriminately and uncompromisingly. This paper posits that disability is better understood as a universal divine demonstration of man’s imperfection, dependence on God and ability in disability than unleashing suffering and punishment on man as a result of sin. The paper reveals that oppressing and dehumanizing people with disabilities not only violate the intentions and will of God for His creatures, but also have grave eschatological implications. The paper recommends a theological reflection statement and practical strategies for integration, social adaptation, and empowerment of people with disabilities. The paper amplifies the solidarity and full inclusion of people with disabilities not only in conventional curriculum planning and social arena but also in Christian liturgical life and worship.

**Key Words: Disability, Nigerian Church, Orthopraxis, Orthodoxy, Denigration**

### **Introduction:**

Following the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) on 13 December 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, which was opened for signature on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2007, disability studies are beginning to receive recognition not only as a human rights issue but also as an important development issue. A handful of individuals and organizations in the contemporary world have not only understood that people living with disabilities are part and parcel of the society, but also that these people are no less human beings who need acceptance, inclusion and customized pedagogic arrangements and interventions to enable them cope meaningfully in the society. Some of these individuals and organizations have been able to demonstrate their understanding in taking proactive steps in making people living with disabilities relatively comfortable in the society. Religious institutions have equally shown signs of varied robust

theological views on disability, confirmed in their religious books and expressed by their teaming clerics.

Regrettably, many grounds are yet to be covered in the implementation of programs and plans for people with disabilities. In an age of enlightenment and globalization which work towards building an inclusive community, persons with disabilities in Nigeria are still grappling with exclusion. Denigration of people with disabilities has become a worrisome issue not only in Liberation Theology but also in global contemporary Christianity. Most people and organizations leave much to be desired in their approaches to Disability issues. Significantly, the society and the church still pay lip services to issues of Disability in Nigeria. Under normal circumstances, little or no plans are made for People Living with Disabilities, let alone during emergency situations. Discussing “the Challenges of Persons Living with Disabilities amid COVID 19 in Nigeria”, Samuel Kanu (2020:1-3) argued thus:

The pandemic has heightened inequality and increased the marginalization of vulnerable communities. One of such vulnerable segments is people living with disabilities who already faced harsh difficulties in Nigeria before COVID-19. Now, largely unnoticed in the general media, disabled individuals face increased healthcare, social, and economic risks; thus, it is essential to shed light on the importance of an inclusive response to limit the impact of COVID-19 on Nigeria’s disabled community... Disabled persons account for a third of Nigerians living in extreme poverty, making them prone to harsh economic risks due to the pandemic. Before COVID-19, disabled persons faced difficulties securing employment, and a 2015 study on the employment rate of disabled persons in Anambra State found that 82% of respondents were unemployed.

Evidently, the Church in Nigeria falls short of orthopraxis in matters of disability. Most Christian churches in Nigeria still distinguish and indoctrinate people with disabilities as vulnerable objects of charity, philanthropy and ‘miracle’. Often times, the church’s conception and explanation of healing from the narratives in the New Testament reveals how theology has continued to injure people with disabilities, many of whom already experience marginalization, oppression and dehumanization. Some Christian ministers interpret disability as a flaw in need of remedy or cure; others link the condition with a family ‘curse’, ripple or causal effect of ‘sin’ or ‘abomination’ committed by the person living with disability. These and more have left the church with little or no inclusion plans for people living with disabilities. Harmful theological approach to disability issues in the contemporary places of worship negate the missionary goal of the church and can force the aggrieved group and their families to leave the church. There is therefore an urgent need to bridge the gap between orthodoxy and orthopraxis in matters of disability in the Nigerian Church. Doing this would mean a juxtaposition of the Christian theological theories and beliefs about disability with some ecclesiastical attitudes and practices that oppress, dehumanize, stigmatize and marginalize people with disabilities. A hermeneutical study approach would help to

examine the anomalies and provide the much-needed scriptural resources for analyzing and rejecting religious denigration of people with disabilities.

***Quest for Meaning:***

The terminologies used to describe people with disabilities have been shifting along with changes in the society. Very old terms include: ‘insanity’, ‘invalidity’, ‘idiocy’, ‘imbecility’ and ‘moron’. These derogatory terms were later replaced with yet dehumanizing terms such as ‘mentally retarded’, ‘disabled, and ‘deformed’. It later became obvious, the nature of disability notwithstanding, they are still human beings, not inanimate objects. If this is taken into consideration, it suggests therefore, they are human beings first and then with disabilities. This understanding was considered important to emphasize the individual, not the person’s disability; e.g., “individuals with mental retardation” rather than “mentally retarded people.” Nowadays, people with disabilities want to be recognized for their abilities, not their disabilities; they prefer the term “differently abled” rather than disabled. However, generally, the acronym PWD (People with Disability) is used in referring to any category of disability.

In seeking for a universal definition of disability, Ojo (2017:5) reported the position of the United Nations Covenant on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities thus: “Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” In line with this definition, Disability Theology or Theology of Disability is typically identified as an aspect of liberation theology, which put forward critiques of social systems and religious arrangements that go against, defy or abuse the intentions and will of God for His creation by neglecting, oppressing, marginalizing, and dehumanizing people with disabilities. This also includes any social or religious laws, principles, culture, traditions, programs or systems that stultify the potentials of People with Disabilities. Thus, the field of Disability Theology provides the much-needed resources for analyzing and rejecting social and religious denigrations of people with disabilities.

***The Problem:***

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Nigeria pledges to ‘leave no one behind’. Unfortunately, most people living with disabilities are being left behind in Nigeria. The Leprosy Mission International (2018) revealed that more than one billion people in the world live with some forms of disability. Nearly 200 million have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, hinder their participation in society on an equal basis with others. Out of Nigeria’s estimated population of 200 million, approximately 27 million people live with disabilities. A 2005 study by the Leprosy Mission Nigeria found that, of its 1,093 respondents, 37 percent struggled with visual impairments, 32 percent had limited mobility, 15 percent had reduced hearing and the majority of people surveyed 61 percent were unemployed because of their disability. People with disabilities in Nigeria typically received little support from the government and instead rely on family members, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and religious groups. One

of their biggest obstacles is the stigma surrounding their disabilities, which excludes them socially, economically and politically. These disabilities include physical and intellectual developmental conditions. The Leprosy Mission Nigeria found in its survey that 16 percent of its participants survived by begging. According to the World Health Organization's 2011 World Disability Report, about 15 percent of Nigeria's population, or at least 25 million people, have a disability. Many of them face a number of human rights abuses including stigma, discrimination, violence, and lack of access to healthcare, housing, and education.

For the past several years, activists have been working tirelessly to pass the Nigeria Disability Act. In January 2019, President Muhammadu Buhari signed it into law after two chambers of the National Assembly passed it. To ensure that Nigeria enacts this law effectively, Sightsavers Nigeria has petitioned the U.N. to uphold the rights of people with disabilities. The Act states that all employers of labour in public organizations shall, as much as possible, have persons with disabilities constituting at least 5% of their employment. Since the signing of the Act into law, how much has changed? Human Rights Watch, an advocacy group, says the Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Bill also stipulates a 5-year transitional period to modify public structures to be accessible to people living with disabilities – an important amendment since about 98% of facilities in Nigeria are not modified to accommodate disabled persons. (*Business Day*: May 29, 2020).

In the contemporary Christian church, there are scanty and inadequate indications of a theology of inclusion in matters of disability. Most Christian clerics take out time to preach love, sacrifice, acceptance, brotherliness and equality of worshippers before God, yet these essential components of Christian spirituality are farfetched in concrete terms. Most church denominations see disability cases primarily as issues of charity, philanthropy and miracles. Some others organize 'empowerment' programs mainly to make people with disabilities independent of the church, thereby, letting the church off the hooks of these perceived 'parasites'. Festive periods such as the yuletide and Easter seasons, remembrance days such as fathers', youths' and mothers' weeks seem to be the churches' best opportunities for a show of charity towards people with disabilities. They often have their field day having camera on people with disabilities to prove their 'generosity' to the public. Some of the so called charity items are better imagined than seen; the case of 'a beggar has no choice.' Only a handful of churches organize conscientization programs for their congregations with disability issues in mind. However, the question remains: "what happens after the conscientization programs"? This is where a healthy blend between orthodoxy and orthopraxis is needed in the contemporary church.

Interestingly, the Christian Council of Nigeria organized training on empowering women with disabilities on sexual and reproductive health care at Umuahia, Abia State Nigeria from 9-11, March, 2020. The training was initiated by the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network and hosted by the Methodist Church Nigeria as part of a six-month project aimed at empowering women with disabilities in Nigeria on sexual and

reproductive health rights through increased access to information and services. The Archbishop, Methodist Church Nigeria, Umuahia - Raphael Opoko (March 17, 2020), expressed thus: “we have been made by God and given self worth and confidence... We must value God’s creation and renew our minds to be like Christ’s mind who accepts us the way we are.” The programme coordinator for the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network Anjeline Okola (March 17, 2020), was also reported to have said: “Religion plays a big role in shaping the daily lives of the society. The church can provide women with disabilities with opportunity to learn, dialogue and interact while journeying with them in advocating for attainment of sexual and reproductive health.”

Notwithstanding, Etieyibo and Omiegbe (2016) argued that religion and culture promote certain beliefs and attitudes about disability and people with disabilities that lead to discriminatory practices. That is, they are sustaining factors in discrimination against people with disabilities. These practices should be wholeheartedly denounced because they result in the invasion of the dignity, personhood and life of persons with disabilities. For Deinde-Sanya (2020:2), there is the possibility of tying the shame of living with disability to the cultural and religious beliefs many of us were brought up with. He therefore submits that people living with leprosy shouldn’t be outcasts. Mental illness is not entirely caused by juju, and people who have one form of disability or another are not paying for their sins. We should be focused, instead, on building a disability-inclusive society. Moreover, Otieno (2009) expressed that one of the major root causes for the discriminatory acts against people with disability in Kenya is religion-related. Theological interpretations of disability have significantly shaped the ways in which society relates to people with disability. The challenges faced by physically challenged people range from praying for healing and attributing blame on the individual when not experiencing a cure, to discounting a child’s agency by only speaking to the parent, to attributing depression to one’s lack of faith.

Osukwu (2019:52-64) explained the challenges of people living with disabilities in the church to include:

degrading treatment, marginalization, and exclusion from recruitment opportunities, as well as discrimination in churches. Some people believe that disability has negative connotations and that persons with disabilities are hopeless, helpless burdens and passive “objects” meant to receive charity as well as physical and spiritual deliverance. Persons with disabilities are stereotypically seen as incapable of being productive. It is assumed that because people live with disabilities, they are not meant to occupy leadership positions or fully partake in church activities. The expectation that persons with disabilities be wholly embraced into the Christian fold is yet to be met.

Adesulu (2018:10) asked this pertinent question: “who looks out for People Living with Disabilities?” This question has direct implications on the Church regarded as ‘the light of the world’ and ‘the salt of the earth. How has the Church fared in giving hope and relevance to the People with Disabilities (PWD)? Are Churches proactive about recruiting staff who are

persons with disabilities? During pastoral counseling sessions, are our offices easily accessible for persons with disabilities? These are hard questions we must ask ourselves. What plans has the Church made to accommodate people with hearing impairments, wheel chairs, clutches, sight impairments, etc? The Church is expected to be the trailblazer for social revolution in the society by setting up structures that reveal to the society how PWD ought to be treated. Alas! The church's theology on disability leaves a lot to be desired.

***Hermeneutic Dilemma and Imperatives:***

Eiesland (1994:73-74) identified three theological themes that have created obstacles for people with disabilities. The first is conflating disability with sin. The second theme views disability as virtuous suffering. The third theme perceives people with disabilities as cases of charity. Thus, the Bible is intermingled with texts that have been interpreted in oppressive ways and together these continue to reinforce the marginalization and exclusion of people with disability in the social, economic, political, and religious life of the society. This is evident in the experiences recounted by people with disability. Bible references to disability present varied likely confusing pictures, which have given rise to different hermeneutic approaches in a bid to evading misrepresentation of ideas. Yong (2011:53-54), who has written extensively on disability theology, points out that we cannot assume an understanding of disability either in biblical times, or through much of history, which is similar to our understanding of it today

Biblical and theological views of disability have led to a discriminatory and exclusive approach to viewing people with disabilities. For instance, the Bible paints pictures of disability that portray curse and punishment as a result of disobedience. The blindness of the wicked men of Sodom (Genesis 19:11) and of Elymas, the magician who obstructed the work of Paul in Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12) are specifically attributed to divine punishment. Samson was punished through his eyes: "Then the Philistines seized him, gorged out his eyes" (Judges 16:21). Prov. 30:17 warns that the eyes, which are disrespectful to parents, will be plucked out by birds of prey. Visual impairment is viewed as a symbol of ignorance, sin, and unbelief. It refers to the lack of intellectual or moral understanding (Is 29:9-10, 18). Judges are warned that bribes or gifts blind the eyes of the discerning (Exodus 23:8). Jesus uses the expression 'blind' as a term of abuse in the Gospel of Matthew. When Jesus attacks certain groups of people, he describes them as 'blind guides' (Matt.23: 16, 24), 'blind fools' (v.17), and 'you blind Pharisees' (Vs.26). King Uzziah's unfaithfulness to God fetched him leprosy "because the Lord had afflicted him" (2 Chron. 26: 20), King Jeroboam was suddenly afflicted with paralysis (1 Kings 13:4).

Furthermore, the Bible paints pictures of disability that portray unworthiness and worthlessness in the society. In 2 Sam. 19:24-28, King David's servant, Ziba, bars Mephibosheth, who was physically impaired, from accompanying David on a trip. He was not worthy to be with the King because of his disability. Mephibosheth himself feels unworthy. In vs. 26, Mephibosheth says: "My Lord the King, since I your servant am lame." In Daniel 1:3-4, people with disabilities are regarded as worthless. God seems to indicate to Moses that God himself is the source of Moses' slowness of speech and of other forms of

disability (Exodus 4:10-11), and yet the Torah forbids people with various impairments from offering some sacrifices (Leviticus 21:16).

The Bible paints pictures of disability that portray consequences of sin. When Jesus healed the physically impaired man who lay by the pool of Bethesda, He said to him: “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse will happen to you” (Jn. 5:14). This clearly indicates that Jesus thought there was a connection between the man’s disability and some sin. Similarly, when Jesus healed the paralytic man lowered through the roof (Mk. 2:1-12), Jesus said to him: “Son, your sins are forgiven” (Vs 5), and then continued with the physical healing of the man. The legacy of blindness as a punishment from God or a metaphor for sin and disbelief continues in the New Testament. Jesus sometimes seems to go along with the idea that sin and disability are linked (the paralyzed man in Luke 5:17-26, or the healed invalid in John 5:14) and at other times rejects the idea (the man born blind in John 9:3). Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?” Jesus said, “You’re asking the wrong question. You’re looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. John 9:1-3 (The Message). Even back in Jesus’ day there was an inaccurate perception that disability was a result of sin. But what did Jesus say? “It was not because of his sins or his parents’ sins, this happened so the power of God could be seen in him.” (John 9:3 NLT)

Nevertheless, the Bible also paints pictures of healing as a sign of liberation for people with disabilities. This gives a picture of God’s redemptive and inclusive plan for these categories of people. Isaiah 35:5-6 outlines the joyous return of the liberated Israelites: “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongues shout for joy....” In Isaiah 29:18, God includes the handicapped in His plans of salvation: “In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.” In Isaiah 33:23-24 we read that the abundance of spoils will be divided and even the lame will carry off plunder.

### ***Denigration of People with Disabilities in the Nigerian Church and the Ways Forward:***

According to Fatai (2016:3), “Disability in Nigeria is viewed as a curse, and so, people discriminate against persons with disabilities, even within the family especially children with disabilities (CWDs).” Ashi, Olayi and Ikwen (2015:38) corroborated this thus: “...persons with disabilities in many parts of Nigeria are still relegated to begging in the streets. In some parts of the country, any form of disability is still viewed as a curse, a result of one’s sin or the sins of the parents.” Obviously, this anomaly is a brainchild of religious and cultural indoctrination.

Brock and Swinton (2012:20) have provided an excellent historical review of Christian theological ideas about disability. The Church’s history of caring for the sick, poor and marginalized has encompassed people with disabilities, who often find themselves also in those categories. And many churches provide very good services and worship opportunities

for people with disabilities. Nonetheless, as pastors and churches, we still find ourselves short of biblical and theological resources from which to respond well, and with confidence, to people in situations of disability.

Denigration of people with disabilities in the Nigerian church are highlighted as follows:

1. **Presumptuous Spiritual undertone of Disability:** In most Nigerian churches, just as in the Old Testament Jewish cultural milieu, it is widely assumed that disability points to a spiritual anomaly: a person with disability is under a generational curse as a result of ancestral sins. The resultant effect of this presumptuous notion is a careful avoidance of people with disabilities by some worshippers in order to evade transference of such curses on them. This assumption is erroneous having not taken into cognizance the possible biological, social, economic, psychological factors that cause disabilities. The church should correct this negative impression with sound biblical teachings so as to sustain a healthy interpersonal relationship in her midst.
2. **Occupational Exclusion:** The Bible is used as a justification for the denial of certain ecclesiastical offices and other clerical and administrative positions to people with disabilities in the church. Some clergy are automatically retired from active service against their wish and regardless of their abilities as soon as they're considered 'disabled' by the church, as if the *charismata* are restricted to only 'able-bodied' individuals. The church seems to be ignorant of so many factors responsible for disability other than spiritual reasons and the social, spiritual and economic implications of occupational exclusion. In recent past, many motivational speakers, pastors and gospel artistes have demonstrated ability in disability. This suggests that the emphasis shouldn't be on the areas of disability but on the areas of ability.
3. **Unavailability of access Ramps:** Imagine the large demographic of people to whom the Church has shut out of accessing worship arenas due to non provision of access ramps. Some of the people in wheel chairs are either forced to remain outside during the church service or literally 'crawl' into the worship arena leaving their wheel chairs outside. This is dehumanizing! The Church needs accessibility ramps to enable people with disabilities enter the church building and wide doors to fit a wheelchair.
4. **Technical Exclusion in some spiritual activities:** Most Nigerian churches lack improvisations, customization and inclusion plans for PWD when it comes to some spiritual activities such as evangelism, crusades, choir ministration etc. The word 'packaging' is now becoming a trending nomenclature in the church's vocabulary. Huge resources are expended and gigantic plans made to 'package' the church in a saleable manner so as to attract 'worshippers'. Most Nigerian churches prefer showcasing their 'able-bodied' members online to boost their corporate image. Often times, people with disabilities are left at the background, not to be seen by the public, for selfish reasons. The church should understand that disability does not remove human dignity. The dignity of people with disability must be recognized, restored and preserved with equal opportunities given them to be part and parcel of all spiritual activities in the church. The Church needs to embrace adults and children with disabilities, not out of pity or out of service, but out of a genuine understanding, love, acceptance, and celebration of their life.

5. **Lack of Conscientization program for Worshippers:** The church's discriminatory attitude towards people living with disability is attributed to ignorance and responsiveness to normative prescriptions of the society, which are antisocial and antithetical to human development. The church needs to articulate operational policy for the periodic conscientization of her members on the need for acceptance, integration and inclusion of people with disabilities. Gray areas in the Bible regarding disability should be properly explained and juxtaposed with the salvific plan of God for mankind, which includes people with disability. The conscientization program has to accommodate general awareness of the characteristics of disabilities, how to integrate and work with them, knowledge of their ability levels as well as behavioral characteristics. It has to also include relationship skills, modes of communication, and how to care for individuals with complex needs, reaching out to families of children with disabilities and how to bridge social gaps for their maximum benefits.
6. **Communication Lapses:** In a conventional Nigerian church, someone with hearing difficulty may not be able to cope since he or she will definitely find it difficult to understand what is being said in the church. The Nigerian church has to work in collaboration with experts in special education whose major responsibility is to carry the person with hearing difficulty along in the worship by interpreting and demonstrating the proceedings. By this, the church is giving a universal or holistic approach to missions and evangelism in line with the Great Commission of Christ.
7. **Lack of Capacity Building for Parents:** Parents see disability cases as accidental situations which they're not prepared for. Nobody prays to have a child with disability, and as such, nobody is readily prepared to handle the situation when it suddenly occurs. When parents notice traces of disability in their children, the initial reaction is to find a way to nip it in the bud, but when all efforts are made and the situation seems irredeemable and irreversible, they grudgingly and painfully learn to cope with the situation. Nowadays, the church seems to be carried away by other issues; no plan to prepare these parents psychologically for the challenges in their homes. The church needs to give these parents some psychological as well as spiritual therapy. By this, the church is providing the needed capacity building for the parents of these children to grapple and cope with the challenges associated with disability.
8. **Indiscriminate Display of Disability Pictures:** Nigerian churches derive joy in using pictures of people with disabilities for miracle adverts. Some of these pictures are displayed with careless abandoned attitudes, which may be offensive to their owners. The truth is, many pastors wouldn't display any of their immediate family members in such ways. Such careless and selfish act should forthwith be discouraged in the Nigerian church. Granted, different miracles certainly take place in the church, but the biggest miracle is the salvation of human souls, not the healing of people with disabilities.
9. **Inadequate Rehabilitation Program:** The church has many PWD who are confused, helpless, emotionally and psychologically traumatized due to hostility and rejection from the society. This adversely affects their sense of worth and dignity. The best done by the Nigerian church is to organize an 'empowerment' program for those living with disability. In most cases, these supposed 'beggars' are provided with lean resources to engage in non professional jobs as if the professional jobs are the exclusive preserves of

the ‘able-bodied’ individuals. This humiliating approach to disability alleviation in the church should be discouraged and replaced with a more dignifying approach.

10. **Preconceived Disability Stereotype:** most worshippers in the church see PWD as candidates for charity and miracle. The impression here is that PWD don’t really show up in church except for the purpose of ‘receiving’ miracles or charity. Little wonder some supposed worshippers can’t even manage to hide their show of contempt for this category of people. The church must accept the fact that the primary purpose of being in church is to worship God. Also, some people with disabilities will certainly grow old and die in their condition and as such their spiritual conditions should be placed first in dealing with them. If this is understood, sighting people with disability in church should not generate any other notion regarding their reason for coming, except for the purpose of worship. Miracles do take place in the atmosphere of worship not only in prearranged situations.

***Conclusion:***

In conclusion, there are indeed scantiness of theological resources that repudiate ‘shame’, ‘sin’, or ‘mistakes’ in disability discourses and involvements in the Nigerian church. Despite varied robust Christian theological views on disability, the Church in Nigeria evidently falls short of orthopraxis in matters of disability. Again, the Nigerian church has shown remarkable level of complexities in connecting the worlds of the ‘able-bodied’ and the ‘disabled’ indiscriminately and uncompromisingly. However, against the church’s preconceived ideas about disability, those with disabilities reveal the true nature of humanity, which is - we are vulnerable and interdependent. Our ideas of self-sufficiency are thus unmasked by God through people with disabilities. Thus, disability is better understood as a universal divine demonstration of man’s imperfection, dependence on God and ability in disability. Disability is not to be understood as intentional unleashing of sufferings and punishment on man by God as a result of sin. In disability, paradoxically, God further demonstrates His grace, in that which appears weak and nonsensical – His strength is made perfect in weakness (ability in disability). God recognizes the dignity of people with disability and as such treats them as His beloved children, not to be molested, abused, intimidated or dehumanized by the church. Oppressing and dehumanizing people with disabilities in any shade not only violate the intentions and will of God for His creatures, but also have grave eschatological implications. Thus, the contemporary Nigerian church must urgently bridge the clear gap between orthodoxy and orthopraxis in matters of disability.

***Recommendations:***

The paper recommends the following for the Nigerian church:

1. Articulate a theological reflection statement that condemns denigration of people with disability, which recognizes people with disability and incorporates people with disabilities in ecclesiastical affairs.
2. Introduce practical strategies for integration of people with disabilities and their full inclusion not only in conventional curriculum planning and social arena but also in Christian liturgical life and worship as expressed by Block (2002:133-137).

3. Liaise with the government to initiate social adaptation plans for people with disabilities. The church should play a supervisory, advisory as well as participatory role in this initiative.
4. Provision of pastoral care, which is an evidence of Christ's solidarity with the weak and poor in the society; His deliberate seeking out and care for those with disabilities as well as those suffering from diseases. Block calls this, 'relational Christology'.
5. Introduce physical rehabilitation – physiotherapy, occupational therapy, surgery and the provision of appliances like crutches, wheelchairs and prostheses for people with mobility problems.
6. Embark in advocacy – at local, national and global level, for the rights of people with disabilities. Support the people with disabilities in their quest for recognition and acceptance in national polity.
7. Package capacity building (vocational and professional) training for people with disabilities to give them skills to break down barriers and stand up for their rights; and of governments and other organizations to ensure they include disabled people in their programmes. Parents and guardians of PLWD need training on how to grapple with the challenges they face at home.
8. There has to be a way to approach disability from a theological perspective that does not involve shame, sin, or mistakes. The church must reexamine its disability theology, and then it to do a better job of connecting the worlds of the able-bodied and the disabled.
9. Christian theology must provide tools for analyzing and responding to the conditions of people with physical challenges.

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