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Please cite this publication as follows:

Hayhoe, S. (2014) Towards a greater dialogue on disability between Muslims and Christians. *Journal of Disability and Religion*, 18 (3). pp. 242-263. ISSN 2331-2521.

Link to official URL (if available):

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2014.935104>

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Title: Towards an Inter-Cultural Dialogue on Disability between Arab Muslims and Western Christians

Shortened title for running head: Disability, Arab Muslims and Western Christians

Abstract

Attitudes to disability and disabled people by Muslims – focusing on attitudes in the Middle East and North Africa - and Christians – focusing on the West (here taken to mean Europe, North America and Australasia) - were examined through a grounded theory literature search, with the study being divided into three phases of reading and analysis. The aims of study were to develop a dialogue on disability between the two cultures, to inform an understanding of the attitudes to disability in the two cultures, and to inform cultural practice in promoting support and equality in both cultures. The study finds that Islam and Christianity have much in common and are a force for good in promoting and developing disability equality in both Muslim and Christian cultures.

Keywords

Arab, Western, Christianity, Islam, Disability

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Introduction

How are attitudes to disability shaped by Islam and Christianity? Are there areas of interest on disability that can be discussed in both faiths in order to form an inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue on this issue?

This chapter discusses the results of a grounded theory literature search which examines the attitudes to disability, with a particular analytical focus on people who identify themselves as having an Islamic faith in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and those who identify themselves as having a Christian faith in Western countries (taken to mean Western Europe, and the Americas), based on these two questions. These two regions were chosen as MENA states (Israel being the exception) have historically been ruled by Islamic leaders and Western countries have traditionally been ruled by professed Christian leaders, and their laws, attitudes and customs are largely informed by their Muslim and Christian traditions respectively (Ling, 1968). Thus, the Muslim and Christian populations of these regions are more clearly historically defined through their respective faiths. The research focuses on literature relating to the theology of both religions in their respective regions, the original teachings of Islam and Christianity, and how thought and social practice has been regionally affected by notions of religion (or what Thrower (1999) refers to as world-view parochialism).

The research is timely as a recent report by the Pew Forum (2012) reveals that 80% of the world's population still identify themselves as having a religious faith, and that Islam and Christianity together form the majority of the world's population. Thus attitudes towards Christianity and Islam are significantly important to the lives of a large number of people with disabilities. Furthermore, an increasing numbers of Muslims live in majority Christian societies and Westerners living in societies with governments guided by their Islamic faith, such as the GCC (Author, 2014). Therefore, steps towards an inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue on the

issue of the treatment of disabled Christian and Muslim members of society would help in the understanding of the faith of minority groups.

The analysis of attitudes centres on the theology, spiritual beliefs, and practices of Christians and Muslims in these regions in regard to disability. It also concentrates on the history of the concept of disability in Islamic and Christian societies. Its findings show that there are significant similarities on which to base a dialogue between Muslims and Christians – although this is to be expected as both religions share prophets and religious scriptures. In particular, there are striking similarities between a belief in charitable gifts and actions, and the moral nature of disabilities. However, the research also shows that there are differences in practices relating to disability, with contemporary Islamic Arab societies emphasising jurisprudence, the role of the family and the practice of giving of alms in relation to the treatment of disability, and contemporary Western Christian societies emphasising healing, charitable acts and institutionalisation of disability.

The findings of the study are presented in three sections: the first identifies the initial topics and themes of the literature; the second analyses the nature of the themes in the previous section, identifies similarities and differences, and formulates an initial hypothesis; the third tests this hypothesis and refines its analyses in light of the testing. This process starts with an introduction to the definitions of disability, Christianity and Islam that are used in this study, and the methodology used to analyse the data.

Context and Methodology

Definitions

In discussing the approach to this study, the terms disability, Islam and Christianity are defined in order to contextualize the analysis. This provides two initial problems. The first is that

disability is a contemporary phenomenon that does not exist in early Christian or Islamic texts (Fritzon, 2001; Bazna & Hatab, 2005), and what is regarded as disability by contemporary academic disciplines has undergone a number of revisions (Llewellyn & Hogan, 2000; Author, 2012). Despite these disparities, it is found that the United Nations' most recent definition appears to be the most inclusive of all of the recent classifications:

“The term persons with disabilities is used to apply to all persons with disabilities including those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others... Disability resides in the society not in the person.” (United Nations, 2007)

Thus in the following discussion, I include what are traditionally seen as physical disabilities (such as impaired limbs that affect mobility and task performance, impaired senses that affect perceptions of the outside world and neurological impairments that affect movement and mobility) alongside learning difficulties (such as Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia and Downs syndrome) and emotional difficulties that affect social and material performance (such as depression and extreme forms of mental illness).

The second problem is in defining Islam and Christianity, as they have to be interpreted from a particular standpoint of culture or faith. In this study, to objectify this process I refer to the Encyclopaedia Britannica's definitions (Islam, 2012; Muhammad, 2014; Christianity, 2012), except where I cite individual authors, as their main contributors are primarily members of the religion they define. These definitions can be summarised as follows:

Christianity

Christianity is a monotheistic religion which follows the lessons of Jesus Christ (peace and blessings upon him) who lived in the Middle East region bordering the Mediterranean around 2000 years ago in the Gregorian Calendar - he is referred to as Jesus in this chapter. Jesus' teachings, the reporting of his birth and death, and a number of prophecies are reported by his followers, the most important of which are from the apostles, in the New Testament of the Bible; this is the central text of Christianity. Similarly, Jesus' spiritual heritage and lineage, as well as further prophecies – including that of his birth and status - are reported in the Old Testament of the Bible. However, Christians emphasize the teachings of Jesus over his spiritual lineage, and thus in Christianity the gospels of the apostles in the New Testament are of greater significance than the Old Testament. (Christianity, 2012)

Despite a number of contradictions and inconsistencies in the Bible, there is a general consensus about the teachings of Jesus, such as his insistence on peace and non-violence, the miracles that he performed, his teachings on the avoidance of sin, and where his teaching references the Old Testament of the Bible, such as his lesson that Christians should follow the ten commandments handed down to Moses from God. However, the different interpretations of the lessons of Jesus, what the Bible actually means – including the wording of different texts in different languages – what are the authentic words of the Bible, the administration of Christianity and the behaviour of Christians have led to the development of different Christian sects or denominations, referred to as churches or communions. The three most prominent of these denominations are:

- Roman Catholicism – this church is largely derived from the tradition of the Western Roman Empire.

- Orthodox Christianity – this community is largely derived from the traditions of the Eastern Roman empire and elsewhere in the Middle East, and North and East Africa.
- Protestant Christianity – this communion was founded during the reformation of the Roman Catholic Church, dating from the 16th Century (Christianity, 2012).

Islam

Islam is also a monotheistic faith, and follows the words of the prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings upon him) - in this chapter he is referred to as the Prophet, who was born over 1400 years ago in the Gregorian calendar. The main text of Islam is the Qu'ran – this is the word of Allah (the Merciful, the Compassionate), which is the Arabic translation of *the God*. In this period, His words are recited to the Prophet by the Angel Gabriel in Mecca and Medina over a number of years, as the Prophet is on retreat. These writings are later compiled by the Prophet's followers, and rearranged into discrete passages that each Muslim – the adherents to Islam – must follow (Dawood, 1999).

The foremost rules of Islam are referred to as the five pillars. These are:

1. To have faith in God alone – this includes the rejection of all icons and other deities;
2. To adhere to the rules of prayer set out in the Qu'ran;
3. To fast during Ramadan;
4. Where it is physically possible, to attempt to conduct Pilgrimage – Haj - at least once in a lifetime;
5. To give alms – charitable donations, broadly seen as 2.5% of a Muslim's income – to the poor and those most in need.

In the Qu'ran there are also separate rules for men and women (Islam, 2012).

In addition to the Prophet, Islam follows the prophets of the Bible as they are set out in its text, starting with Adam (Peace and Blessings Upon Him) and finishing with Jesus - the one exception is Jesus, whom it regards as a prophet rather than the son of God. However, the Prophet is seen as the most important of all of these prophets (Islam, 2012; Muhammad, 2014). Thus, His instructions set out in the Qu'ran are the definitive words of God, and are therefore also the basis of the laws of His communities and followers; although different Muslim interpretations later evolved around its application and the interpretation of other texts following the Qu'ran, written by the earliest followers of Islam (Islam, 2012). Akaddaf (2001) observes that the most prominent two of these denominations of Islam are the Sunnis and Shiites.

Methodology

A survey of secondary source academic literature and research articles is used to evaluate an existing understanding of disability, Islam and Christianity, in order to find areas of research that show correlations or differences for further consideration. As with a previous model of research (Author, 2014), the methodology used is a grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) literature search approach to data collection and analysis. This methodology includes adapting elements from a basic structure of three phases of data collection, described by Glaser & Strauss as the coding phases. These are laid out below in their chronological order of implementation:

The Open Coding Phase

This phase is an initial analysis to determine the initial connections between individual data, the nature of these connections, and their organization of themes, topics and taxonomies for further study. As with previous research on the epistemology of disability, in the open coding phase a broad range of research literature is read with few

preconceptions wherever possible. This allows new topics and trends to emerge, which are then described in memos for later reference. The literature selected for this study largely consists of small scale research studies, personal theologies and philosophies of faith, in order to identify the need for a focused literature search in the axial phase of research.

The Axial Coding Phase.

This phase is the point at which sophisticated links between the topics identified in the open coding phase are developed and refined, and unpolished hypotheses are formulated. During this phase of study, the initial data and topics are reappraised by the refining process – although none of this data is rejected from the study entirely, as it may re-emerge with significance later. During this phase of analysis, the different texts and topics are compared again, and memos of any new links and connections are made. These memos are then used during a more directed search of the literature according to the initially observed categories, and any false assumptions are rejected from the initial analysis.

The Selective Coding Phase.

This last phase is the point at which the initial hypothesis is tested with old and fresh data, refined, refuted, or new evidence is found to support it. After this, the hypothesis is further refined and strengthened until it is able to be scrutinized by following studies.

What now follows is a presentation of the analysis of the literature gathered in all three phases of investigation, which is written in the three chronological coding stages discussed above.

The Open Coding Phase: Ways of Interpreting the Literature in the Field

It is difficult to identify patterns in the literature on disability and religion, as there are no predefined genres or theories that investigate influences of Christianity and Islam on disability; there is also little meaningful analysis of individual religions as a whole in relation to disability (Albrecht, 2006). Thus a comparison of Islam and Christianity needs to be extrapolated from information featured in texts where the focus is either on single religions, the holistic concept of religion or on unrelated sociological factors. This issue is further complicated as few texts have attempted to analyse disability as a comparator in both Islam and Christianity. The only evaluations that are made tend to be on the medical and social treatment of people with disabilities by doctrinal communities, rather than a direct comparison of Islam and Christianity (Vreede, 2004; Miles, 1989, 2002a; Porter 1999).

Thus a significant proportion of the literature on religion and disability merely addresses the social conditions of people from different religious traditions and their experiences of disability, or they examine the issues that involve being a disabled person who holds religious beliefs. For instance, critical social studies analyse disability and impairment under the broad remit of studying religion and *religiosity*, or discuss the place of religion within a framework of spiritual, social or cultural attitudes towards impairment and disability (Treloar, 2000, 2002; Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Miles, 1989; Bazna & Reid, 2000; Cuskelly, Hauser-Cram & Van Riper, 2008; Miles, 2002b). Similarly, sociological literature and personal accounts examine the treatment of Muslims from the perspective of other ethnic minorities with disabilities within Christian societies (Hasnain, Cohon Shaikh, Shanawani, 2008; Ali, Fazil, Bywaters, Wallace & Singh, 2001; Stienstra, 2002), the treatment of disabled Christians and Muslims within their own communities (Ahmed 2007; Miles, 1989, 1995; Al-Aoufi, Al-Zyoud & Shahminan, 2012; Baznaa & Kim Reid, 2009; Hull, 1992; Odell, 1993; Murad & Gordon, 2002) or reactions to descriptions of disability in the Bible from a mixed Western community (Watts, 2012). These comparisons can too often be unhelpful however, as their lack of focus on understanding the nature of Islam and

Christianity is disorienting to a comparative analysis, and their mention of Biblical and Qu'ranic passages are often given no context.

Despite these contextual problems, three usable topics of analyses emerge in this phase.

Although they are not clear enough to be seen as single themes of articles or books, they become foci of analysis in a significant proportion of the literature. These topics are:

1) Philosophical concepts of disability in Islam and Christianity.

Textual analyses of philosophy are the most common form of study in the literature on disability, Islam and Christianity, with almost all texts mentioning some form of Qu'ranic or Biblical scripture in their investigation. The concept of disability in these studies tends to focus on individual impairments, and are thus incomparable to contemporary attempts to form a history of disability as an entity - such as that by Braddock & Parish (2001), who argue for a largely secular social interpretation of disability (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Oliver, 2001) with little analytical sophistication given to the changing contexts of religious periods and definitions. This process is also not helped by the lack of a holistic conceptualization of disability in law and social discourse before the latter half of the 20th Century (Warnock et. al., 1978).

Thus it is not surprising that Bazna & Hatab (2005), Ghaly (2010) and Porter (1999) find that the Qu'ran mentions few concepts that can be construed as disability or illness, and where interpretations are made in the academic literature on Islam they tend to contradict contemporary notions of disability. Similarly, Byrd (1990) finds that references to physical and mental impairments and what can be considered to be physical or psychological imperfections in the Bible are not necessarily related to what we now consider to be disability. In particular, he refers to a number of physical conditions in the

Bible related to sin and charity, with some conditions associated with temporary and permanent mental states - including being blind, sick, a leper, “afflicted” (sic.), drunk, having “issue” (sic.), general disease, being “dumb” (sic.), lame, and “mad” (sic.). Byrd also finds that these conditions have new interpretations in the modern media, including literature, popular films and television shows. This suggests that it is unproductive to impose interpretations from a modern secular concept of disability or spirituality based on philosophies originating from more than 2,000 years ago.

Despite a lack of clarity in the literature, in the open coding phase three elements are observable that indicate loose contexts of scholarship: the first is a body of literature that relates the Bible and Islamic jurisprudence derived from the Qu’ran to a form of spiritual healing for those with long term illness and impairments (Ghaly, 2008; Barnes, Plotnikoff, Fox & Pendleton, 2000; Frohock, 1992); the second is the observation that modern Christians and Muslims still look to sacred texts to find meaning in disability, or to explain their own or family members’ disabilities (Creamer, 2012; Morad, Nasri & Merrick, 2001; Ghaly, 2010; Tan, 1998; Hersh & Scotti Hughes, 2006); the third is that in many Western and Arab societies, jurisprudence that affects people with disabilities is found to either have its roots in Christianity or is directly related to Islamic teaching (Movsesian, 2010; Ghaly, 2010).

2) Changing attitudes to disability in Islam and Christianity.

A first reading of this literature sees an emphasis on the medical and educational treatment of disability, the place of abnormality as disability, the moral causes of disability, and institutional treatments as changing cultural features of disability by Islamic and Christian societies (Porter, 1999, 2004; Miles, 1995). A significant proportion of this literature also focuses on the Islamic Arab and Christian Western notions of charity in

the development of institutions (Porter, 1999, 2004; Foucault, 2001; Barasch, 2001; Author, 2008; Paulson, 1987)

Authors on this topic also highlight the different attitudes to disability in Christianity and Islam before the age of European enlightenments. For instance, although individual types of what we now call disability are discussed in many documents before the British and French enlightenments, they often refer to aesthetic abnormalities of physical form and function (Cusack, 1997; Foucault, 2001; Barasch, 2001; Thurer, 1980; Ghaly, 2006). Similar to the foci of textual analysis, a number of these studies also find that there is a linkage between physical treatment and the moral attitudes of the time, although again these abnormalities are not necessarily what we consider to be disability in the modern era. For instance, Ghaly (2006) finds that the respected 16th Century Islamic text, *al-Nukat al-Ziraf*, by the Islamic scholar Ibn Fahd, focuses on descriptions of physical impairments and what are considered to be aesthetic abnormalities, including skin conditions and baldness.

ElHessen also observes that there is a significant amount of scholarship on Islam by disabled scholars in the Middle East from the earliest years of Islamic theology, although there are few contemporary works that focus on Islam and disability. As she states, “the materials from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries compiled by al-Marghinani and Ibn Khallikan suggests the wide range of disability experiences, of social responses, and of debate regarding disability among Muslim scholars and jurists” (ElHessen, 2006: p. 98). This dearth of more modern literature is difficult to understand, she argues, as religion is always an important tenant of Arab society.

Historically, Western Christian discourse is similar to that of the Islamic world, with physical abnormalities and impairments often being regarded as the result of sin or a gift from God (Selway & Ashman, 1998), or mental illness and abnormal behaviour being linked with insight, deviance, expulsion or punishment (Foucault, 2001; Porter, 1999, 2004; Kors & Peters, 1978). Author (2008), however, suggests that a change in attitudes to blindness by Christian thinkers begins in the 17th Century, when Protestant philosophers and scientists such as John Locke and Isaac Newton start to reject an accepted Roman Catholic emphasis on visions in the Bible, and therefore the marriage of the soul, consciousness and the body. Similarly, Porter (2004) finds that the period of European enlightenments gives rise to a new scientific development of understanding the body, medicine, and the notion that the body and soul are more secular and less spiritual entities; which later come to be seen as the mind and organs as we see them now.

This shifting in emphasis to the organs and the mind signals a start to changes in attitudes to what are now regarded as “the human personality”, Porter (2004) contends. This also leads to a new form of institutionalisation by both Protestants and Roman Catholics in Western communities, each designed to promote the liberation of the personality. These institutions are founded for those with the impairments described in the Bible and treated according to religious principles, focusing in particular on the moral retraining of blindness (Author, 2008; Paulson, 1987), deafness (Betten, 2009), and mental illness (Foucault, 2001; Taubes, 1998; Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001).

3) Attitudes to disability from personal and social experience.

The issue of attitudes highlights a difference between the *practical approach* to disability by Christianity and Islam. Ghaly (2010) in particular finds that Islam has two approaches to personal healing and disability, which are outlined by its social attitudes to jurisprudence.

These are: (1) scientific healing, which is based on contemporary scientific, medical healing; (2) spiritual healing, which is based on the use of texts, many of which are from the Qu'ran. Although it is also mooted that there is an urge for Muslims to forge their own spirituality from these texts as part of a unified notion of spirituality by a Western liberal literature (Gaventa, 2008), Muslim creed states that Islam should not be seen within the context of other beliefs.

By contrast, in contemporary Western Christianity there is a growing literature on the personal spirituality of disability (Kaye & Raghavan, 2002), and a search for an acceptance of disability as a spiritual concept within faith as a whole (Berinyuu, 2004; Reyes-Ortiz, 2006; Schulz, 2005; Gaventa & Coulter, 2005). Evidence in support of this hypothesis is found in ethnographic studies from North America, which observe that people become more aware of their own spirituality, develop a stronger belief in God, and sympathize more with the plight of people in similar circumstances when they develop disabilities (Treloar, 2002; McColl et. al., 2000), or interpret Biblical passages with less prejudice when they know people with disabilities (Weinberg & Sebian, 1980).

Much of the literature espousing the development of a Christian spirituality of disability also reflects an image of empathy and the acceptance of physical imperfection at the centre of the Christian message. For example, Hull (2003a), a blind theologian and religious educator, observes that physical disability has its place at the centre of Christianity, as the foremost image of its faith is the "broken" body of Jesus on the cross. He also argues that the experience of God as a spiritual entity should be separated from the notion of the body, disembodiment and the need to picture His face (Hull, 2003b). Similarly, Kutz & Ketcham (1993) argue that imperfection itself is a form of spiritualism, as the human state is born as imperfection. Comparable imagery is also developed in the

literature on the Christian as the carer of the aged, infirm and ill (MacKinlay, 2008), the supporter of family members with Downs Syndrome (Yong, 2007), and the rejecter of a cruel, materialist society (Fitzgerald, 1998).

There is also an attempt to create a liberation theology - or theology as a tool of liberation - in the study of disability in modern Western Christian society, whereby the study of God is focused on an emancipating force to counter the oppression of people with disabilities (Rose, 1997; Lewis, 2002; Swinton, 1997; Underwood, 1999). However, it is also cautioned that such an overly paternal approach can lead to a hegemony of care and detract from the struggle for political equality by people with disabilities (Hull, 2003b).

The second phase of investigation is broken into two central themes that appear to be common to both Islam and Christianity, and that are identified in the three topics of the open coding phase: the first is the notion of charity and caring that is present throughout the doctrine of Islam and Christianity; the second is the cause of disabilities from either previous sin or disabilities which are derived as a gift from God. These themes are now investigated through a review of textual analyses on disability, the Bible and the Qu'ran.

Axial Coding Phase: The Study of the Topics of Sin and Charity in Disability

In the axial coding phase it is found that there is an interplay between the notions of charity and deliverance from sin in both Islamic and Christian literatures. However, it is also observed that the literature finds many contradictory statements in other's textual analysis, or where there are contradictory passages in the Bible on the causes of disability and the nature of sin in relation to them. These are discussed through the topics identified in the open coding phase:

1) Sin and Disability

Ghaly (2010) and Rispler-Chaim (2007) find that early Arab Islamic literature observes a link between parents' miss-deeds and their children's disabilities, with surveys discovering that such connections contribute to feelings of guilt. Yong (2007) finds a comparable mixture in the status of children with Down's Syndrome and the shame of the family of such children in Western Christian culture.

Further moral ambiguities towards disabilities are observed by Gaventa & Coulter (2001) in more traditional parts of the Middle East. In these communities they find there is a belief that intellectual disabilities are the work of spirits termed *jinn*¹, and that having a child with such disabilities can bring shame on their families. These beliefs, they argue, result in many children in deep-rooted communities being doubly handicapped by their disabilities and by social and economic rejection. Likewise, Ameen (2005) finds that many in traditional Islamic societies believe that people with disabilities are afflicted with *jinn* through acts of witchcraft, even though such practice is in conflict with the Islamic teaching on *jinn*. However, the Qu'ran itself is unambiguous about *jinn*. For instance, it finds in 55:1 that God made them from smokeless fire. Similarly, in Chapter 71: *jinn* are described as deceptive and make attempts to undermine the word of God. However, nowhere in the Qu'ran are *jinn* linked with physical conditions, impairments, mental illness or learning difficulties.

Similarly, Ghaly (2010), Chaleby (1996) Murad & Gordon (2002), Yasser A Elsayed, Al-Zahrani & Rashad (2010), and El Hessian (1986) observe that in Islamic Sharia law there is a difference in moral attitudes to those with intellectual difficulties and those with

¹ Belief in the *jinn* existed in the Arab world before Islam, and is part of ancient polytheistic religion, with non-Islamic *jinn* now being referred to as Genies, which are similar but tangible

mental illness. Thus both forms of impairment are found to be morally “incompetent” by the Islamic judiciary, and are not treated as harshly as an unimpaired person might be.

Barnes & Mercer (2003) argue that Christian notions of sin also have a negative influence on disability. However, Fritzon (2001), Gleeson (1999), Olyan (2008), Abrams (2007) and Schipper (2006) variously argue that individual statements about negative interpretations of the Bible are too simplistic, as the Bible either contradicts itself on this issue or there are significantly different interpretations of attitudes to biblical characters in different language contexts. Hull (2001a) follows a similar theme in his analysis of the Bible as a blind man, and in a separate article asks the question, Could a Blind Man Have Become a Disciple? (Hull, 2001b). Like Gleeson, he finds that there are many different interpretations that can be made of attitudes to impairment, and that it is seen as a punishment in the Old Testament, a focus of healing by Jesus in the New Testament, the word *blindness* is used to signify “unbelieving”, and that the moral dimensions of light and dark are seen as metaphors for good and evil.

Similarly, Fritzon (2001) observes that Deuteronomy states people who do not behave charitably to people who are blind will come to harm. “Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen.” (Deuteronomy 27:18). He also finds that all people are made equal under the eyes of God, and that Christians must love their neighbours as themselves (Leviticus 19:18). There is also another passage in the Bible that is cited by Fritzon (2001) and Hull (2001a) from the gospel of John, which describes a lesson from Jesus about the status of blindness not being caused by sin.

“And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he

was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (John 9:1-5)

2) Charity and Faith

Both Christianity and Islam espouse acts of charity as a significant part of the religious life of their followers (Bhatty, Moten, Tawakkul & Amer, 2009; Fitzron, 2001). Almusa (2004), Bhatty, Moten, Tawakkul & Amer (2009), ElHessen (2006), Bazna & Hatab (2005), and Ghaly (2010) argue that equality for people with disabilities, as with equality for all disadvantaged people, is a fundamental tenant of Islam. Muslims should not judge people on physical or economic strength or superiority, but on their piety to the laws of Islam. Similarly, Fritzon (2001) argues that the Bible is positive towards people with disabilities, and that it is the responsibility of Christians to treat all people equally, as we are all made equal in God’s image. ElHessen (2006) also observes that Islamic scripture regards ill and impaired children as a gift from God, with the spirit of Ibsan asserting that such children are sent as a test of their parent’s compassion and charity. Similarly, Morad, Nasri & Merrick (2001) find that the Qu’ran emphasizes the obligation of wealthy and non-disabled Muslims to conduct positive acts for those in physical need of help.

There are also other unambiguous passages in the Bible and Qu’ran stating that there is a reward for acts of charity. For example, Peter 4:8 states, “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” Likewise John 1:6 states, “Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well”.

Correspondingly, the Qu’ran states in 2:110, “Attend to your prayers and render the alms

levy [charity]. Whatever good you do shall be recompensed by God. God is watching all your actions.”

However, there is a difference in the method by which charity is developed, as the Bible favours charity as an action, a statement of behaviour and a series of deeds, whereas the Qu’ran sees charity more as an act of giving alms. For example, in Matthew 5:19 it is stated that an act of self-reflection and teaching will be rewarded in heaven, “Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Likewise, in Luke 10 Jesus tells his followers about the act of a Samaritan who helps a man who is injured and left for dead, even though a priest, who is supposedly a man of God, passes by on the other side of the road in an uncharitable manner.

The testable hypothesis from these findings focuses on the significant difference between Islam and Christianity on disability. This hypothesis is,

As the Bible and Qu’ran have different approaches to charity, approaches to current charitable institutions will be different in Arab and Western cultures.

In the final phase of research this hypothesis is tested against surveys and studies of contemporary faith-based charities in the Western and Arab worlds.

Selective Coding Phase: The Study of the Effects of Islamic and Christian Beliefs on Institutional Structures

Schuelka (2012) and Porter (1999) argue that there is a different emphasis in Christianity and Islam on the treatment of conditions related to disability by institutions. Porter in particular finds that this emphasis underpins the predominance of Western models of institutionalisation of

people with disabilities in the modern era, similar to the observation in the axial coding phase that Christian charity emphasises acts over alms giving. Thus, although Porter and Ghaly (2010) find that there are institutions for the Islamic medical treatment of people with disabilities in the period before the European enlightenments, Western Christian infirmaries and hospitals are far more numerous in this period, and many Abbeys are involved in the medical treatment of people who are now considered to be disabled. Similarly, in the medieval period crusaders returning from the Middle East with their eyes gouged out by the forces of Saladin - in itself telling of a punishment in both religions - are provided with shelter by a Christian foundation where they are taught a trade (Selway & Ashman, 1998). In turn, this Christian emphasis on the treatment of illness can be said to be at the root of the development of early scientific medical practices and the treatment of diseases leading to disabilities (Porter, 1999, 2004).

Furthermore, Goffman (1991) finds that many 20th Century Western institutions follow a “total institution” model, similar to those formed by Christian schools and monasteries. Literature of this period also indicates that these institutions focus even further on the moral training of people with disabilities not simply to understand the texts of religion, but also to receive what is felt to be religious enlightenment, either through a general literacy or manual labour (Author, 2008; Paulson, 1987; Betten, 2009; Taubes, 1998; Koenig & Larson, 2001; Foucault, 2001). This form of treatment is designed to dissuade disabled people from begging or other acts considered to be un-Christian, as they were prone to do in large cities.

Similarly, Warnock et. al. (1978) and Author (2008) observe that the founding of institutions is at the root of contemporary laws and government policies that relate to the rights and independence of the contemporary disabled community. Author and Warnock also find that the institutional education of people with what are now called special needs, or special educational needs, is rooted in the Christian foundation of what are referred to as special schools, asylums or

institutions, even though integrated education for children with disabilities existed before these schools.

In Islamic culture, as charity focuses more on the giving of alms directly to the needy, research shows there is less historical focus on institutionalisation, and that the role of institutional charities in Arab societies is relatively recent (Derbal, 2011). Furthermore, it is found that Arab Islamic cultures focus more on charity within the family, and thus people with disabilities are more traditionally looked after by their mothers and sisters rather than outside organisations (Frank, 1989; Crabtree, 2007). Thus, Terpstra (2011) finds that prior to 1700 Islamic institutional charities are largely only found in the Ottoman and Persian territories, whose societies are based on models of Christian institutions developed in Europe and which are influenced by Christian traders passing through these territories or indigenous Christian communities. Although not part of the MENA region, similar observations are made in what is now the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, with institutional education of disabled students starting there around 1840 (Miles & Hossain, 1999).

Therefore, as Western Christian notions of charity tend to exist outside of the family Western cultures tend to look more to governments, non-governmental organisations and international government-sponsored organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) to provide resources, treatment and education. These institutions still also rely on Christian structures of charitable administration. For example, reports by large international organisations that are involved in charity outreach in the developing world find that many such institutions work largely with Christian faith-based organisations (Serneels, Montalvo, Pettersson, Lievens, Butera & Kidanu, 2010; The Mental Health and Poverty Project, 2010; Banda, Ombaka, Logez & Everard, 2006), especially on matters relating to sexual and reproductive health (World Health Organization, 2010; Chand & Patterson, 2007). Similarly, the

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2009) has roots dating back to the middle of the 19th Century when it was a Christian organisation called the Red Cross; the addition of the Red Crescent was initially adopted by the Ottomans at the beginning of the 20th Century. Likewise, majority Islamic Arab societies such as Lebanon find that their current social welfare systems are largely behind those of Western societies as they have no real history of institutional welfare provision (Jawad, 2009). Equally, it is observed that modern structures of special needs education in the Arab GCC countries of the Persian Gulf are largely based on Western models, which only become prevalent after the development of their oil economies in the latter half of the 20th Century (Gaad, 2011).

Conclusion

Attitudes to disability in majority Islamic Arab and Christian Western cultures are still significantly affected by their respective religions. In particular, it would seem that definitions of and attitudes to physical and psychological imperfection as a whole rely more upon theological notions of impairment and imperfection than they do on secular social scientific or medical definitions and treatments. Likewise, evidence from the open and axial phases shows that current patterns of impairment categories such as blindness and learning disabilities still rely on an interpretation of Christian and Islamic theology of human frailty, brokenness and imperfection that lies at the heart of these belief systems. Moreover, historical literature also shows that this trend is not new, with charitable notions of a duty of care and moral notions of imperfection forming the classifications of disability since the Old Testament.

It is also significant that people are more likely to show a greater sense of spirituality when they attain a disability, and have stronger religious empathy when they know another person with a disability. Moreover, as it is found that impairment, illness and learning difficulties are not caused by sin and both texts emphasise the equal treatment of all people regardless of impairment,

wealth or social status, it would seem that human discourse rather than the core message of Islam and Christianity is the cause of the differing treatments of disabled people throughout history.

There is, however, evidence to suggest a difference in the religious practice of Islam and Christianity with regards to disability. In particular, it is noticeable that contemporary Western charitable institutions are based primarily on Christian notions of institutionalization, and contemporary institutions of education and health in the MENA region have been inherited largely from Christian Western philosophies. Although these MENA institutions are sometimes the legacies of Western empires that occupied many parts of the region in the 19th and 20th centuries this is not the primary reason for their establishment, as many were convened either after the colonial era or by Islamic occupations, particularly those of the Ottoman and Persian empires. It is also telling that there is a limited amount of literature on the role of the institution in 19th and 20th century Islamic Arab culture, suggesting that in this period this philosophy is of little importance to the administrative councils, governments and tribes of the MENA region.

In light of these conclusions, two particular courses of action are needed if we are to progress on the issue of understanding disability and providing support for disabled people. Firstly, there is a need for more research, particularly in the area of an Islamic understanding of disability, as the current debate is tilted towards a Christian understanding of disability and a more pluralistic study needs to be formulated. Secondly, there needs to be a far more cogent discussion between Christians and Muslims on the attitudes to disability, and in particular on how we include disabled Muslims and Christians in a general debate. In this way, we can take the discussion of this important subject beyond the rather one dimensional institutional debate of late. Most importantly, however, since both of these religions have a significant influence on how we

define, understand and support disability, each religion must be seen as an important stake holder in the general debate on disability by a wider society.

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