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Opening The Roof 2012

In October 2012 in partnership with St Martin in the Fields, Inclusive Church held a national conference: Opening the Roof: Opening the conversation about disability. Speakers included: Professor John Hull (Honorary Professor of Practical Theology in the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, Birmingham) and Jane Young [1] (Disability Consultant).

Here is Naomi Jacob's reflection on the conference: [Click here for Naomi Jacob's blog \[2\]](#)

"Last month I was able to attend the Inclusive Church one-day conference on disability, and I thought readers of this blog might like to hear about it.

Inclusive Church is an organisation that campaigns for social justice in the church, for LGBT people, women, minority ethnic groups, and other groups that are often marginalized in church communities. As they put it, they are "committed to working for a church that is welcoming and open to all." This is the first time they have held a conference on disability and Christian churches, but they have now committed to holding regular conferences and setting up working groups to work on issues of disability and mental health in churches.

Titled "Opening the Roof" "hey, who stole my title" the one-day conference was held at the wonderfully accessible St Martin in the Fields church in London. It aimed to "open the conversation" about churches, disability and inclusion. The fantastic speakers did just that. Rachel Wilson, a newly-ordained disabled curate at St Edmund King and Martyr church, talked about identity and personhood, affirming the right of disabled people to minister to others rather than just to be ministered *to* (which is something I'm writing about at the moment). She discussed disability as central to identity, and the importance of being called to be ourselves. Jane Young [3], a disability activist who works with the We Are Spartacus [4] campaign group, talked persuasively about the oppressive social situation that disabled people find ourselves in today, thanks to government policy, and what the churches can and should be doing about it. I got to hear disability theologian John Hull [5] (a hero of mine "I was a bit star-struck). whose talk was a conversation with us about the way that theology and the Bible represent disability. He talked about the negative use of metaphors of blindness, not just in the Bible, but also by the church " in hymns, sermons, and more. His re-writing of the first verse of "Amazing Grace" was very striking, and I was left with a strong impression of his bold willingness to take offence at Jesus, who called his disciples "blind fools."

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see."
- *Amazing Grace*, lyrics by John Newton. *Have you ever really thought about those lyrics?*

Here is John Hull's version of this verse:

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me,
I once was lost, but now am found, was bound but now I'm free"

When it comes to disability and social justice, there's a lot that the church can and should be doing at the moment ? and, arguably, isn't. I was left with two impressions at the end of the day ? Jane's fantastic talk about the disturbing scapegoating of disabled people in our society today, and the distressing stories I'd heard from other delegates about the lack of inclusion that they've faced in churches. This is personal opinion, of course, but I was left feeling that the church has two big, related tasks on its hands. It has to be a prophetic voice in these times of oppression of disabled people. But in order to do that, it needs to understand and address its own oppression of disabled people, historically and in the present, and learn about real inclusion. That's what I heard and took from the conference. Were you there, and did you take something else from it? Comment and tell me what you think.

Thanks to everyone who organised this excellent conference, including Sarah Davies and Bob Callaghan. It was a great day. If anyone reading gets the chance to go to the disability conference in future years, I hope to meet you there."

Inclusive Church is committed to raise awareness of this issue at various events ? for example at General Synod and at Greenbelt.

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[6]

Source URL: <http://inclusive-church.org/social-issues/disability/opening-roof>

Links

- [1] <http://janeyoung.me.uk/>
- [2] <http://naomijacobs.wordpress.com/2012/11/06/inclusive-church-disability/>
- [3] <http://janeyoung.me.uk/category/benefits/spartacus/>
- [4] <http://wearespartacus.org.uk/>
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