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Foundations of Theological Ethics 6600-Spring 2021 Paper

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“Radical Dependence and the *Imago Dei*: Bioethical Implications of Access to Healthcare for People with Disabilities” by Mary Jo Iozzio”

In this paper, I will take up a brief account of the essay "Radical Dependence and the Imago Dei: Bioethical Implications of Access to Healthcare for People with Disabilities by Mary Jo Iozzio. I will highlight the historical impact of the "prevalence of disability worldwide" with an exploration into the liberation theology of disability. I will draw attention to two overarching theological themes, the *imago Dei* and the body of Christ, with the anthropology of relationality and radical dependence. Finally, I shall provide an understanding of disability ethics, focusing on the principles of human dignity and justice in healthcare access among patients with disabilities.

Author Iozzio begins with a historical account of disability prevalent within our world. It is essential to bring awareness and advocacy to address people's rights with disabilities. According to the World Bank, "One billion people, or 15% of the world's population, experience some form of disability. People with disabilities, on average as a group, are more likely to experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes than persons without disabilities" (World Bank). Iozzio argues the prevalence of disability is significantly higher in developing countries as the socioeconomic factors of poor education, poorer health, unemployment, and poverty are all significant components. People with disabilities are more susceptible to chronic health conditions and 'greater risk of premature death.' Initially, Iozzio notes to define the working definition of disability given in the WHO, which states, “Disability is the umbrella term of impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, referring to the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual with a health condition and that individuals contextual factors of environmental and personal factors” (Iozzio, 235).

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People with disabilities have struggled against unfair and partial perceptions and social stigma. Iozzio brings to light the recognition of 'learning ableism' within society. The parallel approach of people who are non-disabled who view themselves as superior to people with disabilities is compared to the "learning of racism." The hidden notion is that "prejudices built into the normalizing systems of power and authority have been used to segregate and oppress by those dominant populations" (Iozzio, 238). Within America, the stigma of disability caused marginalization and an oppressed minority. From World War II, a disability of rights movement began in providing veterans with disabilities assistance. The campaign progressed with the civil rights movement when minority groups started to call for equality for people with disabilities. In '1973, the Rehabilitation Act' passed. This act provided civil rights for people with disabilities. This movement moved forward with the passing of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and finally the "American with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990." These acts protected the inclusion of children with disabilities into classrooms and the rights of parents in educational decisions regarding their children. Furthermore, the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination against equal treatment within employment, public services, and public accommodations.

The Liberation Theology of Disability

In the characterization of ableism, liberation theology of disability brings forth a differing but illuminating perspective. Author Iozzio attributes religion as a cultural factor enmeshed with complex social and political forces of "power, access, and privilege." The liberation theology of disability demonstrates how all three cultural aspects of religious, social, and political elements offer a foundation for people's rights with disabilities. Moreover, the cultural factor of religion presents a transcendent discussion that depicts an idea of hope and belief in the rights of people

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with disabilities. This transcendent discussion reflects how spirituality measures the quality of life and the subjectivity of people with disabilities lives. Furthermore, the teaching within Catholicism of “preferential option for the poor” emphasizes, “God holds a special love, a preferential love for the poor and those who suffer social injustice” (Danforth, Curran, Dorr). The liberation theology of disability draws attention to a pragmatic faith that acknowledges everyday living experiences shaping cultural factors of people with disabilities into a more transcendent view.

Imago Dei (Image of God)

Iozzo argues the theological anthropology of *imago Dei*, stating human beings are “made in the image and likeness of God.” This relationality approach points to the essence of humankind and the relation human beings have with God. The author asserts God created all human beings in His image. Illustrating no distinction on people with disabilities or the “non-disabled.” All human beings are equal.

Furthermore, Iozzo emerges a “paradigm of relational dependence” that defines the Trinity doctrine into a union of diversity that shows both God and expresses His image. Iozzo calls this the “Trinitarian diversity,” which symbolizes the diversity of humans with the image of God within all people, including people with disabilities. In this case, the Trinity describes the unity of God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Three in one, the same, yet different deities. The diversity of the Trinity and dependence upon one another become humankind's expression. In a like matter, the diversity of humankind is dependent upon one another and forms the expression of our creation.

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Considering this, Iozzio approaches the relationality of dependence as interdependent. A radical dependency is presented in the demonstration of the Trinity once more. The interdependence of the Trinity is to be in a relationship. Therefore, Iozzoi remarks, “God reveals an interdependent relationality, whereas humankind expresses a dependent relationality of a radical kind where the image of God surrenders to radical dependence as the singularity unifying attribute of human relationality: to be is to-be-in-relationship” (Iozzoi, 244-245). Similarly, humans are created in the image of God, and the image of God includes the Trinity. Iozzoi implies having an interdependent relationship with each other. The result concludes that “to be a human is to be in a relationship” with others equally.

Principles of Bioethics and Healthcare Access

Accordingly, to the theological themes of relationality and radical dependence, the principle of human dignity ought to incorporate healthcare access for people with disabilities. The equality of healthcare access is vital in addressing ethical problems in fairness and valuable worth to all individuals to live a good quality life. People with disabilities have the right to healthcare access and the establishment that healthcare can bring the ultimate goals of promoting human well-being and the human flourishing of our society.

The principle of human dignity employs the worth of a person. It strengthens the shaping of adequate healthcare in identifying healthcare as a right for people with disabilities. Notably, human dignity has no awareness of socioeconomic status, gender, disabilities, or social determinants. It exists viewed as in the theological description discussed above “Humans are made in the image and likeness of God” (Genesis 1:27). Human dignity is the central priority of providing healthcare needs to our society. Its impact contributes to the main focus of decision-

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making for ethical goals in healthcare and promotes quality of life in society as it places value for all healthcare given. Therefore, human dignity has a framework of two dimensions that work together to promote human well-being. Human dignity encompasses both universal and particular human dignity. "Universal human dignity" draws attention to the equality of all human worth. Whereas "particular human dignity" expands to an individual's needs that create a good quality of life. These two dimensions implement quality healthcare services for people with disabilities.

Human dignity embraces all the principles of bioethics. Both autonomy and justice as ethical principles provide equality and a "concern and respect of others." The principle of justice determines the distribution of healthcare services and includes equality among different perspectives. Iozzo argues that there are still many dimensions of injustices in healthcare towards people with disabilities. As claimed, Iozzo gives accounts of cases where the absence of the principle of human dignity was disregarded with patients with disabilities by practitioners and forgoing needed medical treatment. An experience given describes a case where healthcare practitioners believed patients with developmental disabilities had a different threshold for pain, causing the physician to send the patient home, resulting in not receiving the adequate healthcare needed.

To conclude, applications of ethical principles remain a challenge in healthcare with people with disabilities. Furthermore, with the prevalence of disability worldwide, the issue of injustice and inequality of people with disabilities persist. However, disability can be seen differently through the liberation theology of disability and the existence of the relationality and radical dependence of the Trinity. Suppose the paradigm of radical dependent relationality is applied. In that case, it can create a more significant systemic and social change for people living

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with disabilities to stop marginalization with the union of all three cultural factors of spirituality, politics, and social dimensions.

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