ABRSTACT

The Psalmist asks, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you should care for them?" (Psalm 8:4 NRSV). This dissertation seeks to ask the same question in light of the challenge proposed by recent developments in prenatal screening around the nature of personhood. Enquiring as to what, if any, Christian theology as informed by the Imago Dei, incarnation and other biblical doctrines, can have on the response of the Church of Ireland to such Developments in both its pastorally and advocacy.

To aid this process extensive theological research and assessment took place to better understand the Imago Dei and its implications for Christian living and practice. Then an assessment of historical situations where specific groups of society had their dignity threatened was also considered to see what could be learned via the role and response of the church. Following this, an assessment was taken of what impact the incarnation has on a Christian view of human personhood. Then this dissertation considered the examples of Jesus as portrayed in the canonical Gospels as a pastoral framework for the charge in the care of the marginalised. Finally considering how a theology of personhood should shape the Churches praxis around the inclusion of differently-abled people within its community, and how it speaks to the wider society in advocacy.

Through a framework of Christian personhood, as grounded in the Imago Dei and fleshed out by the incarnation, this dissertation argues that Christian personhood provides a favourable view of the human person that enables the church to respond lovingly in both word and deed. That any challenge must not be to restrict access to medical resources but to present a better story of human dignity and the worth and contribution of those with disability and the potential contribution of those still to be born. Furthermore, this dissertation seeks to challenge the notion that disability is something to be cured by suggesting it is a valid expression of the human experience.

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