

Summer Institute 2017 Our Keynote Speakers

Monday Morning Plenary, June 6: Joni Eareckson Tada

Disability and Social Injustice: A Biblical Call to Action

Social injustice comes in many forms. For example, disability advocates have long understood how the post-Christian culture of extolling personal rights has adversely impacted the un-born and newborns with disabilities, the medically fragile, persons with significant disabilities, and the elderly. This culture has been fed by people's fundamental fears of suffering and disability – people do not know how to experience well-being while suffering! And so, their irrational fears become the foundation for laws and policies around the world. Ironically, these laws are eroding global safeguards which protect vulnerable populations – the same laws that society purports as just, have led to many injustices against persons with disabilities. So how does the Bible address this situation, and how can the church respond, not defensively, but offensively? Come and be motivated to "... speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice" (Proverbs 31:9).



Joni Eareckson Tada is founder and CEO of Joni and Friends, an organization that accelerates Christian outreach in the disability community. Joni and Friends provides practical support and spiritual help to special needs families worldwide. Joni is the author of numerous bestselling books, including *Joni and Ken: An Untold Love Story*, *Diamonds in the Dust*, and the Gold Medallion Award-winning *When God Weeps*. Joni and her husband, Ken, reside in Calabasas, CA. For more information, visit www.joniandfriends.org.

Tuesday, June 6

Brian Brock PhD: *How can we talk about disability?*

“Nothing about us without us.” This important insight has become a central feature of discussions of disability in universities and political contexts. But what does it say about people who cannot speak, or cannot speak well? What does it mean also to include such people in our discussions of disability? And what right do people without disabilities have to speak about something that they do not themselves experience? Presented by a Christian disability theologian who is also as a father of a special needs child, this session will directly engage the problems raised by attempting to speak for those who do not speak. It will also raise the more complex problem of how we can speak about disability at all without entrenching the problem of “othering” people with disabilities, as “those” who can and should be distinguished from “us”.



Brian is a Reader in Moral and Practical Theology at the University of Aberdeen, and the father of Adam, who is 13, a delightful human being, and has Down’s Syndrome and autism. He has written a wide range of scholarly essays on themes related to disability and is a Managing Editor of the *Journal of Religion and Disability*. He has also written monographs on the use of the Bible in Christian ethics as well as the ethics of technological development. He is also editor (with Prof. John Swinton) of *Theology, Disability and the New Genetics: Why Science needs the Church* (2007) and *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader* (2012).

Rabbi Brad Artson and Jacob Artson: A Son & Father Reflect on the Challenges and Opportunities of Living with Autism

Jacob is a young man living with autism. Listen in on how he fashions a life of meaning and joy while serving as a role model and advocate for inclusion for all people. His father, Brad, is the Dean of a Conservative/Masorti rabbinical school in Los Angeles and another one in Potsdam Germany. He will speak both as a father and a religious educator on mobilizing biblical and rabbinic wisdom in creating welcoming communities in which every person can best thrive, including reflecting on some of the impediments we need to remove to get to that promised land together.



Jacob Artson is a young adult who communicates by typing. He has spoken about inclusion to Jewish groups across the United States and has also published articles about inclusion. He is committed to advancing the dignity of all people, including people with autism and other disabilities.



Rabbi Dr. Bradley Artson is the Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at American Jewish University, and the Dean of the Zacharias Frankel College in Potsdam, Germany. He teaches Philosophy and Theology, and his most recent book is *Renewing the Process of Creation: A Jewish Integration of Science and Spirit*. Rabbi Artson also led a Summer Institute Plenary Session in 2012 in Chicago.

For more information on the Summer Institute and a link to registration, go to <http://faithanddisability.org/projects/summer-institute/>

Tuesday Evening: A Discussion on Faith Communities and Mental Illness with Kay Warren and John Swinton.



KAY WARREN cofounded Saddleback Church with her husband Rick Warren in Lake Forest, California. She is a passionate Bible teacher and respected advocate for people living with mental illness, orphaned and vulnerable children, as well as for those living with HIV&AIDS. She founded Saddleback's HIV&AIDS Initiative. Kay is the author of *Choose Joy: Because Happiness Isn't Enough, Say Yes to God* and coauthor of *Foundations*, the popular systematic theology course used by churches worldwide. Her children are Amy and Josh, and Matthew who is in Heaven, and she has five grandchildren.

Wednesday, June 7

Suheil Laher, PhD: Heroes and Hubris: A Muslim Perspective on Disability

This presentation invites us to question our conception of 'disability,' and our attitudes towards the disabled. I present a brief survey of prominent religious and scholarly figures in Islamic history who (although it may surprise even many Muslims today) were disabled in some way. Next, I discuss some Islamic teachings about our moral and religious obligations to the disabled. I explain the Islamic teaching that every individual is accountable to God based on their abilities, and hence in the final analysis, someone we perceive as disabled might in fact be blessed, while an ostensibly normal individual might, through his/her own neglect, end up in the much more severe state of spiritual disability.



Suheil Laher is Dean of Academics and Senior Instructor at Fawakih Institute for Classical Arabic and Quranic Studies, and has held visiting faculty positions in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Brandeis, Harvard and Boston Universities, and also served as Muslim Chaplain at MIT. He received his MA in Religious Studies from Boston University, and PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies from Harvard University. He conducts research in Islamic theology, law, Quran and hadith studies, and has published encyclopedia articles and scholarly translations, as well as two articles in a collected volume published as a concerned Muslim response to and condemnation of terrorism. Suheil was born in sunny Zimbabwe, and came to the US as a college student. He lives in northern Virginia with his wife and three children (one of whom has Down syndrome). (In this picture.)

Miguel Romero, PhD: *“One of Us”*: Catholic Teaching On ‘Disability’ Since 1878

The vulnerabilities and diverse dependencies of the human being have been consistent themes in the apostolic teaching and evangelical outreach of the Catholic Church. Very often, however, these doctrinal and pastoral resources are overlooked by contemporary Christian theologians. I will provide a brief survey of Catholic teaching on ‘disability’ and related themes from Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) to the present. After introducing the Scriptural principles and relevant theological lexicon that unites Catholic teaching on these themes, I draw attention to two features that can be a resource for contemporary theological work on disability: (1) the Catholic presumption that any theological discussion of infirmity, illness, and physical weakness must be squarely located within the Christian understanding of the history of God’s goodness, mercy, and grace; and (2) a consistent rejection of theological and philosophical attempts to regard persons with an infirmity, illness, or other form of physical weakness as anything other than ‘one of us.’

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Dr. Miguel J. Romero is Assistant Professor of Religious and Theological Studies at Salve Regina University. He earned his B.A. from Colorado College, his M.Div. from Fuller Theological Seminary, his Th.M. from Duke University, and his Th.D. from Duke University in 2012. From 2012-2016 Romero was a postdoctoral research fellow and theology instructor at the University of Notre Dame. Romero's research interests include moral theology, Catholic social teaching, philosophical and theological accounts of disability and mental illness, and the theology of Thomas Aquinas. His written work includes: "Liberation, Development, and Human Advancement in *Caritas in Veritate*" (*Nova et Vetera*, 2010); "Aquinas on the *corporis infirmitas*: Broken Flesh and the Grammar of Grace" in *Disability in the Christian Tradition* (Eerdmans, 2012); "The Call to Mercy: *Veritatis Splendor* and the Preferential Option for the Poor" (*Nova et Vetera*, 2013); and "Aquinas on Happiness and Those Who Lack

the Use of Reason" (*The Thomist*, 2016). Miguel is married to Dr. Heather Romero, a geriatric neuropsychologist and Alzheimer's Disease researcher. Miguel and Heather have four children.

Thursday, June 8

Jean Vanier Emerging Scholar Lecture: Benjamin Wall, PhD

Back to Benedict: Vanier, L'Arche, and Form-of-Life

L'Arche does not name only a place, but first of all a form-of-life. To inhabit L'Arche entails sharing, not simply a place, but first of all a form-of-life constitutive of virtuous gestures of listening, presence, belonging, friendship, and love. Dr. Wall's lecture highlights specific social and communal forming dynamics that remake the individual within L'Arche and how the collective gesture(s) of radical hospitality remake the community as a whole. The aim of Dr. Wall's lecture is to show how the form-of-life of L'Arche is not necessarily derived from any specific rule (or rule-set) but rather, its rule is derived from its form-of-life.



Dr. Benjamin Wall is Assistant Professor of Religion & Ethics at Greensboro College in Greensboro, North Carolina. In 2013, Since completing his doctorate, Dr. Wall has held a resident scholar post at the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at St. John's University in Minnesota, served three years as Assistant Professor of Practical Theology at Houston Graduate School of Theology, and was recently ordained an Anglican priest in the Diocese of Christ Our Hope. Dr. Wall holds a B.A. in biblical studies from the Southeastern College at Wake Forest, an M.A. in Christian Ethics and a Th.M. in theology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary,

and a Ph.D. in practical theology from the University of Aberdeen. His first book, *Welcome as a Way of Life: A Practical Theology of Jean Vanier* was recently published in July with Cascade Books. While Dr. Wall's research interests vary along the lines of theology, ethics, disability studies, and church history, much of his current writing research and writing focuses on bioethical discourse and how alternative theological accounts of disability within history of the church provide a platform on which Christian ethics can constructively engage, critique, and lead contemporary medical, ethical, and political discussions toward theoretical and practical enrichment.

Monica Coleman, PhD: Learning to Lose: Finding Success while Living with Depressive Conditions

This presentation discusses three ways for finding success while living with depressive conditions. Focusing on how much we often fear losing, the plenary speaker encourages the audience to embrace some of its deepest fears about loss. As we learn not to fear loss, we can see how much is gained when we let go of the things we hold to the tightest. In so doing, we'll find greater mental, spiritual and communal strength.



Monica A. Coleman is Professor of Constructive Theology and African American Religions at Claremont School of Theology in southern California. Answering her call to ministry at 19 years of age, Coleman is an ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. She brings her experiences in evangelical Christianity, black church traditions, global ecumenical work, and indigenous spirituality to her discussions of theology and religion. Coleman is the author or editor of six books, and several articles and book chapters that focus on the role of faith in addressing critical social and philosophical issues. Her memoir [Bipolar Faith](#) shares her life-long dance with trauma and depression, and how she discovers a new and liberating vision of God. Coleman's

strength comes from the depth of her knowledge base and from her experiences as a community organizer, survivor of sexual violence and as an individual who lives with a mental health challenges. Coleman often teaches Bible study in her local church, and speaks widely on religion and sexuality, religious pluralism, churches & social media, mental health, and sexual and domestic violence. Coleman is based in Los Angeles, and lives in an intergenerational household where she is an avid vegan cook and cyclist.

This is Monica Coleman's second presentation at a Summer Institute, having led one of the plenaries in Atlanta in 2015.