PAST 307 or MINS 405: A Practical Theology of Disability and Mental Health by Professor John Swinton

From 1-5 Feb, 2016, Professor John Swinton of the University of Aberdeen will teach an intensive course in Dunedin entitled: A Practical Theology of Disability and Mental Health – What does it mean to be Human. The course is jointly offered by the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Otago, and the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership.

John Swinton is Professor in Practical Theology and Pastoral Care in the School of Divinity, Religious Studies and Philosophy at the University of Aberdeen. He is the founder and Director of the Centre for Spirituality, Health and Disability at the University. In 2014 he also established the Centre for Ministry Studies there.

John has published extensively within the area of practical theology, pastoral care, mental health studies, disability theology and nursing. Some of his books include:

- *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* (2012);
- *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader* (2012), edited with Brian Brock;
- *Raging With Compassion: Pastoral responses to the problem of evil* (2007);
- *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (2006) with Dr. Harriet Mowat;
- *Critical Reflections on Stanley Hauerwas’ Essays on Disability: Disabling society, enabling theology* (2005), edited with Stanley Hauerwas;
- *Spirituality in Mental Health Care: Rediscovering a “forgotten” dimension* (2001);
- *Resurrecting the Person: Friendship and the care of people with severe mental health problems* (2000);
- *The Spiritual Dimension of Pastoral Care: Practical theology in a multidisciplinary context* (2000), edited with David Willows;

For further information about John go to: [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/profiles/j.swinton](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/profiles/j.swinton)
The course will have six modules:

1. Introduction to Disability Theology
2. Disability in the Christian Tradition: Theologies of disability
3. Re-Thinking Discipleship: The vocation of people with profound intellectual disabilities
4. Theology and mental health and illness: Understanding psychosis differently
5. Theology and mental health and illness: Depression
6. Forgetting whose we are: A practical theology of dementia

Details about teaching:

The course is a Semester 1 paper, with the teaching in 1-5 February, and assessment to follow throughout the Semester. Teaching will begin at 1pm on Monday 1 February and conclude at 1pm on Friday 5 February.

Qualifications:

The paper can be taken as PAST 307 or MINS 405. The former can be credited to a BTheol or Diploma for Graduates, the latter for a Postgraduate Diploma of Ministry or a Master of Ministry, or for the new Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma in Chaplaincy or the Master of Chaplaincy. Further details about these new Chaplaincy qualifications can be found at: http://www.otago.ac.nz/courses/subjects/chap.html

Alternatively, the paper can be taken as a ‘Certificate of Proficiency’ and credited to a qualification at a later point.

Fee and Enrolment:

Online enrolment for the course opens in August. To enrol go to www.otago.ac.nz/study/enrolment/. The fees for 2016 have yet to be set, but the cost for PAST 307 in 2015 is $811 (+ sundry fees) and for MINS 405 is $1,225 (+ sundry fees).

Contact:

For further details contact Paul Trebilco, Department of Theology and Religion paul.trebilco@otago.ac.nz or 03 4798 798
**Course Outline:**

**Module 1: Introduction to Disability Theology**
An introduction to practical theology and the theology of disability: the relationship between theology and practice; the social construction of disability; the social construction of humanness; the centrality of theology for understanding disability and the centrality of disability for understanding theology.

**Module 2: Disability in the Christian Tradition: Theologies of disability**
An exploration of the ways in which disability has been understood and responded to within the theology of the church. Here we will focus on the ways in which profound disabilities can actually enable us to see the true nature of what it means to be human. Dependency, contingency and vulnerability are the true status of all human beings. A focus on profound disability opens up the possibility of us recognising what it really means to be human. Theologians discussed here may include Stanley Hauerwas, Jean Vanier, Nancy Eiesland, St. Augustine, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth.

**Module 3: Re-Thinking Discipleship: The vocation of people with profound intellectual disabilities**
This module will ask and seek to answer the questions: What does it mean to know God when you have no intellectual capacity to do so? What does faith mean when you can never know with your mind or proclaim with your lips who Jesus is? Reflection on these questions takes us into the heart of the nature of discipleship, vocation and the Body of Christ.

**Module 4: Theology and mental health and illness: Understanding psychosis differently**
This module builds on the critical analytical skills gained in the first three modules and offers a reframe of what psychotic illness is and how the church should respond to it. We will discover that psychiatry, valuable as it is, may not be the best place for the church to begin its journey into mental health and illness. The church has another set of stories to tell about those experiences that we describe as mental illness. By bringing together perspectives from theology, anthropology and psychiatry we will develop a revised model of psychotic illness that opens up new possibilities for theological understanding and pastoral practice.

**Module 5: Theology and mental health and illness: Depression**
This module will explore the lived experience of depression and will offer fresh perspectives drawn from theological reflection on this deep and painful human experience. Issues discussed will be: culture and depression, medication, sadness, psalms of lament, suicide and suicide prevention.

**Module 6: Forgetting Whose We Are: A practical theology of dementia.**
Dementia is more feared than cancer. Why is this? What is it that scares us about dementia? The fear of losing our memory? The fear of losing our-selves? The module will explore dementia and offer a perspective that indicates that dementia is as much a social, psychological and spiritual experience as it is a neurological one. We will re-think dementia in the light of God’s memory and offer a counter-story to the negative stories that are told about dementia within western cultures. Theological reflection on dementia helps us to understand what it means to be fully human when we have forgotten who and whose we are.