



DISABILITY AND SPIRITUALITY: BARRIERS TO AN AUTHENTIC VOICE

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AIMS AND OBJECTIVES



- ❧ Briefly highlight the meaning of spirituality
- ❧ Outline a number of barriers to spiritual and faith community inclusion
- ❧ Outline a number of ways in which these barriers can be overcome

WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY ANYWAY?



- ❧ Religion and spirituality are not the same
- ❧ *“I don’t believe in a God – a divine being of any description... But I do have a great wonder at the workings of the world and the universe. I suppose you could call that a spiritual response.”*
- ❧ It is what is deepest in us – what gives us direction, motivation
- ❧ ‘Spirituality is the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning and about relationships to the sacred or the transcendent which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals’ (MacKinlay E (2006))

WHAT IS DISABILITY?



The *Equality Act* (2010) defines disability as a 'physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-lasting **negative** effect on a person's ability to carry out **normal** day-to-day activities' (emphasis added).

BARRIERS TO AN INCLUSIVE SPIRITUALITY



- ✧ Within the individual person
- ✧ Within individual faith communities
- ✧ Within structures
- ✧ Within history

BARRIERS WITHIN THE INDIVIDUAL PERSON



- ❧ Some people may find comfort and meaning in structured, repetitive religious rites but may find a personal, abstract spirituality difficult to understand, practice and experience
- ❧ Disability is seen as being 'un(w)holy'
- ❧ Being on the periphery rather than in the centre of the disability:spirituality:theology:faith community dialogue
- ❧ Some may feel rejected by their individual faith communities. This may lead to the individual with a disability rejecting all faith communities

BARRIERS WITHIN INDIVIDUAL FAITH COMMUNITIES



- ❧ A “curates egg”
- ❧ Faith communities may not be welcoming to and inclusive of those with a disability and may be patronising/belittling
- ❧ Lumping together those with a disability as a homogenous group: a one size fits all approach without taking into account the background, culture, abilities and wishes of the individual
- ❧ Faith leaders and faith communities tend not to be aware of and understand the spiritual and faith needs and barriers experienced by those with a disability
- ❧ Little genuine and sensitive help is offered to help those with a disability to be comfortable with and express their own spirituality
- ❧ Disability is seen as peripheral rather than central
- ❧ Architectural issues

BARRIERS WITHIN STRUCTURES



- ❧ The prevailing 'spiritual landscape' of affective experiences of love and 'connectedness' (Percy) may unintentionally exclude some vulnerable people
- ❧ The isolating use of language
- ❧ The use of certain forms of language may create a barrier for some people
- ❧ Charity that segregates
- ❧ Societal attitudes towards those with disabilities influencing attitudes held by and consequent actions of those within faith communities
- ❧ A body and/or mind that is rejected due to disability: a spirituality of and with those with a disability that is also rejected

BARRIERS WITHIN HISTORY



❧ The spiritual super-hero

- ❖ Holy and saintly because of their disabilities
- ❖ God like in their differences
- ❖ God's specially chosen
- ❖ Adulated
- ❖ Outsiders

OR

❧ The spiritual super-villain

- ❖ The result of sin, either their own or of their parents or grandparents (John 9:1-3)
- ❖ Possessed or thought to be witches
- ❖ Feared and despised
- ❖ Outsiders

HOW YOU CAN HELP



- ❧ Be aware of and understand your own attitudes towards those with disabilities
- ❧ Critically engage with and challenge Biblical and theological understanding of and practices towards those with disabilities: engage in a liberating model of theology
- ❧ Christ's disabled body must be acknowledged as part of Christian legacy and be celebrated in the ways in which we offer worship and service
- ❧ Ask those with a disability what they need in order to experience and express an authentic spiritual identity
- ❧ Carry out an audit of inclusive spirituality and religious practices within your individual faith communities
- ❧ Actively participate in learning opportunities
- ❧ Network with leaders and members from other faith communities

FINAL THOUGHT



By listening to the often marginalised voices of those with a disability both within and without our own individual faith communities and acting upon them, we have the opportunity to develop a richer palette of resources for spiritual care and support for the journey towards an authentic spiritual voice and disability identity.

The Church finds its identity as the Imago Dei and Corpus Christi only by being a community and communion of faith and witness, a coalition of struggle and justice, and a fellowship of hope.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES



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Kairos Forum

<http://thekairosforum.com/>

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Through the roof

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AUTISM AND ASPERGER'S CONDITIONS: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR NURSES



- ❧ ISBN: 9781856424110
- ❧ 200 pages
- ❧ Christopher Barber
- ❧ Publication date: 30/09/2011
- ❧ Quay books (Mark Allen Publishing)
- ❧ Price: £22.50
- ❧ Discusses recent developments and challenges in providing services for patients with autism and Asperger's conditions
- ❧ Practical, accessible text written specifically for nurses to improve patient care covering a wide range of patient groups and case studies.
- ❧ Includes the author's personal experience with autism; he is the parent of a son with Asperger's and has himself been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome/high functioning Autism.

