

TANGAZA COLLEGE

TANGAZA-MASTERS IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

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FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POOR RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF
THE DISABLED. A CASE STUDY OF SISTERS OF THE MISSIONARIES OF
CHARITY, A HOME FOR THE DISABLED CHILDREN, OTIENDE-
LANGATA.

Supervisor

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A Thesis submitted in Partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Masters in Pastoral
Ministry

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Dedication

To my late Parents, my late aunt who did everything possible to see me completing my schooling, and my brothers and sisters who have supported me and showed me love from the depth of their hearts.

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Student's Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work achieved through personal reading, scientific research, and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master's Degree in Pastoral Ministry. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited and acknowledged.

Signed:.....

Name of Student:.....

Date.....

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the College supervisor

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Name of the Supervisor:.....

Date.....

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This research explores factors contributing to the problem of the poor response to the problem of disability. While conducting this research, the researcher used the pastoral Cycle methodology of SEE, JUDGE and ACT. SEE is the insertion process whereby one gets in touch with the reality of the situation at hand. The aim here is to identify the situation facing the people, what they are feeling, undergoing and how they are responding.¹ It is a moment of touching the reality through objective observations and subjective feelings.² JUDGE is the Social analysis and theological reflection. Social analysis is where, “one looks at the different dimensions that influence its situations by analysing the historical, political, economical, social, cultural and religious dimensions.”³ In other words, it is to do with understanding the reality and people’s own consciousness and searching for the root causes of the situation.⁴ Theological reflection is when the person examines the reality of the situation with a Christian eye. The aim is to link the lived experience of the people with their living faith.⁵ Then ACT is putting into action concrete steps, taking the necessary steps, and evaluating the results in order to plan anew.⁶ This was done through the practicum exercise at the Missionaries of Charity Sister, Otiende in Langaata.

Looking at today’s society, one realises that most of the disabled children/people experience and endure rejection, mistreatment and violations of all sorts from the society. Most

¹ Cf. C. Bodewes, *Parish Transformation in Urban Slums: Voices of Kibera*, Kenya, 15.

² Cf. F. Winsen, P. Henriot, R. Mejia (eds), *The Pastoral Cycle Revisited*, 251.

³ C. Bodewes, *op. cit.*

⁴ Cf. A. Parise, “*The Pastoral Cycle: A Pedagogy of Social Transformation*”, 155. In Various Authors, Social Ministry, Tangaza Occasional Papers no 23, 2009.

⁵ Cf. C. Bodewes, *op. cit.*

⁶ Cf. F. Winsen, P. Henriot, R. Mejia (eds), *op. cit.*

of them have been denied of their human dignity and have been forced to lead miserable lives in dehumanizing conditions and others have lost their lives due to dehumanising living conditions.

Though the statistics do not show clearly the exact number of people who are victims of various forms of human disabilities world-wide, demographers agree that the world population of individuals with disabilities is very large. For example, in 2000, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that between 7% and 10% of the world's population lives with disabilities which means almost 500 million people are disabled. The vast majority of them, about 80%, live in developing countries, where only 1% to 2% have access to the necessary rehabilitation services.⁷ Additionally, in Kenya, according to 2008 Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities, 4.6% of Kenyans (1.6 million) experience some form of disability. This shows that quite a large population is disabled and need to be cared for. The most common forms of disability in Kenya are associated with chronic respiratory diseases, cancer, diabetes, malnutrition, HIV and AIDS, and injuries, such as those from road accidents.⁸ This clearly shows that the problem of the disabled in Kenya is an issue which needs to be responded to effectively.

In the disability field, ignorance, neglect, superstition and fear have led to many children with disabilities being isolated and their development delayed. This has led to discrimination of children with disabilities because awareness on the needs of disabled children is minimal. About 80% of the disabled people in Kenya experiencing segregation, isolation, and lack of support for their needs.⁹ More than one-third of the disabled, their own families had

⁷ Cf. World Health Organisation, <http://www.who.int/inf-pr-2000/en/note2000-16.html>

⁸ Cf. Kimani Njogu, <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/983/1171>.

⁹ Cf. Report , <http://wecando.wordpress.com/2008/01/17/report-state-of-disabled-people%E2%80%99s-rights-in-kenya-2007/>.

committed abuse or violence on them, and more than 45 percent families do not allow them to participate in family activities on the same basis as other family members.

This research will mainly be based books, journals, internet sources, Church documents and unpublished work. It emphasises the factors contributing to the poor response to the problem of the disabled children. Chapter one entails the insertion point and the background of the issue of disability. Chapter two presents literature review, which will base on the available literature about human disability. In chapter three, there is a theological reflection whereby the researcher explores the Biblical, the Church's teachings, the African Synod understanding of human disability, and the researcher's experience as he worked with the disabled children. Chapter four presents conclusions and recommendations to various stakeholders who are key to the issue of disability.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Background and Significance of the Study.

1.1 Human Disability.

Many people up to this millennium have failed to acknowledge that disability is a collective predicament around the world. People view disability as out of the ordinary experience and therefore, they carry on looking at people with disabilities with abhorrent eyes even to the extent of deserting them. In some African countries, children with disabilities were killed because disability was considered a curse and a disgrace to the family not knowing that mistreatment and killing shows the implacable way in which evil unfolds.¹⁰ Bornstein emphasises this by saying that human disability is a problem that cuts across all countries, all cultures and all social strata.¹¹

People with disabilities may be socially excluded by attitudes of fear and ignorance on the part of those who are not disabled, who may use derogative language about them, or they may be excluded from society because of generally low expectations of what disabled people can achieve in life or what they can offer to the society. People do all this not knowing that human dignity is a bridge between who a person is and how he ought to be treated.¹²

According to the United Nations report of 2000, it is estimated that, there are about 500 million people in the world who live with disabilities. Two thirds of these disabled people 400 live in the developing countries. In certain developing countries nearly 20% of the general

¹⁰ Cf. D. Demarco, *"The Fate of two sets of Twins: Tragic and Tender Outcomes"*, 3.

¹¹ Cf. D. Borstein, *How to Change the World, Social Entrepreneurship and the Power of New Ideas*, 214.

¹² Cf. R. Agnelli, *"Redefining Human Dignity: The Debate over its true Meaning"*, 1.

population are in some way disabled and if the impact on their families is taken into account, 50% of the population are affected.¹³

The forum on the rights of the disabled children promotes and protects the human rights of the disabled children in civil, cultural, economic, political, and social life. However, all over the world, too often the lives of the people with disabilities are handicapped by physical and social barriers in the society which hamper their full involvement. As a result of this, and in all parts of the world, they are often poorly responded too, and without help, many live in isolation and insecurity.¹⁴

1.2 Disabilities in Kenya

According to the national survey done in Kenya in the year of 2008, 4.6% of the general population of about 28.68 million experience some form of human disability. More of these people reside in rural areas than in urban areas.¹⁵ It was also reported that Kenya has had no accurate data on the number of people with disabilities. Although human disability module was included in the 1989 national population and housing census, the data was not analyzed. This means that even now there is no figure assigned to number of the people with disabilities but one can calculate at 4.6% by the total population of the country.¹⁶ The Kenya Demographic Health Survey of 2009 estimates that about 10% of the country's population have a form of disability.

¹³ Cf. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, 2.

¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Cf. *Kenya National Survey for Persons with Disabilities*, xv.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 4.

With a population estimated at 32.2 million, a 2003 economic survey noted that approximately 3.2 million persons in Kenya have a disability.¹⁷

1.3 Insertion Experience

The researcher inserted himself in the Missionaries of Charity Sisters in St. Michael Parish, Nairobi Diocese in Kenya. The area is around 10 kilometres from Nairobi city to the west of Nairobi city bordering Kibera slum which is the largest slum in the whole world. The area is generally known as Otinde-Langata. When the researcher inserted himself in the programme that responds to disability, he noted poor response to the problem of disability as a common phenomenon. This is the reason that has led the Missionaries of Charity to support and take care of the disabled children where this insertion experience was conducted. The researcher realized that a considerable number of children at this place are severely disabled. The cases of physical disabilities that are common in this place include physical, mental, visual, speech, hearing, emotional and multiple disabilities. The missionaries of Charity Sisters who have a home for the disabled children which is the main area of this study is one among the many institutions that have emerged in our contemporary society to minister to the needs of the problem of the disabled children.

The Missionaries of Charity Sisters is a religious congregation in the Catholic Church situated in the archdiocese of Nairobi in St. Michael Parish, Langata-Otiende estate. The mission of the Sisters of Charity is, “to serve and live amongst the poorest of the poor”. Their Founder, Mother Teresa of Calcutta believed in a God who dwells among us, fully God and fully human,

¹⁷Cf P. Otieno, <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/988/1164>.

¹⁸Cf. K. Spink, *Mother Tereza, A complete Biography*, xiii.

and so, she despised nothing human.¹⁸ Maalouf clarifies more on the mission of the Sisters of Charity by saying that, “ The Decree of their new Constitution confirmed in a prophetic way the wishes of the Missionaries of Charity in the line; To fulfil our mission of compassion and love to the poorest of the poor we go: seeking out in towns and villages all over the world even amid squalid surroundings the poorest, the abandoned, the sick, the infirm, the leprosy patients, the dying, the desperate, the lost, the outcasts, taking care of them, rendering help to them, visiting them assiduously, living Christ’s love for them, and awakening their response to his great love.”¹⁹ Thus, it is a missionary means of witnessing the ministerial and prophetic vocation through responding in an apostolic sense, to the needs of Children who are disabled and are responded too poorly by the society. This apostolate of working with the disabled and the poor was initiated specifically by the founder of the missionaries of charity Sisters Sr. Mother Theresa of Calcutta.

Therefore, her missionary zeal extends to the entire world through the sisters who are doing as their founder commissioned them to work for the marginalized in the society. Since in this area poor response to the disabled to the disabled have been witnessed as a common phenomenon, the sisters are doing a loving and caring service to the disabled children in their house. It was started as a way of promoting the dignity of the disabled children and young adults who, due to cultural practices and religious beliefs are rejected and abandoned to die. The Sisters of the missionaries of Charity do this through giving tender and loving care to the children and young adults while serving them by providing them with holistic needs.

¹⁹ J. Malouf, *Mother Teresa, Essential Writings*, 14.

Currently this house of the missionaries of Charity Sisters has a capacity of 150 girl children and young adults with physical disabilities ranging from mild to severe. These include children and young adults who are rejected by the society and who have no one to care for them. It is rather a home that shows love and care to the poor of the poorest as the founder mother Teresa of Calcutta zeal was to serve the poor souls for them to experience the love God and Christ's presence in their lives.

During the researcher's insertion and doing practicum at the site, he had an opportunity to encounter and serve the disabled children at this home. The researcher's interaction with them was of great value to the researcher as a pastoral minister because the researcher was working with them while being involved in giving them physical assistance for example, washing, feeding, giving them mobility support, giving them company, a little bit of counselling, interacting, playing and praying with them on Sundays during mass. This laid the foundation of the researcher's ardent desire to work and interact more closely with these people hence get more acquainted with their needs as human persons. From the time the researcher began working with the disabled children at this practicum site, he has had a precious opportunity to get into close contact and interact in a very close manner with people who are infected and affected with physical disabilities at the Missionaries of Charity Sisters in Langata-Otiende.

The researcher's journey towards personal insertion to the realities, the activities, the entire life of the disabled children, and the whole community of the sisters of the missionaries of charity and its neighbourhood at large took the researcher a considerable process. It all began when the researcher started making inquiries about a possibility to carry out my insertion process at this place. With the information which the researcher received from the Sister in charge of the disabled children and having had a prior opportunity to listen to some sisters who have been

working with the people affected and infected with physical disabilities, the researcher got a glimpse of what it means to be a victim of physical disabilities.

The journey of the researcher to deal and work with the disabled children at the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity started back on 17th-October 2011. Starting the researcher's insertion process was marked with official introduction to the Sisters of Mother Teresa, the entire supporting staff members and all the disabled children at the centre. After the introduction, the researcher took part in the daily running of the activities which gave him a golden opportunity to interact more closely with the sisters and the supporting staff in a working atmosphere and also to interact and familiarize with the disabled children at the site. After a few days, the researcher felt perfectly at home with everyone and he likewise perceived that both the children and the supporting staff were at ease and interacted with the researcher freely though there were still some few who were still a bit closed. It was worthwhile working and having basic experience in each of the departments. This enabled the researcher to have sufficient orientation so that his ministry of journeying with the group could be effective.

Following the researcher's prior expressed desire to journey with the disabled children, he was informed by the sister in charge (the researcher's supervisor) the kind of work he would be involved in. The responsibilities included, washing the children's cloths, washing their bedrooms, making their beds, supporting them, counselling, comforting, playing with them, praying with them on Sundays during mass and interacting with the sisters and the supporting staff and feeding the children. The working schedule at the practicum site begins at 8:30am with cleaning the bedrooms of the children, their mattresses and making the beds and mopping the floor of the children's bedrooms. From there, they go and do laundry of all the cloths the children used the previous night plus their beddings. This is done on a daily basis. After laundry,

the researcher could go and talk with the children while sharing with him their life stories, play with them, counsel them, comfort and supporting them. Then at around 11:30am we begin feeding them lunch. After feeding them they clean up the utensils and at around 12:00pm the researcher could finish the work of the day.

The researcher's insertion into this ministry involved fitting himself into the system and carrying out the activities that are carried out in different times as mentioned above. The researcher's role here also involved pastoral care which meant listening to them for the sake of assessing their needs, concerns, feelings and hopes.

While working closely with the disabled children at the practicum centre all through the researcher's specified insertion experience process, the researcher identified a number of challenges experienced by people with disabilities through observation, oral interviews and spontaneous sharing with individuals, which lead to poor response to the problem of the disabled in the society. These challenges include mistreatment from their family members, discrimination as compared to other children who are considered normal, abandonment, laughing stock and neglecting them. These challenges have affected the lives of the disabled children and young adults in the society greatly to the extent of subjecting them to a feeling that they are unworthy beings. Journeying with them, the researcher deduced that their human dignity is compromised because their weakness is poorly responded to thus; the researcher identified poor response to the problem of the disabled as a problem that needed to be addressed. It is due to this reason that the researcher decided to continue accompanying them so that together we could carry out a social analysis of the problem.

1.4 Social-cultural Analysis.

This section presents a social cultural analysis of the structures and cultural elements that lead to the poor response to the problem of the disabled which emerged during the researcher's journey with the disabled children at the practicum centre.

The analysis involved the researcher, the disabled children, the sisters at the site and the supporting staff during the researcher's direct experience with the disabled children. Through close interaction with the disabled children, the researcher was able to accompany the children throughout the process of identifying the factors contributing to the poor response to the problem of the disabled, how the problem has been addressed by individuals and institutions, and the measures that can be taken to address the problem holistically. The researcher facilitated activities such as the sharing of one's life experiences, and a discussion of people's world view namely; the beliefs, values and attitudes in relation to human disabilities.

1.4.1 Cultural Beliefs and Practices

Like in many other cultures in Africa and particularly in Kenya, human disability in the Otiende is associated with a curse. When one gives birth to a child with disability defects, definitely it is regarded as a punishment for the evil committed and treated as a curse. It is not only taken from the cultural point of view, but also from the religious point of view. For example In Romans 12:19 it is written very clearly that "never try to take revenge: leave that, my dear friends, to the Retribution. As scripture says: vengeance is mine- I will pay them back, the Lord promises". That is why many times, the physical sufferings are frequently interpreted as divine retribution, that is, God's punishing of Israel for its lack of fidelity.²⁰ And because of this belief

²⁰ Cf. R.E. Barron, *"The Grandfather and the Voice from the Whirlwind"*, 61.

such a born child with disabilities deserves to be socially excluded because no one can reverse what God has decided.

Other people believe that human disability is a result of the broken taboos in the family traditions. Among the Kikuyu (a tribe in Kenya) if a woman gives birth to a child and it is noticed immediately that the child is not normal, the child would be taken to the forest and suffocated to death. If the mother continues to give birth to abnormal children, it was concluded that there was a curse or a broken taboo either from the woman's or man's side.²¹ For example, a woman having sex while in the menstrual periods, committing adultery while pregnant, abusing an elder when pregnant would conceive a disabled child. Akiiki concurs with the researcher by emphasizing that people marrying outside own clans and lack of respect to the elders used to cause punishment, the couple could die or the children given birth too could die or being born with disabilities.²² When one breaks one of the taboos above, it is believed that a person is likely to give birth to a disabled child, and such a child is not meant to stay in the society, if he or she stays in the society, he or she has to be excluded from the rest of the community. Other members say that disability can also occur because of incest, that is, marrying a close uncle, aunt, daughter, son, mother in law, distant mother/father, and grand. And because of the strong belief in incest, sexual unions outside of marriage was illegal and punishable in various ways ranging from death to being excommunicated from the family and the society at large Any child born out of an incest relationship is not likely to survive according to African culture.²³ In case he or she survives, he/she has to be disabled in one or another and people cannot tamper to associate with a child who is a product of an incest relationship.

²¹ Cf. E. Bayingana, *The Church's evangelising Mission to the mentally handicapped*, 18-19.

²² Cf. B. Akiiki, *African world Religion, A grass root perspective*, 37.

²³ B. *Ibid*, 47.

Some members emphasized that human disability can come as a result of bewitching. The Kisii (a tribe in Kenya) believe that God created everything in a pure and clean manner, and any abnormality in creation is the work of the devil or bad spirits.²⁴ They say that in the society, there are some bad people who can decide to bewitch a woman when she is pregnant and she ends up giving birth to a disabled child. Shaw talks about witchcraft by emphasizing that it is a problem all over the world and it makes people cold towards God and religion. Its destructive influence can go as far as slowing down the material development of the entire community.²⁵ This point explains more why Africans fear so much witchcraft because it can finish the whole community whether directly or indirectly.

Refusing to offer sacrifices to the ancestors can result into annoying the ancestors and in the long run, the ancestors can decide to punish the society by making the pregnant of that particular society to give birth to disabled children. Akiiki affirms this assertion by saying that “each of the close relatives needed to be on his/her best behaviour towards God, the spirits, ancestors, kith and kin, neighbours and the whole community or else the developing child could be adversely affected by the consequences of any bad behaviour of such people and miscarriage or delayed delivery might occur.”²⁶ Therefore, since abnormality is associated to such social-cultural beliefs, the members do not find it normal to stay with disabled people in the same household. Some societies end up killing the disabled children, throwing them away, being hidden by their parents, and those who decide to stay with them, they exclude them or they attend to them very poorly. Bruno affirms this when he says that, “traditionally in Africa, some

²⁴ Cf. E. Bayingana, *op. cit.*, 19.

²⁵ J. Shaw, *Overcoming our Fears of Witchcraft*, 4.

²⁶ B. Akiiki, *op. cit.*, 47.

families hid mentally handicapped children because they were embarrassed of them. In some instances, such children were even killed.”²⁷

1.4.2 Social-cultural and Economic Factors

The social-cultural factors are also some of the factors that contribute to the poor response to the problem of the disabled in Otiende. The analysis done by the researcher, the Sisters and the supporting staff acknowledged that negative attitudes held by parents with disabled children and the larger Otiende community, persistent stereotyping, discrimination, rejection, neglect and abandonment are very well-known realities facing disabled children. Worth to note also is poverty which is a big problem in many parts of Africa that has contributed a lot to the problem of disability. Poverty renders those affected directly and indirectly by disability vulnerable such that, they remain unattended too in the society and lack the means to take those affected in hospitals or rehabilitation centres so that the problem can be dealt with positively. Rust and Metts affirms this problem when they say that “disability and poverty tend to go hand in hand, forming a cycle of cumulative causation.”²⁸ In many cases, as indicated by the Sisters, disability comes as a result of poverty because the disabled person cannot afford to help himself or herself to get something to do for a living, all the jobs are designed for able-bodied people which disrespect the right for all to work. And at the same time, poverty is an outcome of disability because a person who has a disabled person cannot go away to get a job without leaving someone behind to attend to the disabled person. Therefore, at the end of the day, instead of going to look for a job, the parent(s) end up staying home while attending to the disabled child/person.

²⁷ C. K. Bruno, *“The Church as Conscience and Voice of Society”*, 76.

²⁸ T. Rust and R. Metts, *Poverty and Disability*, <http://www.ecomod.org/files/papers/181.pdf>.

The problem of poverty is further explained on more by Bornstein who says that, disability is a problem that cuts across all countries, all cultures, and all social strata. But in poor countries and poor families, the problem is more severe.²⁹ A poor household that cannot afford medication, food and other basic necessities may easily be struck by disability because when the woman is pregnant, she cannot afford for ante-natal care where by the doctors can work on the problem in its infancy stage. And in case the disabled gets some treatment, it is also poor because of the standard, that is, she cannot get the necessary finances so that the problem can be dealt with completely. However, cultural beliefs are the main influence to the societal negative attitudes towards the disabled and the poor response to them thus serving as the main obstacle to the good response to the problem in the society. This hampers the realization of their dignity.

1.5 Problem Statement

The state of the disabled people is characterized by poor response from the individuals of the society. It's very clear that in every society the disabled people take a visible number of our population; hence their issues ought to be brought to the public eye. The United Nations 2007 documented that 500 million people are disabled worldwide. Statistics show that 55 million are blind, 70 million deaf, 130 million people have severe intellectual impairment, 20 million are epileptic and 160 million have some sort of mobility impairment.³⁰ The Church, religious congregations, non-government organisations have come up to address the problem of the poor response to the problem of the disabled, but in most cases such institutions are not supported by the public and the government in order to recognise the present reality of the disabled people.³¹ However, the problem to be brought to the attention and to be addressed is the problem of failing

²⁹ Cf, D. Bornstein, *op. cit.*

³⁰ Human rights of persons with disabilities, http://www.hrea.org/index.php?doc_id=416.

³¹ Cf. *World programmes of action concerning Disabled Persons*, 1

to recognise the dignity of the disabled people, which have led to poor response to the problem hence leading to discrimination, rejection, marginalization, killings, abandonment hiding and mistreatment.

Therefore, poor response to the problem of human disability is an essential social problem which needs to be addressed holistically so that the dignity, love, care, equality of all individuals can be promoted and realised in this millennium. So far, there is no other research that has been conducted in this specific place concerning the issues around the poor response to the problem of the disabled. This has created the gap between the existing literature and what is the reality on the ground. Therefore, this is the reason why the researcher chose to study the problem in order to give some recommendations.

1.6 Rationale

Many researches on people living with disabilities have been carried out, but none or a few of them emphasize on the specific problem that the disabled people experience in their lives. In this reverence, I find it crucial to carry out my research on, the factors contributing to the poor response to the problem of the disabled in the society. The outcome of this research is therefore very important in the process of transforming the society and individuals living with disabilities. This will open up people's perspective to understand the situation of the disabled people, hence promoting human dignity of every person.

1.7 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To find out the factors that contribute to poor response to the problem of the disabled.

2. To examine how the problem has been addressed by individuals and institutions.
3. To suggest the measures that can be taken to address the problem holistically.
4. To identify the biblical response to the issue of disability.

1.8 Scope

This case study is of a home for the disabled children in Otiende-Langata, St. Michael parish in the archdiocese of Nairobi which is run by the Missionaries of Charity Sisters. The Sisters do a great work of addressing the problem of the disabled in the area. The researcher has worked with them since October 2011 as he was doing his insertion process. Therefore the biggest part of work is limited to this site.

1.9 Conclusion

The first chapter has introduced the problem of disability. It presented the insertion process and experience of the researcher. The researcher brought in the social cultural analysis of the problem of the disabled, while looking into the main objectives and then towards the problem statement of the people living with disabilities. In this reverence, the next chapter is literature review whereby the researcher explores various documents and literature regarding disability.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was about the background and the significance of the study. This chapter is a review of existing literature with special regard to issues around human disabilities. The literature that is reviewed includes sources such as books, journals, electronic materials and other unpublished materials. We will look at the issues around the lives of the disabled people worldwide and locally. The main focus of this chapter is to identify the factors that contribute to the poor response to the problem of the disabled, the impact of this poor response to the disabled children, how the problem has been addressed by individuals and institutions, the measures that can be taken to address the problem of the disabled holistically in Otiende-Langata.

2.2 Meaning of Disability

Disabilities have been defined in many ways. The world programmes of action concerning disabilities defines disabilities as, “any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for human beings.”³² The Oxford dictionary defines disability as a state of being incapacitated or the lack of something necessary.³³ Both sources agree that disability has to do with a lack of something or lack of an ability to do something. In general, disabilities are features of the body, mind, or senses that, to a greater or lesser extent, affect a person’s ability to connect alone in some or all aspects of day-to-day life. Most persons with disabilities are just as healthy

³² *World programmes of action concerning Disabled Persons*, 3.

³³ Cf. S. Meheier, *Oxford Advanced Dictionary*, 338.

as people who don't have disabilities; however, for a mixture of reasons, persons with disabilities can be at greater risk for weakness in some areas of the body movement. Most people with disabilities can, and do, work, play, learn, and enjoy full healthy lives in their communities.³⁴

According to the World Health Organisation, a disability is any restriction or lack (resulting from any impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the scope considered normal for a human being. People with disabilities are part of every section of our community: men, women, and children; employers and employees; students and teachers; indigenous and non-indigenous; customers and citizens. It describes a functional limitation or activity restriction caused by impairment. Disabilities are descriptions of disturbances in function at the level of the person. The examples of disabilities include; difficulty in seeing, speaking or hearing, difficulty in moving or climbing stairs, difficulty in grasping, reaching, bathing, eating and toileting.³⁵

The only thing that distinguishes a person with disability is that they may be unable to do certain things in the same way that most people in the ordinary of society do them without some form of adaptation to assist them overcome the effects of their disability.

2.3 Causes of Disability

There are many causes of disability to human beings and some of them include; stressful life situations, that is, loss of jobs, loved ones, violence, wars, sicknesses. Traumatic family backgrounds, organic brain diseases, for example, meningitis, strokes. Hereditary genes like sickle cell anaemia, medical problems, etc... The Council for disability awareness affirms on the causes

³⁴ <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/disabilities/calltoaction/WhatIsDisability.pdf>

³⁵ *Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities, 4.*

emphasizing that Injuries at work, Freak accidents, illnesses like cancer, heart attack or diabetes cause the majority of long-term disabilities. Back pain, injuries, and arthritis are also significant causes.³⁶ The causes of disability can be broadly classified into three groups: genetic/hereditary factors, biological (including age-related) factors and accidents. There is some overlap between the categories as there may be more than one cause of disability: for example, increasing frailty may have contributed to an accident, which in turn may have caused or exacerbated a disability.³⁷

2.4 Why the Poor Response to Physically Challenged Children

According to the responses the researcher obtained from different sources the poor responses to the challenges of disability are cultural-social-religious, and economical factors as discussed below.

2.4.1 Cultural Factors

Witchcraft is a serious belief in African tradition and specifically in the Langata-Otiende region. It is seriously believed by the people in this society that witchcraft is one of the causes for a child to be born while disabled. Shaw explains what witchcraft means by saying that:

Witchcraft is an activity aimed at getting certain results that are neither within human and natural power nor expected from God. The witchdoctor should be distinguished from a “traditional healer” or “medicine man”; the medicine man intends to heal but the witch is out to destroy-although in some aspects the difference may not be clear. Witchcraft is also called “magic” or “sorcery”. At times, witchcraft also attempts to know hidden or future events which human beings cannot know naturally.³⁸

³⁶ Council for Disability awareness, http://www.disabilitycanhappen.org/chances_disability/causes.asp.

³⁷ Disability, <http://www.archive2.official-documents.co.uk/document/deps/doh/survey01/disa/disa08.htm>.

³⁸ J.Shaw, *op. cit*, 6.

Therefore from such a background, when a woman gives birth to a disabled child, the people in the society rush to conclude that this should be witchcraft. And since people do not want at all to associate with anything to do with witchcraft, they end up responding very poorly to the children born disabled, abandoning them, hiding them or eliminating them through killing.

Curses are strongly believed in by almost the whole of African traditional societies. For the case of Otiende region, majority of the people believe in the power of curses. Mwiti affirms the belief in curse by saying that many tribal groups regard handicapped children as a curse, bad omen or incomplete being unworthy of living.³⁹ In this case, if a pregnant woman abuses or does something wrong to an elder, her mother, her father or to any of her in-laws, it is believed that that person who is abused in retaliation can decide to curse that pregnant woman for her to give birth to a disabled child. It's not that every person can curse, but there are special people who have that power of cursing, and the moment that person curses you, a misfortune has to befall on you. John Mbiti emphasizes on this belief in curses by saying that if there is a dispute between neighbours or relatives and in this case if a neighbour is pregnant or a relative is pregnant, the other is tempted to use a bad tongue (curse) to affect the unborn child. If something goes wrong following such a dispute, everyone will immediately suspect that it is caused by the other party through a curse. He adds on that people who curse others like that do it as a revenge for the wrong done to him or her, and in this case if a pregnant woman is cursed and gives birth to a disabled child, it clearly indicates that the person who cursed her did it for the wrong the woman did to the other party.⁴⁰ In such an instance, people will be afraid to associate with someone who is disabled as a result of a curse because they believe that a curse can turn to them, hence neglecting and throwing away the disabled child.

³⁹ Cf. G. Mwiti, *Young lives at risk*, 35.

⁴⁰ Cf. J. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 160.

Incest is something which is an abomination in most of the cultures in the whole of Africa. Incest is when someone in the family, or someone who is like a family to another, has sex with that person he/she is related with. The Oxford dictionary defines Incest as, “the sexual intercourse between people who are too closely related to marry, for example, brother and sister or father and daughter.”⁴¹ If you are a woman, this person could be your father, stepfather, brother, stepbrother, your uncle or grandfather. If by accident a woman gets pregnant out of an incest relationship, it is believed by the society that such a child would be very weak to survive, and in case he or she survives, he or she will be having disabilities. According to the Canadian centre for the missing Children, “Incest has long been a social taboo. In the past, it was seen as a problem because it created jealousy between family members and inbreeding resulted in deformed, sickly, and improperly developed offspring.”⁴² In some societies incest was believed in some time back but in Otiende, the majority of the people still believe in them. Therefore, it would not be a shock if a disabled child is born out of an incest relationship and is not given proper attention and care like any other human being.

2.4.2 Religious Factors

It is believed in African traditional societies that evil spirits are ever hovering around looking for someone to devour or to destroy. This is affirmed by one of the sources which says that there are a handful of ancient individuals who believed that one’s injuries or disabilities were caused by an evil spirit, therefore inciting individuals to keep their distance from the disabled⁴³. There are some rituals a pregnant woman has to undergo to protect herself against these evil spirits. Failure to abide by the customs and rituals of the society by a pregnant woman,

⁴¹ S. Meheier *op. cit.*, 629.

⁴² <http://www.victimsofviolence.on.ca/rev2/index.php?>

⁴³ Cf. <http://www.helium.com/items/1943011-disabilities-living-with-rehabilitation-rehabilitation-handicap>.

it is said that the evil spirits can enter the womb of a woman and she gives birth to a deformed child. Laurent Magesa talks of these spirits as the spirits which do not receive prayers or recognition because they are not ancestors in the real sense. So, for these spirits to attract attention they cause trouble to people around, and these are the spirits which lived badly while still on earth, and they continue doing to others what they used to do while on earth. These are the spirits which did not receive proper burials, those who died without fulfilling life's expectations of acquiring wealth and children. Such spirits are angry and vengeful and they can easily cause grave harm to the community by destroying life through disease, starvation, death or giving birth to disabled children.⁴⁴ Because of the strong belief in the evil spirits and fear of the evil spirits, African people will definitely respond poorly to the disabled child whom they suspect to have been disabled due to the power of the evil spirits.

Offering sacrifices to the ancestors in African cultures is very much valued and it is a must. They are seen as dispensing both favours and misfortune; they are often accused of being unpredictable and of failing in their responsibilities, but, at the same time, their actions are related to possible lapses on the part of the living and are seen as legitimately disciplinary.⁴⁵ Failure to offer sacrifices to the ancestors can react angrily and cause catastrophes to the whole society, that is, pregnant women to give birth to disabled children as a punishment of forgetting the Ancestors. Hence obedience to the ancestors is very important in order to have a healthy and fruitful family. Bujo supplements on this point by saying that success or failure in a family or society depends on a personal choice. In freely recalling the life-giving actions and words of the ancestors, a person is choosing life; but in neglecting these

⁴⁴ Cf. L.Magesa, *African Religion*, 58.

⁴⁵ Cf. I. Kopytoff., <http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/era/ancestors/kopytoff.html>.

things like sacrifices to the ancestors, that person is choosing death.⁴⁶ In such a case, if a family ignores their ancestors by not offering sacrifices, and by a bad luck they give birth to a disabled child, the whole society will point fingers at them, hence neglecting them, abandoning them and in the end, the family will hide the disabled child which really disvalues the dignity of the human person.

Africans attach a lot of meaning to taboos. Various taboos involved a variety of forms of punishment depending upon the gravity of the offence. They included: death of the person who broke a taboo or his relatives, expulsion from the community, sickness, for example, becoming mad which affected the person himself/herself or his relatives.⁴⁷ A taboo is a ban against touching, saying, or doing something for fear of immediate harm from a mystical force. According to this meaning and the value attached to taboos, a pregnant woman is not supposed to eat certain foods, to quarrel, to abuse others, to have sexual relations, to commit adultery while pregnant and should avoid latrines. When a woman does something of the above while pregnant, it is believed by the people of the society that the child born must have defects or may be born dead. Benezet Bujo gives a lot of meaning to taboos by saying that;

Biological life is transmitted by God through the elders and the ancestors. Along with this life, God and the ancestors, and the elders in their respective positions, take care to lay down rules, in the form of laws and taboos, to ensure the prosperity of the society...Such ancestors had laid down laws, and established customs, which embodied their own experiences, and which they passed on to their descendants as a precious legacy.⁴⁸

Therefore a pregnant woman is warned not to do anything as mentioned above for her to give birth to a healthy child. In case a woman does one of the above and she gives birth to a disabled child, the society will say that she refused to abide by the taboos. In the long run, the

⁴⁶Cf. B.Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, 30.

⁴⁷ Cf. <http://mojaafryka.weebly.com/taboo.html>.

⁴⁸ B.Bujo, *op. cit.*, 21.

society will ignore her, will abandon her and herself will feel inferior to stay with such a child who is disabled.

2.4.3 Social Factors

Every boy or girl who had reached the age of maturity had to undergo some initiation rites. These rites are for the preservation and promotion of life for example, circumcision for boys and girls would prepare them how to take care of themselves when they were pregnant. If a woman misses the initiation rite, gets married and gets pregnant then at the time of delivering she gives birth to a disabled child, all blame goes to her and her family. Bujo gives a concrete meaning to initiation rites by emphasizing that initiation rites are a kind of ordination ceremony whereby young adults are consecrated especially with their procreative power into the whole community of the living and of the dead from whom flow all life and strength.⁴⁹ There is no way the society and the family of the woman will accept a child born due to the negligence of the woman not attending the initiation rites, hence poorly responding to that child or ending up killing the child.

It is unfortunate to note that some parents and the society at large after giving birth to a disabled, they attribute it as a misfortune or a punishment from God which is not true at all.

For example, one mother wrote;

What was it like to be told your beautiful first born child is physically handicapped? At first there was guilt. Maybe I had done something wrong during my pregnancy. Maybe the Doctor had done something wrong. Maybe as a couple we had done something wrong and God is punishing us, my husband's side of the family had the defect and he felt extremely guilt about it...⁵⁰

⁴⁹Cf. B.Bujo, *Ibid.*, 26

⁵⁰L. Colston, *Pastoral Care With Handicapped Persons*, xi

Others begin thinking that may be they did something evil to God in the past and God is punishing them through giving birth to a disabled child. But God is merciful and will never wish his children to suffer. God loves his people and is full of compassion and wants all his children to have a full and abundant life. All that is needed is to accept what God has given however weak that human being maybe because he/she is made out of God's own image.

2.4.4 Economical Factors

Poverty in many parts of African has contributed a lot to the problem of poor response to the problem of the disabled. Poor people are at risk of acquiring disability because of lack of access to good nutrition, healthcare, sanitation as well as safe living and working conditions. Poverty creates ill- health because it forces people to live in environments that make them sick, without decent shelter, clean water or adequate sanitation. Poverty creates hunger, which in turn leaves people vulnerable to disease. Poverty denies people access to reliable health services and affordable medicines, and causes children to miss out on routine vaccinations.⁵¹

Many parents who give birth to disabled children are poor families who cannot afford the finances to take their child for medication or some therapies because some of these disabilities can be dealt with by medical personnel when the situation is still in its infancy stages. But due to the financial burden, these parents stay with their child or neglecting their disabled children to remain like that for the rest of their lives. They at times even close lock them in the house as they go to look for meagre part time causal jobs. This indeed was the situation of most of the children who were rescued and brought to the missionaries of charity sister's home for the disabled. This problem is affirmed by the United Nations which noted that, two thirds of the total population of the disabled people live in developing countries or poor countries where advancement in

⁵¹ Cf. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPAH/Resources/Publications/Dying-for-Change/dyifull2.pdf>.

medicine is still very low. As a result of poverty, the lives of the disabled remain segregated, poorly responded to, and without any help, many of them will live in isolation, insecurity and early deaths.⁵²

Still to note on this problem is that, most of the parents of the disabled children are low income earners. They have to struggle every day to get a living hence having no time to be with their disabled child. In such a situation, the child will always be left locked in the house hence being poorly supported and attended to and their rights being abused which totally contradicts what the convention on the right of the child says that, “every child has an inherent right to life, and the state shall ensure, to the maximum, child survival and development.”⁵³

2.5 The Impact of the Poor Response to the Disabled Children

Disabled children experience several challenges in our current society which impact on their lives both negatively and positively. The United nations convention on the rights of children emphasize that children should enjoy all their rights without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his/her parents’ or legal guardians; race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic, or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, disabled children experience a lot of discrimination from other strong children, from old people, relatives and from their parents calling them names which are really derogative instead of calling them their real names. This suffering is not only on the disabled but sometimes on their parents as Perotta confirms that, human beings suffer in a thousand ways. They fall prey to anxiety, loneliness, depression, grief.

⁵² Cf. *Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities 2*.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

They feel the pain of seeing others suffer and of not being able to remove their suffering.⁵⁵ This really shows the lack of respect to the human dignity and watering down God's creation in its fullness if people do not care about those suffering (the disabled).

Many disabled children have been abandoned and rejected by their parents or relatives. The moment their disability is realised, these children are not given the attention and the child care which, their normal sibling are given. Most of the children at the Missionaries of Charity Sisters are a result of abandonment by their parents and close relatives. While journeying with them, the researcher realized that when some of them were still with their parents and relatives, most of them were treated in dehumanizing manner. These parents reject their children not knowing that at baptism one is drawn into relationship with God and therefore given the capacity to live a life of virtue and integrity, while being united to all the faithful.⁵⁶ It is so unfortunate that due to the children's physical conditions, they were regarded as objects of shame by their families thus they were not supposed to be exposed. Kenyan medical women's association asserts that "child abandonment is a common form of child abuse especially in developing countries. It often involves categories of children born with some form of disability who are left in the hospitals after birth. Others are thrown away by parents who cannot face the fact that they have given birth to deformed children."⁵⁷

Other impacts on the disabled children include undervaluing these children and stigmatizing them by their relatives, family friends and the society at large not knowing that every human being has a dignity and to oppress another human being is to sin against the image

⁵⁵ Cf. K. Perotta, *"Introducing this Month's theme: Suffering"*, 4.

⁵⁶ Cf. D. P. Horan, *"Love Lived in Community"*, 262.

⁵⁷ Kenya Medical Women's Association, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 16.

of God⁵⁸. Such attitudes from the society to the disabled children can often be more crippling than the affliction itself. Hence such dehumanizing factors in the process leads to a feeling of guilt, worry, anxiety, anger, grieving over the loss of ability, stress, blaming God why he created them, reduced self-esteem etc...⁵⁹

Killing is a mortal sin (cf. Exodus 20:13, Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2261) but it is unfortunate to note that some of the disabled children are eliminated through killing by their own parents or relatives because the parents do not see at all the value of having a disabled who is going to give them a burden in the whole of their life time. Such people who eliminate the lives of the disabled children forget that a disabled person is a full human being, that his nature is endowed with intelligence and free will. By virtue of this, he/she has rights and duties of his/her own flowing directly and simultaneously from his very nature, which are therefore universal, inviolable and inalienable.⁶⁰ The Missionaries of Charity Sisters testified during the interviews that some of the children are aborted and thrown in dustbins and are thrown into dustbins to die and that is where they picked some of the children and begun taking care of them.

2.6 How the Problem of the Disabled has Been Addressed

Various individuals and institutions that are concerned with the promotion of the dignity of humanity have been emerging time immemorial. These play specific roles that bring love, care, hope to the lives of the disabled children in the society.

⁵⁸ Cf. A. Bosnick, ed , *“Called by Name, our dignity in God”*, 14.

⁵⁹ Cf. L. Colston, *op. cit.*, xi.

⁶⁰ Cf. W. Kern, *Pastoral Ministry with Disabled Persons*, 3.

Many individuals whose conscience about the right of every individual have realised that all people have a clear duty to do what lies in their power to improve living conditions for handicapped people, rather than ignoring them or attempting to eliminate them as a burden not worth dealing with.⁶¹ For the time the researcher spent working with the disabled children, he saw many individuals coming to the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity to provide whatever possible to promote the dignity of the disabled children. Some of the things these people brought for the children include food, clothing, and other basic needs for any human being. These are the kinds of people who understand that their cultures constitutes their identity and shapes them to understand their possibilities, limitations, and temptations to discovering their specific needs and a call to redemptive healing upon those who are disabled.⁶²

Some of the disabled children, who are able to study, have been granted bursaries in some schools around. This has helped them towards self knowledge and self acceptance. The school therefore serves as a means of giving the right information to the disabled children thus empowering them. It is in schools also where people are trained and encouraged to be advocates of human rights and this enables the society to change their attitudes towards disabled children/people. The Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity have tried to take children who can read and write to school and consequently they have been empowered and many of them have changed attitudes towards their conditions. Lewis cautions other students who study with the disabled children to always accept the disabled handicapped children in the class as though he/she were a normal person.⁶³

⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶² Cf. J. E. Hug, “*Social Sin, Cultural Healing*”, 333.

⁶³ Cf. L. M. Lewis, *Exceptional Children: A Special Ministry*, 9.

The Church in collaboration with the religious congregations has done a great deal of work in addressing the problem of the disabled. This can clearly be seen at the Missionaries of Charity Sisters in St. Michael Parish. The Sisters provide holistic needs to all the disabled children at their home in collaboration with the Church. The Church has entered into the cultural setting of the people of Otiende in the spirit of the gospel openness and sharing, which has necessitated the kind of self-emptying that so characterised the life of Jesus Christ.⁶⁴ The Church being a custodian of human rights upholds the dignity of all human persons regardless of their status. In other words, the church understands that human dignity and worth are not measured by mobility, intelligence or achievement in life. She therefore holds that human life is very special, and thus speaks for all her members including those who are considered disabled. The role of the church is greatly felt at the Missionaries of Charity Sisters because the Sisters teach the children catechism courses which strengthen their faith, love, hope in the Lord Jesus Christ whom they always say that he is their Saviour.

Currently, many Non Governmental Organisations in conjunction with the government play meaningful roles in many programmes especially as providing the empowerment component in the United Nations Development Plan (UNDP).⁶⁵ Their roles and responsibilities include representing the interests of people with disabilities, providing advice about the needs of people with disabilities, educating people with disabilities about their rights, advocating and lobbying for action to ensure that governments and service providers are responsive to their rights, as well as implementation of programmes in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and provision of information about services to people with disabilities. Additionally, here in Kenya, there have been programmes sponsored by the United

⁶⁴ Cf. B. J. Pierre, *"Culture and Incarnation: A new Pentecost"*, 81.

⁶⁵ *Op. cit.*, 27.

Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO) to promote the rights and welfare of all children in order for them to enjoy their human rights to the full.⁶⁶

2.7 Measures that can be taken to address the problem of the disabled holistically

Although different individuals, communities, governments, international communities, Non Government Organisations, and the Church have worked tirelessly to handle the problem of the disabled, there is still a big gap between the real life situations of the disabled people and the able bodied persons in many of our societies. The roles that have been played so far have not yet reached a point of integrating the disabled people into their specific societies. The disabled people are real human beings though they are weak in some areas thus it is vital to implement all possible means that can facilitate their incorporation and recognition into the society.

Human disability is an issue that is very challenging in most of the cultures which needs to be addressed. This is because people lack awareness and thus continue to associate disabilities with their cultural beliefs. Creating awareness by educating the societies through seminars, and workshops will enable people especially in Langata-Otiende to understand that people with disabilities are also part of the community and are equally important. Education is equally very important. Colston stresses that, "education is universally seen as an important key to personal development, advancement, and the means to a decent life."⁶⁷ This will cause transformation to the entire society and enable all members accept a collective commitment to stamp out any attitudes that excludes the disabled people from the society.

⁶⁶ Cf. S.Muyebe, *The African Bishops on Human Rights*, 23.

⁶⁷ L. Colston, *op. cit.*, 19.

Support groups can be of great help at addressing the problem of the disabled. Most of the parents after giving birth to the disabled child, they tend to think that they are alone not knowing that disability is a universal problem. Therefore, in societies/communities, support groups, that is, members of the same problem, families with disabled children can form groups to share their feelings, challenges, ideas, practical information, and mutual support which in the process can disorient their false beliefs and superstitions about disabilities. The United Nations clarifies on this point that: “In the disability field, however, there are also many specific circumstances that have influenced the living conditions of persons with disabilities. Ignorance, neglect, superstition, and fear are social factors that throughout the history of disability have isolated persons with disabilities and delayed their development.”⁶⁸ This can be of great importance in the development of their self-esteem, acceptance of what God has given them and also to become aware that Children are a gift from God who are given out of love and deserve equal treatment like any other child.

Naturally, every human person has an inborn passion for love and to be loved. To accord the disabled children/people with love, is to empower them to feel important. Love, generally speaking, manifests itself as care. Caring includes a profound respect for the other thus enhancing the dignity of the other. It assumes that a disabled child needs to grow and has the capacity to grow in a unique way. To care is also to feel needed and to respond to that need, whether it is in respect to a parent and child, teacher and pupil, counsellor and patient wife and husband. True love and care helps us to have the ideal example of mutually creative relationships. Through giving a tender loving care to the disabled children in Langata-Otiende, the society will succeed to lessen some of the pain and suffering endured by the disabled children. It was very meaningful

⁶⁸ *The Standard rules, on the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities*, 5.

to realize that majority of the children who are at the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity were becoming cheerful while the researcher was with them. Mother Teresa, founder of missionaries of charity sisters emphasized that, “every child is a sign of Gods’ love. A child is the greatest of Gods’ gifts”. The community therefore needs to embrace, love, care, protection and in order to assist its poor, weak, sick and the handicapped members.⁶⁹

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the meaning of disability, why there is poor response to the physically challenged children, the cultural-social and religious factors contributing to the poor response, the economic factors, the impact of the poor response to the disabled children, how the problem has been addressed by individuals and institutions, and lastly, the measures that can be taken to address the problem holistically.

⁶⁹ Cf. W. Kern, *op. cit.*, 5.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Theological Reflection

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was a literature review and pointed out the meaning of disability, the factors contributing to the poor response to the problem of disability, the steps that have been taken by individuals and institutions to address the problem, and the measures that can be taken to address the problem holistically.

In this chapter on Theological Reflection, the researcher will highlight what disability means according to the Bible, how Jesus perceived disability in relation to the problem of disabled and the society. It also highlights what the teachings of the fathers of the Church calls us in view of value and dignity of every person, the African Synod response to the problem of the disabled. It also brings out the shared experience from the researcher as a source of inspiration and reflection in relation to the information gathered and analyzed.

3.2 Biblical Understanding of the Problem of Disability

The general view of the Old Testament writers is that God brings disability as punishment for transgressions for sin or as an expression of God's wrath for people's disobedience. The Bible portrays disability as a curse and as a result of disobedience, unbelief, and ignorance. In Leviticus 26:14-16, as one of the punishments for Israel's disobedience is expressed in the following way: "I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life."⁷⁰ The inclusivity of the disabled is seen in

⁷⁰ P. Otieno, <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/988/1164>.

God's plan for the restoration of the Israelites. We find God assuring the remnant of His people, Israel in Babylon, that the land of their captivity would be restored to them and that they would return back to Jerusalem: "See, I will bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them the blind and the lame" (Jeremiah 31:8, 9). Micah 4:6-7 sets out God's plan concerning the people of Israel: "In that day, declares the Lord, I will gather the lame, I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought grief, I will make the lame a remnant, and those driven away a strong nation."⁷¹ Therefore from such a background God assures the people of the renewed relationship as it was from the beginning when he was creating the world.

But when you go back at the creation story in Genesis it is well stipulated that each and every child is a unique individual created as equals, out of chaos and in the image of God with intrinsic value (Genesis. 1:26). This means that each and every individual whether disabled or not, is created in the image of God and God in full communion with him and need to be loved unconditionally. His purpose of creating every individual (disabled and not disabled) was to create harmony between his creatures. Then it would be very disastrous to discontinue the harmony which God intended while creating by responding very poorly to our brothers and sisters who have some disabilities on their bodies.

God never finished the work of creation but He invited everyone to participate in his work of creation so that people may reach full maturity which will be realised in his Son Jesus Christ. The way humanity participate in this work of creation is by taking care of God's creation

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

with compassion and love (Genesis 1:28). And if people take good care of their brothers and sisters who are weak or disabled, they are participating in God's work of creation because God created everyone to be happy and enjoy life to the full in his name so that everyone may reach full maturity in knowing him and serving him through their brothers and sisters.

Humanly speaking it can be painful to be different from the rest of the members of the society, but in God's Kingdom, "to shame what is strong, God has chosen what the world counts weakness" (1 Corinthians 1:25-31). For example, some key Biblical characters, like Moses (Exodus 4) God called Moses who was disabled to lead the Israelites out of Egypt where they were enslaved for years. "I am slow and hesitant of speech" (Exodus 4:11). Moses became one of the faithful and the strong instrument of God, by leading the Israelites and all other nations to freedom. In fact God used Moses' weakness to teach him that he was not alone, he could work together with other people such as Aaron and others, and God was always with him.

Many people in African cultures believe that disability is a result of human sin upon God and God retaliates by punishing them through giving birth to a child who is disabled (Leviticus 26:14-17). But disability is not due to sin of the child or parents or because of a lack of faith of the child or parents. It may be a wonderful revelation to a child with disabilities or to the parents when they find that God loves them unconditionally, and that they have equal access to Him in prayer and worship like any other child, man or woman. "I call you by name" says the Lord "You are mine" (Isaiah 43:1). Each and every child or person is called by God and created by God out of love. This means that God has never wished anything bad to happen to his creatures though a person maybe weak in some aspects of his life. God loves him or her and is calling upon him or her to serve him unconditionally so that he can experience the love, joy and hope in

God. This is a reminder to each and every person that God is merciful and compassionate and he knows each person whom he cares and loves unconditionally.

St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians talks about disability as; ‘Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour...Now you are the body of Christ and each of you is a part of it.’ (1 Corinthians 12: 22-3, 27). The Bible gives the researcher a satisfactory understanding of what disability means which the researcher believes will help him as he continues to analyze the whole issue of the problem of the disabled in the society, which is reflected in the light of the word of God in a theological understanding. This will be in relation to the daily experience of life situations concerning the problem of disability in the society.

If full maturity is seen as “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13) in whom “all the fullness of the divinity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9) individuals need to accept that for all of humanity, there is, and always will be a limit to how far wholeness is achieved. As Christians, it is believed to be true whether or not a child or any other person has any kind or form of disability. In fact, none of the people will reach complete wholeness until they reach heaven. This clarifies that everyone is disabled in one way or another and needs to work on all his/her disabilities and most specifically, there is a need to attend to the visible disabilities of the fellow human beings so that they can also experience God’s presence in their lives through putting what people profess in practice.

Children with disabilities are ‘whole’ as they are and to say otherwise it indicates that people are distorting the image of God who created them in His own image. It also perpetuates the notion that a disabled person means one is not a whole person, that is, in thinking, feeling,

doing, and with the same needs and desires as non-disabled. In contrast, at the Missionaries of Charity Sisters, the disabled children are often seen as a value though they are weak in some parts of their bodies which the able bodied people need to help them to experience the love of God rather than being contributors to their distortion of the image of God because, all need to experience God's love. Unfortunately, as the researcher has mentioned above, children with disabilities more than other children may experience prejudice and rejection from an early age because of people's relationship with them. So, the response of every individual must provide an alternative loving environment to the disabled children.

St. Paul too had disabilities and God used him for the salvation of humanity. But he has answered me, 'my grace is enough for you: for power is at full stretch in weakness.' It is then, about my weaknesses that I am happiest of all to boast, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2Corinthians 12:9). This would not have been the case if God did not mean disabled people to be around. But God used their disabilities so that all may know that He is Sovereign forever and that His creation is not about individuality but interdependence and togetherness or oneness of human beings. Therefore, all are interdependent with one another, and caring for the disabled is a promotion of this interdependence, unity, and responding to them poorly or isolating them, people are not promoting the interdependence God intended in His work of creation.

It is very interesting that during Jesus' time, his fundamental ministry was with the disabled in the society. Jesus responded to the needs of the weak in the society, he was always paying attention to the needs of the people especially those considered disabled in the society. He healed many both spiritually and physically, fed them and quenched their thirst of water and for God. Jesus transformed the people to enter into a new way of life. For example, In Mathew, 9:27-31, Jesus' healing of the two blind Men, cure of a man with a skin disease (Mathew, 8:1-4),

curing of the centurions' servant (Mathew 8:5-13), curing of Peters' mother in law (Mathew 8:14-15) and many other healings Jesus performed which really shows that Jesus was very much concerned about the inauguration of a new era in totality of human experiences at both the individual and society level.

In the whole of Jesus ministry, Jesus felt the sufferings, discrimination, isolations, condemnation of the society towards those who were disabled in one or another (cf. Mathew 9:27-31). He never stopped at only feeling their sufferings but he healed them, comforted them, forgave them, supported them , and he was ever with them and at the end of it all, they were transformed and they became a source of light and witness to the rest of the society. He then, challenged all the people around to do the way he does his ministry by sharing in the sufferings of all those who are segregated and poorly attended too so that they can also share in the fullness of life which is realised in the Son of God, the Christ. People too are challenged to offer unconditional care, love and be responsible to their fellow human beings so that they can true witnesses of his word and actions.

He liberated the weak/disabled by firstly removing the obstacles that held up their abilities so that they could have access to Jesus. By this example, Jesus is challenging all people of good will and most specifically the Christians to work hard through the light of the gospel to remove all obstacles in the society such as cultural beliefs, economical factors, social factors etc, that hamper people with disabilities to have access to God and other human needs in the society because, the disabled are part of this sacred body, the Church. The only way the Church can be a faithful disciple of Christ is by following his mission of liberating all people from all beliefs and factors that hold them back from experiencing the saving power of Christ.

Christ has shown all who he is and how all can identify with him. For example, in the beatitudes he says, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink...” (Mathew 25:35). In other words, Christ is ever present in the people society tend to reject, people tend to isolate, discriminate and people attend too poorly, that is, the disabled in the society. In the current situation, Christ will add, “I was disabled and you rejected me, isolated me, ridiculed me, you hindered me access to better living conditions, you abandoned me and threw me out of the home, and I was not able to experience the love and word of God in my life”. This teaches clearly that people are not going to find Christ in the extra ordinary activities but through the small things of serving and attending to the disabled brethren. This concurs what the Mathew gospel emphasizes that whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters who are weak in some areas, you do it unto me (cf. mathew25:40). And if individuals who call themselves able-bodied segregate the disabled, poorly respond to them, people then openly separate themselves from God and His kingdom.

What people need to do is to come down from the tussles they have built, where they have put themselves and end up isolating themselves from the real life situations where they can experience God. This will help all to come where God resides, that is, in the disabled people. Moreover Christ himself thanks his Father by saying that, “I bless you Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children (Mathew 11:25)”. There is no doubt therefore, that the disabled people carry a great treasure of the mystery God’s presence. If the people and more so the Christians are unable to discover the presence of God in the disabled, then how are they going to realise and experience the Kingdom of God without serving their neighbours in need?

Every person needs to keep in mind that if he or she discriminates against persons with disabilities, denying them chances to have access to the necessities of life and their freedom as human beings, then people are violating the rights of the disabled people and all are behaving contrary to the will of God of creation, that is, that all may be happy and may be one (cf. John 17:21). Therefore every member of the society whether Christian or not, is reminded by the Gospel of his/her role of being the good news by freeing the captives (the disabled) and uplifting the lives of the poor such as the disabled people (cf. Luke 4:8). The Church through the congregation of the sisters of charity have decided to go on with work of taking care of the disabled children so that the disabled may experience God's unconditional love and the sisters too, to experience the salvific values in serving the marginalized in the society. And if people still have the faith that Jesus still heals as he did 2000 years ago, it is time to launch and pray for inner healing upon the disabled and those who discriminate the disabled.⁷²

Jesus always reached out to those who the society wouldn't normally feel comfortable with and to what his disciples also considered not worth to be in contact with Jesus. For example, Jesus' attention and healing the blind man when he was entering the city of Jericho (Luke 18:35-43), Jesus' forgiveness of a woman who was considered a sinner in the society (Luke 7:36-50). No one wanted to associate with this woman but Jesus because of his loving mercy and unconditional love to everyone; he went ahead and forgave her sins. Therefore, all Christians who have been hearing Gods' word now and then, and who have been transformed by his teachings. It's a call to each one to take care of his/her fellow human being who is weak because if you do not do so, you are doing contrary to the message of Jesus which will be an expression of sin, a negation of Gods' love and forfeiting the message of Christ.

⁷² Cf. P. Mitchell, J. Kun, "*In the Name of Jesus, The Power of Healing Prayer*", 17.

Therefore, the message of Gods' love for sinful man through the gift of His only Son is to redeem Humankind including the disabled because they too need to know that they have redemption. They too need to grow in Christian attitudes and behaviour. All have the responsibility for providing them with appropriate religious training, love, charity, and truth to facilitate the realization of their goals in life.⁷³ Jesus teaches all people to have compassion for all human beings because Jesus in all His ministry life had a special concern for the afflicted as the researcher has indicated above. What people must remember however, is that Christ expects all to carry on His ministry among all people without excluding any of them. United by this knowledge, people strive to nurture and sustain the faith of the disabled children and the whole of humanity.⁷⁴

On this note, people with disabilities and others should live together in community so that all may experience Gods' love because loving someone is not doing things for them but revealing to them that they are precious, and to know and to experience Gods' love through their actions.

3.3 The Church's Teaching on the People with Disability

According to the Catholic social teaching, the Church is one and the Church is the body of Christ, whereby all people are part of it. St. Paul affirms the Church as the body of Christ in his first letter to the Corinthians (1Corinthians 12:12-30). In other words, people with disabilities and those people without disabilities are equal members of the Church and they all make up the body of Christ. But in most cases, the Christians forget the teaching of St. Paul by mistreating their brothers and sisters who have some disabilities on their bodies not knowing that by

⁷³ Cf. R. Hahn, *Helping the retarded to Know God*, 34.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

mistreating or responding to them poorly, they are affecting the performance of the body of Christ, ridiculing this body, killing this body and are contributing to disunity and disintegration of the body of Christ.

The second Vatican Council states very clearly that, through fidelity to the example and teaching of Jesus, Christ showed special care for the suffering in all the wide range of human pain. During his ministry, he embraced the neglected, the disadvantaged, the poor, the suffering and the sick to whom, he specially brought, in words and actions, the proclamation of the good news of God's Kingdom breaking into human history⁷⁵. This teaching is very important to all the Christians because when Jesus came he broke all the boundaries of human cultures which are not in line, for the promotion of the human dignity and respect to human life. In this line, the time is at hand for renewed reflections and articulations of how individuals may execute life directives that respect the dignity of human life and conform to Catholic moral teaching⁷⁶. Therefore, as Christians, they should reflect and put into action the words of Jesus so that they can promote the dignity of all the creatures God created in love and truth. It is a call to all human beings not only Christians but all humanity because there is no religion or there is no believer who believes or professes in devaluing the dignity of the human person. In order for love of Christ to be experienced in the hearts of all, the message of Christ has to be the source of life and direction.

The Second Vatican Council continues to bring some principles concerning the dignity of the human person. These principles include; the disabled person (whether the disability be the result of a congenital handicap, chronic illness or accident, or from a mental or physical deficiency, and whatever the severity of the disability), is a fully human subject with the

⁷⁵ Cf. The Holy See, *Vatican II Documents*, 543-544.

⁷⁶ Cf. E. C. Brugger, S. Pavela, "*Polst and Catholic Health Care*", 3.

corresponding innate, sacred and inviolable rights⁷⁷. This principle teaches and reminds all not to judge a human person by his/ her appearance. A human being is more than what is seen by the naked eyes. He or she has intrinsic values and by judging a person on the physical appearance, it's like judging God who created the human being. The outside appearance makes a very minute percentage of the whole person and what is not seen; it is what a person is. This calls for more respect and concern for the person the way he or she is, so that all can participate fully in the order and work of creation.

The second principle is a reminder to every individual that the disabled person must be helped to take her/his place in the society in all aspects and at all levels as far as it is compatible with his/her capabilities⁷⁸. This will help the disabled to grow in an atmosphere where he/she will be able to get full access to all essential needs of a person. And he or she will be able to grow up in an environment of love, care and compassion. This still will help him/her to develop a good self-esteem towards the community, family members and to the whole of the humanity in general. But if a disabled person is not helped to take his or her place in society, he/she will be having a distorted world-view which leads to poor development of low self-esteem towards the disabled themselves.

The Holy See clarifies that the quality of the society and a civilization is measured by the respect shown to the weakest of its members⁷⁹. Societies which respond poorly to its weakest members, that is, to the disabled in society, they portray as if they are very backward where the message of Christ has not yet reached or who do not exactly know the meaning of human life. But in this situation, many people have received the message of Christ, yet they have not let the

⁷⁷ Cf. The Holy See, *op. cit.*, 544.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Ibid.* 545.

⁷⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*

message of Christ penetrate into their hearts so that they can reach a point of saying, it's no longer I living, but Christ living in me (cf. Galatians 2:20). The researcher also concurs with the Holy See's assertion because when you look into the situation of most the first world countries, the disabled people are treated with a lot of respect, love care and total compassion. Therefore, it is a call to each and every individual to make Christ alive in the everyday activities of their lives.

Many disabled people in the society are not put in the limelight. If not eliminated through killings as earlier mentioned, they are hidden, discriminated, poorly responded too and rejected by the family members, their parents and relatives too. But the Holy See with His authority which comes from above tells all people that the fundamental approach to the problems connected with sharing by the disabled in the life of the society must be inspired by the principle of integration, normalization, and personalization⁸⁰. If people put this in mind and in action, not forgetting that all are human beings created out of God's goodness, then the world and all its creatures will live a happier life which is reflected in the teachings of the Church in light of the gospel.

What every individual should know is that, the human person stands above all things, that is, there is an absolute superiority of the human being to all other beings⁸¹. This does not imply that the able bodied people are superior to the disabled people. All are the same, all are one and all have the same dignity which means that all should treat each other with respect and dignity. But poorly attending to the fellow human beings thinking that they are superior to them while basing on their disoriented and baseless argument on their weakness should not be an excuse to

⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibid.* 5.

⁸¹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 26.

under look them. Rather, it should be an invitation to every Christian to participate in helping the disabled to reach full maturity and fulfilment in life.

Gaudium et Spes sees that the Church considers it, its duty to protect the rights of every person⁸². In this way, the Church has an obligation to cross borders of any kind proclaiming this message. The Church has to penetrate in any form of human culture, political, social, economic systems where these systems do not promote the rights of all individuals in the society. The bad values and beliefs in these systems should be preached against so that the prophetic witness of the Church through Jesus Christ can be realised and lived to the full. The Church has still an obligation to correct, reprove, and sanctify in bad and in good times for the common good and welfare of the society, the Church as conscience of the society must speak out⁸³. The Church as an institution will therefore be able to work together freely under any kind of government and other systems in the society, which grants recognition of the basic rights of the person, the family, and the demands of the common good⁸⁴. However, the Church regrets the discrimination, rejection, abandonment and mistreatment against the faithful in certain societies which disregard the basic rights of the human person and try to build up a society with no regard to the promotion of the common good and the dignity to all individuals irrespective of their abilities⁸⁵.

Pope John XXIII in his Encyclical Letter, *Pacem in Terris*, reminds the Universal Church that;

“Every man has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life; these are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and finally the social services. Therefore, a human being also has the right to security in cases of sickness, inability to work, widowhood, old age, unemployment, or in any other case in which he is deprived of the means of subsistence through no fault of his own.”⁸⁶

⁸² Cf. *Ibid.* no. 41.

⁸³ Cf. C. B Kabir, “*The Church as Conscience and Voice of Society*”, 76.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no, 42.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no, 36.

⁸⁶ Pope John XXIII, *Pacem In Terris*, 5.

Therefore, basing on the Pope's reminder, it is a call to every Christian to respect every individual the way God created him or her. This respect has to be exercised through the way people respond to their brothers and sisters in need, most especially the disabled or those who are weak in some parts of their bodies. But if individuals go ahead and mistreat, discriminate and reject their own brothers, they are totally forgetting their Christian calling, which makes them sinful in the eyes of God. It is call to be united with their fellow human beings so that they can receive from them, and them also to receive from the disabled the love of God which is reflected in his created creatures. Christ the Lord indicates this way especially when, as the council teaches, by his incarnation, he the Son of God in a certain way united himself with each man. The Church therefore sees its fundamental task in enabling that union to be brought about and renewed continually through people's actions and behaviours of their daily lives by responding to the needs of their neighbours⁸⁷.

It is very painful to hear some of the stories from the disabled children at the Sisters of Charity. Some are really very bitter saying that they do not want to do anything with human beings because their own parents wanted them to be dead. They used not to be attended too by their own parents, food used to be thrown to them and others were really thrown out of their homes by their own parents. Some of the Children were aborted but by God's grace, they survived and were picked by the Sisters. Others were thrown to dust bins and that is where well wishers picked them and brought them to the Sisters of charity. But the Scripture and the Church teaches that, the human person is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of

⁸⁷ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no.13

conception, and therefore from that very moment his rights as a person must be recognised, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life⁸⁸.

There is no way people will witness to the love of Christ if they do not love their own fellow human beings irrespective of the abilities and disabilities. Pope John Paul II supplements on the virtue of love by clarifying that, love for others, and in the first place love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice. Justice will never be fully attained unless people see in the poor person, who is asking for help in order to survive, not in annoyance or a burden, but an opportunity for showing kindness and a chance for greater enrichment.⁸⁹ However much people will profess that they love Christ without putting that love in assisting and helping their fellow brothers and sisters in need, they will be wasting their time and the message of Christ, will not be concrete in their hearts.

3.4 African Synod on Human Rights

The African Bishops also sat and discussed on the issue of human rights so that human dignity can be promoted and realised. The Bishops emphasized that, the right to life means each person has the freedom from an arbitrary deprivation of his/her life. In its wide interpretation, the right to life means that the state is required to take such positive measures as to reduce infant mortality, to increase life expectancy and to eliminate malnutrition and epidemics.⁹⁰ And if the state works hand in hand with the ministry of health, then the disability problem can be reduced because most of the disability issues are escalated because of lack of good medical facilities to deal with the problem in its infancy stages.

⁸⁸ Dignitas Personae, *The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith*, no. 4.

⁸⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 58.

⁹⁰ Cf .S. Muyebe, *op. cit*, 23.

The Bishops of Kenya said that the enjoyment of the right to life is applicable from the moment of conception. Abortion therefore constitutes a grave violation of the right to life. They add on that the Church and the society at large, must insist on the right of all human beings to life. This is the most fundamental human right, and it applies to all humans equally, even those who are not yet born.⁹¹ Tarimo is in the line of the African bishops when he says that, “human rights and the common good are mutually correlative, it is impossible of speaking of the common good where there is a denial of human rights.”⁹² This is a call to all Church leaders to be more prophetic witnesses because, many women resort to aborting the moment they realise that the baby in the womb is deformed. Others decide to kill them the moment after delivery. This is totally evil and against the commandment of God, “Thou shall not kill” (Exodus 20:13). People should do good to their fellow humans because the Lord Jesus spent his public life going out doing good, healing, forgiving, comforting, and showing compassion and concern for all forms of human suffering. He did not come to condemn people. At the same time, he openly confronted the evils that oppress people. Therefore a human being should not be subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Each child has a right to special care and attention. The welfare and interests of the child should be recognised and protected. The children are vulnerable and therefore needs special protection to enjoy their human rights to the full.⁹³

The message of Gods’ love for sinful man through the gift of his only son to redeem humankind is meant also for the disabled. They too need to know that they have redemption.

⁹¹ Cf .S. *Ibid*, 26.

⁹² A. Tarimo, “*The Future of Human Rights debate*”, 10.

⁹³ Cf .S. Muyebe, *op. cit.*, 292.

They too need to grow in Christian attitudes and behaviour. People have a responsibility for providing them with appropriate religious training to facilitate the realisation of these goals.⁹⁴

Jesus teaches to have compassion for all humans. Indeed much of the New Testament reveals that Christ had a special concern for the afflicted. What people must remember, however, is that, Christ expects all to carry on his ministry among all people. United by this knowledge, people are to strive to nurture and sustain the faith of the disabled children.⁹⁵

3.5 The Researcher's Experience as he Worked with the Disabled Children

Many people have asked the researcher what drew him to do a research on human disability, and it's a difficult question to answer. For the researcher's confirmation, among the courses the researcher did, the researcher did a course on human disabilities which after the class work; the researcher wanted to explore more in this field in a practical way. Through the researcher's work and insertion experience at the Missionaries of charity sisters, where the researcher did his practicum, the researcher was captivated by the community, that is, by the warmth and friendliness of the workers, the disabled children and sisters who managed the home. For the first time in his life since he had never attended to disabled people, the researcher felt accepted for who he is, not for what he could do. The researcher began working with the disabled children, the supporting staff and the Sisters in charge of the place. It probably sounds unoriginal, but from the very beginning it became apparent that whatever the researcher gave while serving the disabled children, the researcher received much more (Luke 6:38). Working with the disabled people is a very humbling experience. It is a quiet place; a place where the tears of the dying and the tears of the searching meet; a place where east meets west; where

⁹⁴ R. Hahn, *op. cit.*, 34.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 35.

boundaries are broken (cf. Hebrews 5:7). The researcher was continually humbled in the whole practicum exercise, for example, one girl thanked the researcher for helping her eat and she prayed that may God continue blessing the researcher.

In the society, many disabled people are dying without anything and anyone; forgotten by the world; rejected; unwanted; unloved by their own parents and loved ones. This truly shows the influence of archaic cultural beliefs in People's live. Many people in Otiende are still tied in the cultural beliefs which are not helping them in their growth and living practically the message of Christ in their concrete daily and family life. Jesus came to liberate all people from all beliefs that do not contribute to the building of God's kingdom. People of Otiende need to be re-evangelized so that they can be able to integrate the cultural values which are good into their lives as Christians, and get rid of those cultural beliefs that are in contradiction with the message of Christ, that is, loving one another as each loves his/herself. One girl in particular stands out in the researcher's memory – she had such sad eyes; our lives had been so different; different languages and cultures and customs; yet as the researcher fed her, they were somehow united “together” in humanity. That shared experience matters, and you realise that touching each other's brokenness is where people find Jesus (cf. Isaiah 53:4-5). This girl is totally a free person, free from cultural beliefs which do not value the dignity of humanity because, she saw in the researcher the person of Christ and the researcher saw in her the person of Christ.

Their expression of faith in daily life through prayer and concern for one another was for the researcher a great manifestation of God's presence, their suffering and innocent looking faces, revealed the face of God to the researcher and how innocent the world can be through persons with disabilities. This experience has liberated the researcher from all the prejudices he

had towards people with disabilities and gave him new insights and horizons in looking at them. In fact they revealed to him what Jesus meant by telling his followers to take their cross and follow him (cf. Luke 9:23). That is to say, despite of the disabled people's sufferings, they were able to see the loving kindness of God. Sincerely speaking these children are really liberated, their conversations are about Jesus who rescued them from people who never wanted to take care of them, who abandoned them, who mistreated them and wanted them dead. At the end of the tunnel, they have seen the light; they are witnesses of this light (Cf. Psalm 107:19-20).

According to the researcher's observation in Otiende, many parents of the disabled children are still bound by their cultures. They totally believe in their cultures than in the gospel of Christ. Even cultural beliefs which do not promote the dignity of the human person are still tying them. They believe disability comes as a result of bad omen. Therefore, they see no value of staying with a disabled child (bad omen). But Christ is powerful more than any bad omen, more than any human power or evil spirit, he came to conquer all so that all may live in peace and love. Parents of the disabled children need to put on the amour of Christ and take care of their disabled children so that they can be liberated from the slavery of negative cultural beliefs.

The researcher then kept on asking himself, suppose he becomes disabled one day, will he be able to take his cross and continue professing his faith as a Christian? Which image of God will he be having? The researcher feels that people can truly meet Jesus, the good shepherd who carefully continues to watch over his sheep, guiding and leading them to a place of fulfilment (cf. John 10:11). Now the researcher sees that Jesus is calling and sending him to reveal his image present in non-disabled and disabled people to all cultures who have distorted beliefs on the disabled people. The researcher feels it is his duty as a pastoral agent to go and integrate the disabled children into the society and help the society to recognise the face of God in their

disabled counterparts who are unnoticed and poorly attended too by many people. Pope Benedict XVI puts it that, contemplating him whom they have pierced moves us in this way to open our hearts, recognizing the wounds inflicted upon the dignity of the human person.⁹⁶ For it is through integration that society will learn and experience the love and presence of God in their lives.

Without welcoming in love and faith Jesus present in the disabled, there is no fullness of life. Through the formation as ministers of the word and sacraments, ministers seek to become a message of joy and hope, of life and salvation, the salvation of Jesus to the world. In this kind of ministry, ministers will meet all kinds of people; sorrowful, sad, poor, etc but still seeking for the message of salvation. When caring for the person with disabilities people begin by imagining that they are giving them, but they end up by realising that they have enriched them, as the researcher was enriched in the whole process of the insertion experience.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the theological reflection basing on the biblical understanding of disability as its starting point. The researcher begun from the Old Testament going up to the New Testament. Then the Church's teaching on disability, the African synod on human rights and the researcher's experience as he worked with the disabled children.

⁹⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Papal message for Lent 2007*, www.zenit.org.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 General Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims at giving some conclusions and recommendations basing on the findings from the study objectives. The recommendations are intended to promote human dignity, for a deeper evangelization and re-Christianization of all Christians.

4.2 General Conclusion

This study concludes that factors such as cultural beliefs and religious practices, economic, and social-cultural factors hinder the process of enhancing the dignity of the disabled people in Otiende. Therefore, the promotion of human dignity is the work of every person. It is the responsibility of the Church to ensure that people are living according to the Christian invitation of imitating Jesus and his redemptive work here on earth. By doing this, each member will come to realize the need to love and appreciate the giftedness of one another.

The government leaders have also the responsibility of making earnest efforts to bring about a situation where people can easily exercise their rights and fulfil their duties as children of God. They are called to stand strongly to defend those who have been denied their rights most especially the disabled children/people.

It is through the work of restoring the dignity of each other that Christians can encounter God and express their faith in word and action. This will create a family that respects the principles that promote human equality and rights. Creating awareness on the issues about

disability is very necessary to the community. This will influence the community to change attitude towards the disabled people thus giving them their due respect.

The society has a lot to do in order to embrace the disabled people and to improve on their life situations so that the poor response accorded to them may be dealt away with. For centuries, the Church has been at the forefront in care giving and in promoting the rights of the persons with disabilities, but all in all, the Church as a whole, has a big challenge to do more in order to protect them. To do this the Church needs to observe the rights of all people, and improve on her attitudes towards them through the daily living on what she the Church preaches. The Holy Fathers have been voicing their concerns in challenging us Christians to live our faith, by being in solidarity with the disabled people. But despite of these wonderful teachings, the disabled people seem to be left out by society at large and that is why we witness poor response to the disabled people in the society today. Though there is a lot of effort shown by the Church to improve the conditions of the disabled children, on a personal level, something is still lacking, that is, living the gospel values by all Christians.

Jesus Christ himself has shown us a great example of tender loving care for the weak members of the society by being in solidarity with them. Basically, this was one of his missions in the world, to serve such people with disabilities in order to empower them to be strong spiritually and physically. He came to liberate people from what hinders them from recognising their dignity before God. It seems that most of the people in the Church have not understood the mission of Christ fully. Responding poorly to our brothers and sisters who are disabled in our families and in our society, is refusing the mission of Christ. The mission of deliverance of Jesus and his loving care towards those who are afflicted, should lead us to a significant change for the better in our way of thinking and behaving towards those with disabilities. But we tend to forget

that when we serve the disabled people, we are really serving Jesus Christ and God who sent His son so that we may all be delivered from the darkness of this world.

4.3 Recommendations

4.3.1 To the Families/Parents

The families of the disabled people/children are the basic unit of their existence. They need to show the disabled children the basic love and acceptance that is due to any human person because; a child needs to feel that he or she is loved no matter what unconditionally⁹⁷. The treatment of the family to the disabled people will influence the attitude of the entire society. Pope John Paul clarifies by saying that:

Within the people of life and the people for life, the family has a decisive responsibility. This responsibility flows from its very nature as a community of life and love, founded upon marriage, and from its mission to guard, reveal and communicate love. Here it is a matter of God's own love, of which parents are co-workers and as it were interpreters when they transmit life and raise it according to his fatherly plan. This is the love that becomes selfless, receptiveness and gift. Within the family, each member is accepted, respected and honored precisely because he or she is a person; and if any family member is in greater need, the care which he or she receives is all the more intense and attentive.⁹⁸

The family should therefore give children unconditional love and encourage the disabled children to do what they can in order to gain self independence. Therefore, since the parents are the primary care-givers, they are obliged to observe and enforce the rights of children in their daily lives.⁹⁹

Accepting responsibility by the parents is another idea to respect the rights of all children. It is the responsibility of the parents to make sure that the disabled children get what is due to them, as well as integrated upbringing. The disabled have a right to good and dignified living

⁹⁷ Cf. A. Nolan, "*On being a Christian today*", 51.

⁹⁸ Pope John Paul II, "*Evangelium Vitae*" no. 92.

⁹⁹ Cf. B. SSetuma, J.M. Waliggo, "*The rights of a child*", 47.

conditions which should be initiated and supported by a good family. Parents are called to accept with love their duty to bring up children responsibly and not dispose them to mistreatments, rejection, abandonment, and killings because of their physical appearance. It is above all in raising well children, that the family fulfills its mission to proclaim the Gospel of Life. It is through concrete signs and actions, parents lead the children to authentic freedom, actualized in the sincere gift of self, and they cultivate in them respect for others, a sense of justice, solidarity and all other values which help to live life as a gift.¹⁰⁰ We should therefore draw the disabled children closer to concrete way of life and to God, reaching out to them with compassion and understanding.

4.3.2 To the Church

The Church is the guardian of human rights and the conscience of the society. Therefore, it is the Church's responsibility and moral obligation to speak out and condemn any kind of evil in the society. That is, the evil of rejection of the disabled people, mistreating them, discrimination against them and killing the disabled. The Church has the God given Authority to direct all people and guide them in ways of salvation following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, "the Church can take such a strong stand on the value and dignity of the person, because the Church looks beyond the physical aspect and sees also the spiritual aspect of the person which is not diminished with a handicapping condition."¹⁰¹

The researcher urges the Church to be the key part of the teaching role towards a deeper evangelization for the purpose of achieving genuine understanding of the dignity of the human person irrespective of his or her weaknesses. The Church should go forward and witness to the

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Pope John Paul. *op. cit.*, no. 92

¹⁰¹ W.Kern, *op. cit.*, 3.

gospel because Christ said in Luke 4:18, “the spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives”. The Church therefore calls upon every Christian to respond to Luke’s gospel(Luke 4:18) to bring the good news to the poor.¹⁰² The Church therefore has a mandate of ensuring that the disabled people are well protected from mistreatments of any kind which disrespects the dignity of the human person. The Church again calls on all people promote development of every person especially the poorest and the neglected in the community.¹⁰³ The Church should take her role of encouraging the families that are hit by disability by organizing meetings or workshops for such families and also bring them together with other members who are not direct victims of the disability. Through these meeting and workshops, families or parents gets support so that they may not feel out of place and isolated. In all spheres of life, the Church needs to be involved in the point of re-evaluating her practices and preaching against all the negative cultural influences in the society because these negative cultural beliefs are sinful when they devalue the dignity of the human person. Harn affirms this by emphasizing that man’s sinful condition is reflected in his often cruel and thoughtless treatment of the disabled people in the name of cultural beliefs and practices.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the Church needs to fight all these bad cultural beliefs which devalue the dignity of humanity so that the Church can build the real body of Christ in which all human beings participate actively towards fulfilment.

4.3.3 To the Community or Society

Colston once said that; “Non-handicapped people are often unsure about how to relate to disabled persons. Rather than go through the embarrassment of learning what to say or what to

¹⁰² Cf. A. Shirengo, “*Reviewing Dube, Musa, The HIV and AIDS Bible*”, 84.

¹⁰³ Cf. P. Rutechura, “*Church in Reconciliation: Justice and Peace in the AMECEA Region*”, 182.S.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. R. Hahn, *op. cit.*, 35.

do or how to feel, they simply ignore the handicapped, wittingly or unwittingly discriminate against the disabled.”¹⁰⁵ There is a need for sensitizing the community, parents, and everybody in the society and inform them on the situation of persons with disabilities and what it is all about, in order for them to change their mentality and perceptions. Moreover it is very vital for a greater public education on different issues concerning the disabled people in the communities because the society needs to change its perception on disability issues. It was clear to the researcher that majority of the people who respond poorly to the problem of the disabled lack sufficient knowledge and information to enable them discern the value of every individual however much weakness that person has. In the book of prophet Hosea chapter 4:6 it says very clearly that, my people are perishing because they lack knowledge. Prophet Hosea justifies what the researcher had in mind before he began conducting his research among the disabled. When the researcher went into the study, he never thought that the disabled are fully human beings. The researcher thought that the disabled people lack a lot that constitutes a human being. However, his mind has changed after interacting with this naked reality of the disabled with no shepherd, with no one to take them by hand and no one to show them the way to life. This would imply therefore that the society has to change its perception about this issue and move forward into offering help to those in direct need of help. The public in general need to be informed or educated on the need to take care of the disabled. Our society also needs to create institutions that handle disability issues in which the society can be sensitized on the rights of individuals in the society; the government needs to establish institutions in villages and in towns to take care of disability issues.

¹⁰⁵ G. Colston, *op. cit.*, xi.

4.3.4 To all Christians

Anyone who dares call himself or herself a Christian is bound to emulate Jesus Christ the son of God, with whom we are called Christians and through whom we became children of God (cf. Romans 1:5-7). Christians should be a people of ministry to all the people of God, and especially the marginalized, the sick, the suffering and those who suffer with them so that they may share in the fullness of Life which Christ promises those who follow him. Pope John Paul II concurs with the researcher by emphasizing that man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence.¹⁰⁶ By showing love and compassion to the disabled, man is sharing in this fullness of life. Therefore, all Christians are called to invite others to follow their example and join them in the work of healing and reconciliation because compassion and empathy are very important towards healing.¹⁰⁷

People need to live out the words, “the least you offer to one of these, my brothers and sisters, you are offering to me (Mathew 25:45) practically through faith and enduring love. This faith and enduring love can never be realized unless we serve our brothers and sisters in need, that is, the disabled children and other people who are disabled or marginalized in society. We need to learn that it is the body of Christ which is disabled, not those people out there, but my brother and sister who is a precious part of that body. If we are to be the Church of God in Christ, then we have to embrace all those who are living with disabilities because none of us is exempt from the responsibility to be concerned for the care of our brothers and sisters.¹⁰⁸ This

¹⁰⁶Cf. Pope John Paul II, *op. cit.*, no. 2

¹⁰⁷ Cf. H. C. Eggert, “*The Challenges of Chronic pain*”, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. J. McTavish, “*Get up, Young man, and Live*”, 2.

means that if people do not take care of their brothers and sisters in need, they are also disabled and they are in need of healing.¹⁰⁹

We are all reminded that we are all one; we are each other's life, each other's compassion, motivated by love, the absolute law of God in Christ, of God in and beyond all faiths. All of us need to remember that it is the mystery of love alone that is able to embrace, without any other word. Therefore, we have all been sent and called to be at the service of life which requires concerted and generous action by all the members and by all sectors of the Christian community.¹¹⁰

4.3.5 To the Government

The government should work hand in hand with the Church in order to promote the common good in the society so that human dignity is respected. The government's purpose is to lead people justly and to promote the rights of their individuals. This is not at all conflicting with the work of the Church. Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est* clarifies this collaboration of the state and the Church by saying that;

“...the Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest. Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew. As a political task, this cannot be the Church's immediate responsibility. Yet, since it is also a most important human responsibility, the Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Cf. D. Cardinal Wuel, “*Reiki Poses theological problems*”, 2.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *op. cit.*, no. 79.

¹¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *op. cit.*, no. 28.

In this line, the government should cooperate with the Church so that each can help one another in the promotion of human dignity and providing service which is due to every human being created in God's goodness. The government should also create health centers in many parts of the country most especially in rural areas where poor people can easily get access to the health services because most of the disabilities can be treated. Health care is also a right to individuals and it intrinsically connected to maintaining the human dignity and the common good in the society.¹¹² Therefore, the governments should work hard to see that this common good is extended to all.

4.4 Conclusion

The study sought to find out factors that contribute to the poor response to the problem of the disabled, how the problem has been addressed by individuals and institutions, the measures that can be taken to address the problem holistically and to find the Biblical response to the issue of disability. Besides these, the researcher also wanted to make the necessary recommendations that may lead to possible effective solutions.

According to the researcher's findings cultural beliefs and religious practices, economic, and social-cultural factors hinder the process of enhancing the dignity of the disabled people in Otiende. Therefore, the promotion of human dignity is vital and is called for from every person. It is the responsibility of the Church to ensure that people are living according to the Christian invitation of imitating Jesus and his redemptive work here on earth. By doing this, each member will come to realize the need to love and appreciate the giftedness of one another.

¹¹² Cf. L.B. McCullough, <http://jmp.oxfordjournals.org/content/4/2/204.extract>.

The government leaders have also the responsibility of making earnest efforts to bring about a situation where people can easily exercise their rights and fulfil their duties as children of God. They are called to stand strongly to defend those who have been denied their rights most especially the disabled children/people.

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