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My colleagues have shared with you their stories about places we have come from and places where we struggle and celebrate today as disability traverses theological and religious studies classrooms. It is our hope that these glimpses into life through the lens of disability will offer new ideas, insights, practices, and opportunities for teaching and learning that are inclusive and supportive of these and other varied experiences. My aspiration in this final article is to dissuade you from putting this paper in your desk drawer, planning only to pull it out later when a student (or colleague) with a disability intersects your teaching world. Regardless of whether or not you currently encounter disability in your own life or classroom settings, the time has come for attention to disability throughout the work of our field.

Woven throughout the preceding articles is the suggestion that *disability is not just an issue of access for people with disabilities*

. Three claims are embedded within this statement. First, what is at stake is more than access. While access is important, we need to strive for full inclusion, removal of barriers of attitude as well as architecture, looking forward to a day when institutional systems and individual relationships see the presence of people with disabilities as not a burden but an opportunity, or perhaps as the simple presence of a variety of instantiations of human embodiment. Second, the study of disability is not simply about the inclusion of people with disabilities, just as the study of religion is not "simply" about the religious practices of people of faith, or as feminist theology is not "simply" about women gaining access to the pulpit. The discipline of disability studies explores assumptions, systems, and practices that go far beyond the specific day-to-day inclusion of people with disabilities. Third, for this very reason, this topic is not solely relevant to people with disabilities. Especially insofar as disability is established in contrast to the construct of normalcy, these issues raise questions of interest to us all. Thus, the appropriate argument is

that disability is both an issue of inclusion and an exploratory lens relevant to people with disabilities as well as the temporarily able-bodied.

If you accept this claim, what comes next? First, as is evident from these articles, we must continue our struggles for access and inclusion for all people regardless of disability status. Those of us who have grown up with Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as the liberatory legacy of the feminist and civil rights movements, see access to the classroom as a right, not a privilege. It is clear that the work there is not yet done. Additionally, because disability represents a bona fide minority group (or groups), it should be consciously engaged when doing diversity work. We also see that students who are pursuing religious leadership or teaching professions need to be better prepared to work with people with disabilities in their congregations, classrooms, and communities. Seminaries (and other institutions) ought to regularly offer courses on disability, and ableism (discrimination in favor of the able-bodied) should be addressed side by side with other isms.

These reflections also show that it is time for us to recognize disability throughout all of our courses, rather than just as an asterisk or as a special topics forum. Disability is relevant throughout the curriculum, even in places where it has been previously invisible or unnoticed. If we are attentive, we find its imprint in religious texts, church history, theology (particularly issues such as healing and suffering), congregational membership, and even popular culture. When we tell only the able-bodied part of the story and fail to draw on the resources offered by the lens of disability, we are remiss in our role as teachers.

More than just correcting a gap in our research or teaching, though, reflection on disability has a positive contribution to make to the work of our field. This is, for me, the exciting piece that lies ahead for my generation of teachers and scholars. The discipline of disability studies is a rich and exciting one, but until recently it has neither addressed religious topics nor been engaged by scholars of religion. There is much unexplored ground, and much to be gained all around. Let me highlight just a few of the ways our two fields can complement and challenge each other.

Disability studies, while still a young field, has the potential to offer valuable insights to the academic study of religion. Most significant is the way in which it challenges assumptions about what is normal and contributes a new depth of understanding to human diversity. For example, most of us tend to think of disability as both abnormal and clear-cut — either one is disabled or one is not, and one would prefer to be not. Yet in actuality, disability is an open category that exists on a continuum of both constitution and chronemics — all of us, regardless of our physical condition, currently experience some degree of limitation (or “handicap”), and all of us, if we live long enough, are likely to become disabled ourselves. Perhaps “normal” is not so

much the norm we have assumed. This can be an important challenge to theological models that assume a healthy or ideal body as normative, such as accounts of creation or original sin. It complicates our understandings of what might be ideal (or even holy), accepting neither perfection nor average as suitable descriptions, and may even challenge ideas of what it is to be human. In these and other ways, disability studies offers new insights on the complexity, fluidity, and general messiness of embodiment.

Another contribution to our contemporary work in religious studies comes from the recognition that each instantiation of disability is unique. It is not the same thing to be blind, d/Deaf, a wheelchair-user, or to have a learning disability, yet all are typically lumped under the category of “disabled.” Using a wheelchair from birth is a different experience than using it after a mid-life ski accident, and a different experience than using it for one week following elective surgery. Reflection on lived experiences of disability shows it to be a somewhat artificial (yet still functional and at times valuable) construction, an interesting model for other identity challenges within and beyond our fields. At the same time, examination of alliances between and across differences (for example, in particular disability rights movements) can be useful as we continue to explore how to live together in religiously (and otherwise) diverse worlds.

Still, the field of religion is more than a consumer of the insights of disability studies — we have essential contributions to make as well. As mentioned above, disability studies has paid little attention to the religious life, consideration which is long overdue. Disability has the potential to become the next liberation theology: uncovering the hidden, questioning the taken-for-granted, challenging established ways, and proposing new theological constructions. In addition to explicitly religious topics, we can also offer to disability studies our methodologies and vast experiences with tasks such as interpreting (religions and nonreligious) texts, uncovering lost histories, examining values and belief systems, and exploring issues of self, communal, and even theological identity.

The insights and methodologies of our discipline can also contribute to some of the disputes within disability studies today. One has to do with identity hermeneutics: must a person be disabled (or claim the label of disability for herself) to speak with authority or legitimacy about disability? This is a familiar struggle for us in the field of religion, reminiscent of our own insider/outsider debates, and we have valuable histories and perspectives to share. Another area of concern has to do with models of disability. Two are established at this point: the medical model (in which one is disabled to the extent that one’s body cannot do certain things) and the minority or social model (in which one is disabled to the extent that one is treated as disabled, primarily through experiences of exclusion and oppression). The medical model has been rejected by disability studies for quite some time, and dissatisfaction is growing over the social model as well. Many (including this author) believe that it is time now for a third way, one that recognizes both bodily and social structures while simultaneously opening itself to the

instabilities of a postmodern age. We need a model that begins by noting that limits are an unsurprising part of life, that conceptions or constructions of disability are far more complicated than we might once have thought, and that the values we inscribe on limits and limitlessness must be reassessed. This move is part of the larger postmodern challenge that destabilizes unifying theories and problematizes unity and wholeness, a move which (given the value placed on relationality) ought not be approached in isolation from other disciplines.

These are only a few of the ideas, questions, and projects that emerge when scholars of religion engage the work of disability studies. It is time now for a deeper and more complex understanding of disability, one that allows the discourse of disability to inform our disciplines just as it is simultaneously (and productively) informed by them. It is imperative that we recognize that disability within the context of the religion classroom is considerably more than just an issue of access for people with disabilities — it is an area of scholarship brimming with possibility and rich with potential connections to other projects. I invite you to join in the important and exciting work ahead.