

DISABILITY THEOLOGY – INTEREST GROUP

Topic: The Past: Looking for Evidence of Disability Theology
 Convener: Mary Jo Iozzio, Boston College
 Moderator: Stephanie Edwards, Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium
 Presenters: Margaret Eletta Guider, O.S.F., Boston College
 Miguel J. Romero, Saint Louis University

This first session of the three-year group status began with an introduction to the work of the Disability Theology Interest Group. Mary Jo Iozzio provided the general purpose and planned subjects to be covered in each of the three years with the goal of ever-more mainstreaming the CTSA's engagement with the diversity present in lives of persons with disability, the most diverse underrepresented group across the globe. This Disability Theology Interest Group signals a distinctly Catholic approach to work on disability—from systematics to history, scripture, and ethics—by considering welcome, accommodation, collaboration, justice, worship, play, and friendship over the three-year term.

The session included two papers, thirty-five minutes each, followed by a quick question and answer period, and concluded with a robust conversation among the presenters and audience. Stephanie Edwards moderated the pace of presentations and fielded the discussion. Unfortunately, Megan Hopkins, who scheduled to present her paper, "Conversion through Convalescence: Recovering the Disabled Ignatius of Loyola," was unable to attend the Convention.

In his paper, "Disability & Medieval Theology," Miguel Romero drew attention to the resource we have in the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas, focusing on Aquinas's account of the preternatural perfection of humanity in the state of original innocence and the supernatural perfection of the body hoped for in the final resurrection. Aquinas's account of the human body amid the unfolding drama of the history of grace stands at odds with the contemporary cultural attitude profiled in the paper. Specifically, Aquinas's outlook resists both (1) simplistic idealized caricatures of humanity before the Fall and (2) heterodox eugenic fantasies about the resurrection bodies of the blessed. Thinking with Aquinas, he recognizes that, on the horizon of an entire lifetime, the diverse phenomena, social dynamics, and experiences typically organized under the contemporary heading "disability" are an unavoidable aspect of every particular person's life. He notes with no surprise that those phenomena, dynamics, and experiences have held a place of prominence in the Catholic intellectual tradition and the teachings of the Catholic Church. That prominence has been ignored at times and regularly faces challenges from various quarters in contemporary Catholic theology. Today, there is a need for a revitalized Catholic theological engagement with these themes, one which draws deeply from the sources of the Catholic tradition, translated and extended to meet the challenges of this moment in history.

In her paper, "Reinventing Life, Recomposing Faith: Reflections on the Interactive Dynamics of Disability, Interdependence and Theological Imagination," Margaret E. Guider set forth the position that persons with disability and the communities to which they belong are a *locus theologicus* of global significance. Continuing with a personal narrative that is informed and influenced by two specific and sometimes related

disabilities, Down Syndrome and dementia-related conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, Guider reviewed various models of disability, and suggested that the model of interdependence lends itself to critical theological reflection. In doing so, she was mindful of the ways in which the two disabilities highlighted—one lifelong and the other late onset—invariably require persons in relationship to make adaptations to life and, particularly for those who are Christian, to search for more adequate responses to questions about the mystery of God, human suffering, and the meaning of personhood. Drawing upon selected insights from the Franciscan theologian, John Duns Scotus, an effort was made to extend the theological horizons of the Christian community in ways that will support people in the processes of reinventing their lives and recomposing faith in meaningful ways. To this end, she drew attention to the role that theological imagination can play in supporting and advancing alternative and emergent models of disability such as interdependence, while challenging the church's tendency to default to the religious model as recently expressed by Pope Francis' "Magisterium of Fragility."

Thirty years of disability studies continues to attract members of academic guilds, from the humanities and theo-philosophical disciplines to the applied sciences of architecture, economics, engineering, healthcare, law, et al. Many titles in disability theology are readily available and very good for their introductions to the global diversity and prevalence of disability in the human community. The theological significance and implications of engaging disability across our areas of study are far-reaching for the central questions in our tradition—from human dignity to the common good and the communion with one another and with Jesus, *The Disabled God*.

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