
THS 790

THEOLOGY AND DISABILITY

WFU School of Divinity
Fall 2015 ♦ M/F 11-12:15
Dr. Jill Crainshaw
Dr. Michelle Voss Roberts

Sustainability Elements: Professor Voss Roberts and I emphasize during one week of the course intersections between sustainability, theology and disabilities. Also, one of our student site visits was to Peacehaven Farm, a local farm that is growing organic vegetables (to sell at markets and to some restaurants) and that provides housing and other resources for adults with special needs (see peacehavenfarm.org).

THE COURSE

Persons with disabilities are helping theologians to rethink Christian assumptions about God, humanity, and the church. They are also helping ministry practitioners to make worship more inclusive and hospitable to all people. This course will consider how Christian theology can overcome traditional exclusions and affirm persons with disabilities as created fully in the image of God. It will explore the distinct challenges and opportunities created by different kinds of disability. We will ask what practices can help Christians diminish both fear and obliviousness toward others.

COURSE FORMAT

The seminar will explore these questions through contemporary theological work on disability and conversations with guest speakers. Flexible Friday meetings will allow several field trips in the community. A Community Fellows Grant from the Pro Humanitate Institute will facilitate these activities. Because some of these outings will be longer than the usual class time, we will not meet every Friday. (See the course schedule below.)

Assigned texts include the development of disabilities rights movements, inclusion in churches, doctrine of God, theological anthropology, preaching and the Bible, worship, community agencies and resources, and LGBTQ perspectives.

Student interest will drive the choice of many of the readings, speakers, and panels. Within the first few weeks, the class will choose additional topics for investigation. These might include theological issues such as theodicy, ecclesiology, sacraments (communion, baptism); disability in African-American churches; Pentecostal perspectives; aging; dementia; mental illness; advocacy.

COURSE GOALS

To cultivate awareness and help students become advocates by

- understanding traditional theological attitudes toward disability.
- evaluating contemporary works on theology and disability.
- observing practices of inclusion and integration in local ministries and non-profits.
- integrating course texts and experiences into a project useful for one's ministry.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Black, Kathy. *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.
- Eiesland, Nancy. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994.
- Haslam, Molly. *A Constructive Theology of Intellectual Disability: Human Being as Mutuality and Response*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.
- Kafer, Alison. *Feminist, Queer, Crip*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.
- Articles posted on the Course Reserves through ZSR Library

COURSE GRADES

Your final course grade will be based on the following scale:

- Preparation and Contribution: 20%
- Journal 30%
 - Midterm 10%
 - Final 10%
 - Integrative entry 10%
- Denominational Resources project: 20%
- Course Project 25%

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

PREPARATION AND CONTRIBUTION (Class Policy)

Engage the class and community partners. Recall that language can include speaking and asking questions as well as non-verbal cues such as body language and eye contact. Do the assignments to prepare to engage in conversation. Respect people in times of vulnerability (examples: let people finish their thoughts while speaking; treat what is shared in the classroom with confidentiality, including in your notes; when feeling vulnerable, flag such situations as a reminder). Use technology respectfully (examples: in the spirit of “bones and braces bodies,” recognize that some uses may be necessary. Otherwise, laptops are for notes or referring to online readings and phones should be used only in “special cases.”) Professors will allow a 10-minute check-in at the end of class.

Your presence and perspective enhances the group’s experience. Student should notify the professors or their group of absence a week ahead of time (unless emergency). In case of a small group discussion, e-mail comments related to your role before class. Student should meet with a peer within the week following an absence to collect notes and discuss activities

Several small group discussions will require you to prepare a particular discussant role (see “Small Group Discussions” below).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Students will be in the same groups for each of the small group discussions scheduled in the syllabus.

Process and Tasks

Your first task will be to work through the basic content of the writing to understand the text in its own terms. Answering the following questions will be helpful in this:

1. Who is the audience of this work?
2. What is the author's purpose in writing this work?
3. What are the author's main points?
4. How does the author support his/her main points?

The next step is to evaluate the texts. The following questions are suggestions for that evaluative part of your discussion:

1. How do the sources fit into their particular historical context?
2. How do ideas in them compare with ideas in earlier sources or theme discussed in class?
3. What are the implications of the readings with respect to Christian theology, pastoral care, and advocacy?
4. Are the authors persuasive? Why or why not?
5. What do you agree with in their ideas?
6. What do disagree with?

The questions are simply suggestions. Not every discussion will cover all questions, but they should give you some ideas for your discussion

Roles

During discussions students will have a particular role. These roles will rotate so that no one plays the same role twice. All students are expected to read all of the sources, contribute to answering the content questions, raise critical questions, and come well prepared with preliminary answers, page references, etc.

1. *Problem, dilemma, or theme poser.* This participant has the task of introducing the topics of conversation. S/he draws on personal ideas and experiences as a way of helping others into conversation about the theme. It is this person's responsibility to see that all members of the group have an opportunity to participate.
2. *Theologian.* The responsibility of this person is to prepare to take the lead in answering theological questions. S/he should read each work with an eye to implications for systematic theology, including questions of the nature of God, the human person, the problem of suffering, the nature of the church and sacraments.
3. *Pastor.* This person prepares to respond to the reading from the perspective of a pastor. S/he should read each work for its implications for pastoral care, preaching, liturgy, religious education, and the life of the congregation.
4. *Advocate.* This participant pays special attention to opportunities to advocate with and for persons with disabilities in various public settings (congregations, denominations, schools, public spaces and institutions, law.) How do the readings challenge institutions? How does the perspective of an advocate challenge the readings?
5. *Reflective Analyst.* This member keeps a record of the conversation's development, giving every 10-15 minutes or so a summary that focuses on shared concerns, issues the group is skirting, and emerging common themes. This person listens attentively for unacknowledged, unchecked, and unchallenged biases related to culture, race, class, or gender that emerge in the conversation and bring them to the group's attention.

JOURNAL

Each student will keep a journal of her or his personal engagement with the subject matter of this course. You should write in the journal at least once a week. Aim for 1-2 typed pages or the written equivalent (300-500 words) per week. We will collect the journals twice: at midterm and at the end of the course (10% each). A final integrative question will be assigned near the end of the term for 10% of the total grade.

Some students will prefer to keep a Word document as their journal. Others might also consider using a blank scrapbook to collect their thoughts and other items.

We encourage you to begin your reflections with one of these questions related to the course goals:

- How has [choose an assigned readings, speaker, or site visit] informed your understanding of traditional or emerging attitudes toward disability?
- Reflect on a memorable idea or quote from an assigned piece. Why is it memorable? What are the strengths and limitations of viewing things this way?
- How has our contact with local ministries and non-profits informed your understanding of Christian ministry? Which practices of inclusion do you view as successful and why?

Other things that might appear in your journal include:

- Descriptions of experiences that were influential in shaping your perceptions of what it means to be healthy or ill, ablebodied or disabled.
- Recreated transcripts of spontaneous conversations overheard in everyday settings—coffee shops, church events, family meals, etc.—that illuminate issues of disability.
- Newspaper reports that illustrate how views of disability frame our perceptions of the world and our selection of what we consider to be important events
- Poetry
- Visual representations of embodiment and/or theological themes

DENOMINATIONAL RESOURCES

What practices or policies do denominational groups and/or local congregations have in place to respond to the needs of persons with disabilities? What theological messages are communicated by denominational and/or congregational policies and practices?

Each student should spend some time talking to denominational or congregational leaders and researching her or his denomination's and/or congregation's website, curricular offerings, and other resources. Using lenses acquired across the semester, each student should assess how her or his denomination's responses to persons with disabilities and their families.

Students are encouraged to remember the following as they complete the assessment. Some responses to disabilities are explicit and publicly evident. For example, denominations and congregations are likely to have policy statements or practices related to the accessibility of their facilities. Other responses are implicit and often go unnoticed. Student should consider these questions: What theological statements and/or language appear on websites, in curricula and bulletins? What language is used by worship leaders or preachers and how does that language reflect attentiveness or inattentiveness to the presence of persons with disabilities? What parts of the worship space are physically accessible to all worshippers and what parts are not? What does this "say" both to the gathered and the broader community?

Each student should be prepared to share insights from her or his research with the class, including providing others with links to useful resources. Each student should also prepare a 2-3 page, double-spaced executive summary of her or his findings to submit through Sakai.

COURSE PROJECT

Students will design a project that integrates course themes. This can be an individual or group project. It must include both a research component and a site visit or interview related to the topic. The outcome should be 12-15 pp. of written work, which might be a research paper, or it might include a sermon, liturgy, ritual, work of art, or lesson plan, with an accompanying theological rationale.

You might consider the following ministries for your interview/site visit: Salvage Garden, the conference at Peace haven Farm, Knollwood Baptist Church, Agape Fellowship, Salemtowne, Christ Community Church (Pfafftown)

COURSE SCHEDULE

- M 8/24 *Decentering*
Assignment: ADA 25th anniversary videos
- F 8/28 NO CLASS
- S 8/29 Of interest: Special Olympics Sport Expo and MedFest (volunteers needed)
Gateway YWCA, 9:00-2:00
- M 8/31 *First Inquiries*
Read Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, pp. 9-68
Prepare Small Group Roles
Return Student Agreement with Topic Choices (last page of syllabus)
- F 9/4, 11-1 *Intentional Community/L'Arche Model*
Class visit/service project at Peacehaven Farm (allow extra time for travel)
Lunch is potluck - please bring something to share. Dress for work!
In advance: listen to [Jean Vanier interview](#) (also linked through Sakai)
Due on Sakai: Participation patterns and goals
- M 9/7 LABOR DAY - NO CLASS
- F 9/11 *God as Disabled?*
Read Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, pp. 69-120
Read Lee Hull Moses, "Joyful Noises" (Sakai)
Speaker: Melissa Guthrie, Salvage Garden
- M 9/14 *Theological Anthropology*
Read Deborah Creamer, "Toward a Theology That Includes the Human Experience of Disability" (Sakai)
Turn in Project Proposal: Topic and Field Experience Plan (with dates)
- F 9/18 *Disability and Work*
Visit Forsyth Industrial Systems, Sharon Burns, director
Read the agency's website, "Helping Dreams Take Flight": www.monarchnc.org
Read Yampolsky, et al, "The Role of Spirituality in Coping with Visual Impairment," *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness* (January 2008): 28-39.

Meet at Studio 651 located at 651 North Highland Avenue. We may conclude, if time, at the senior program, "The Nook," at Reynolda Manor Shopping Center

- M 9/21 *Intellectual Disability*
Read Haslam, *A Constructive Theology of Intellectual Disability*, pp. 1-52
- F 9/25 *Education and Public Policy*
Visit The Children's Center: Tom Burkaw
Read ADA requirements for public school accommodations here:
<http://nad.org/issues/education/k-12/section-504-and-ada-obligations>
- M 9/28 *Intellectual Disability*
Read Haslam, *A Constructive Theology of Intellectual Disability*, pp. 53-116
Prepare Small Group Roles
- F 10/2 STUDENT CHOICE
- M 10/5 *Disability and Sustainable Theologies*
Read Kim Q. Hall, "Toward a Queer Crip Feminist Politics of Food" (Sakai)
Read Sarah Jaquette Ray, "'Maimed Away from Mother Earth': The Disabled Body in Environmental Thought and Literature," in *The Ecological Other* (Sakai)
- F 10/9 *Developmental Disabilities*
Visit The Enrichment Center, Michelle Baran
Explore The Enrichment Center website and pay particular attention to the blog:
<http://www.enrichmentarc.org/>
- M 10/12 *Race and Disability*
Read Josh Lukin, "Blackness and Disability," in *The Disabilities Studies Reader* (Sakai, also available online through ZSR Library)
Read Erevelles and Minear, "Unspeakable Offenses: Untangling Race and Disability in Discourses of Intersectionality," in *The Disabilities Studies Reader* (Sakai, also available online through ZSR Library)
Midterm Journal due in class
- F 10/16 FALL BREAK - NO CLASS
- M 10/19 *Theodicy*
Read Amos Yong, "Disability and the Love of Wisdom"
Assignment: Course Project Progress Report with Annotated Bibliography and Site Visit Reports
- F 10/23 *Healing*
Panel: Dr. Derrick Thorpe (Carolina Christian College), Rev. LaTonya McIver (New Mount Zion Baptist Church), Rev. Dixon Kinser (St. Paul's Episcopal Church), Rev. Peggy Matthews (Healing Touch)
Read Amos Yong, "Disability and the Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecost and the Renewal of the Church"

- S 10/24 Autism Workshop at Goler Memorial Church
- M 10/26 *Preaching and Disability*
Kathy Black, *A Healing Homiletic*, pp. 7-103
Presentation: Jill Crainshaw
- F 10/30 NO CLASS
- M 11/2 *Disability and the Bible*
Kathy Black, *A Healing Homiletic*, 104-186
Guest Speaker: Kathy Black
Assignment: Pay attention in church!
- F 11/6 *Intersections and Disability*
Read Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 1-85.
Prepare Small Group Roles
- M 11/9 *Disability and Sexuality*
Read Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 86-170
Guest Speaker: Alison Kafer
- F 11/13 *Autism Spectrum*
Visit iCan House with panel Discussion: Kim Shufan (iCan House), Dan and Julie Coulter
Watch or read at least three videos or blogs here from the [Coulter's website](#) (also linked through Sakai)
Read Erica Howell et al., "Parents' Perspectives on the Participation of Their Children with Autism in Sunday School" (Sakai)
- M 11/16 *Comparative Perspectives on Being Human*
Read: Michelle Voss Roberts, *Body Parts* (excerpts)
Presentation: Michelle Voss Roberts
- F 11/20 Due: Course project reports
Peer review in class
- M 11/23 Guest Speaker: Bill Leonard
Reading TBA
- F 11/27 NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Holiday
- M 11/30 Due: Denominational Resources Reports
Concluding Ritual
- F 12/4 NO CLASS: Final Project Due
- FINAL: Final Journal and Integrative Entry Due

Student Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that I have received and read carefully a copy of the syllabus for THS 790, “Theology and Disability,” taught by Dr. Jill Crainshaw and Dr. Michelle Voss Roberts in the Spring semester, 2015. I understand that I am responsible for fulfilling all obligations, for completing all assignments on time, and for adhering to all policies as specified in the syllabus. I further understand that there may be changes to the syllabus, and I will be notified of such changes on the Sakai site for the course.

Student Name: _____

Phone Number/E-mail Address: _____

Class Year: _____

What are your (current, former) religious or denominational affiliations?

What are the top two topics you would like to discuss on “student choice” days? Why?

What concerns do you have about this course?

What else would you like us to know about you?

Signature: _____

Date: _____