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Disability and Attitudes toward It in the Christian Thoughts of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas

Abstract: Disability as a human condition has aroused the interest of philosophers and theologians from ancient times, through the Middle Ages, to the present day. The article attempts to demonstrate the development and continuity of Christian views on the phenomenon of disability by examining the philosophical and theological thoughts of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. The hermeneutical analyses conducted in this article suggest that contrary to the position of theologian Brian Brock, Saint Augustine's thought concerning disabilities did not focus solely on the category of *wonders*. Moreover, Augustine's original openness to disability was not forgotten in the Middle Ages. There is a development in the understanding of disability in the texts of Augustine and Aquinas. It is possible to interpret in this way medieval theological texts referring to disability, as well as texts of Aristotle, which at that time returned to intellectual circulation.

Keywords: disability, attitudes, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas

Introduction

Dating back to ancient times, a milestone in thinking and a moment of social change towards human disability was the idea of access to anomalies, new in early Christianity, announced by St. Augustine in the circle of Hellenic and Roman culture. It was the theologian's reaction to psychosomatic, structural, functional otherness, and sometimes even the monstrosity of humans. In this article, we adopted the main category of *disability* for description anomalies (monstrous births) to denote the distinctiveness and ambiguity

of phenomena and events occurring in families. The category and theoretical construct of disability can be found in an extensive work entitled *The City of God* by Saint Augustine. Kulbaka¹ writes that since antiquity, disability has been by the authors interpreted in four primary contexts: religious, social, moral, and legal. The key in this context is that early Christianity, and especially the original thoughts of St. Augustine on anomalies in infants, revealed the religious and philosophical foundations of a transparent, slow process of constructing an innovative approach to the human disability and actions aimed at the gradual acceptance. This means that, among other things, it regulated cultural access to anomalies with a privilege, giving disabled infants the right to life by prohibiting infanticide and the most frequent practice in the pagan culture of abandoning a child with a visible deformation, i.e., disability.²

Meanwhile, the cultural background for developing a different approach to these issues, announced by St. Augustine, was based on an extended approach to anomalies and a specific plan of social life. Kulbaka³ notes that the times of early and late antiquity (313–476 AD), however, more often used the rule of exclusion and placed disabled people within the so-called lack of access to any individual or social privileges that able-bodied citizens had. These privileges included the right to life for newborns with anomalies. Based on eugenic recommendations against anomalies previously formulated by Aristotle and Plato, the norms of the Hellenic and Roman cultural circles normalized the extermination of weak people.⁴ At the same time, the complicated evolution of the social approach to anomalies announced by St. Augustine in antiquity in the next century, i.e., the Middle Ages, was characterized by the creation of niches of acceptance for physical and mental otherness, especially in charitable church institutions, but more often, despite the development of theological and philosophical thought about the disability, the social and cultural implementation of taming the disability was complex.

¹ Kulbaka, *Niepełnosprawność*, 7.

² Kulbaka, *Niepełnosprawność*, 19.

³ Cf. Kulbaka, *Niepełnosprawność*, 19.

⁴ Cf. Kulbaka, *Niepełnosprawność*, 19.

For this article, we selected authors for analysis according to the following two criteria. First, we selected Church Doctors who researched and analysed disability extensively. Second, we selected theologians and philosophers most representative of the eras. St. Augustine and St. Thomas met these criteria. The selection of two representatives of antiquity and the Middle Ages was preceded by a search of sources, which shows that there is a paucity of sources about the disabilities of ancient Church Fathers. Gossbell writes “throughout the texts of the early church, no specific mention is made of the health of the infant in regards to infanticide or exposure until the work of Augustine.”⁵ Moreover, Laes⁶ and Massmann⁷ mention Saint Gregory, who analysed leprosy, but also state that “by contrast, in wider ancient Greco-Roman literature, people with disabilities are mentioned only very sporadically.”⁸

In this article, we put forward a thesis and argue through hermeneutical analysis that the thought of St. Augustine’s idea of disability, developed against the background of content consistent with the Bible, is an innovative thought in which we agree with Brock,⁹ which, however, was not negated or ignored in the Middle Ages as Brock claims,¹⁰ but was continued, for example, in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. We argue that an inevitable continuation of the ancient thought of Saint Augustine can be seen, ensuring constant development, and increasing accessibility and openness of the church community to anomaly-related issues, i.e., disability. This opening was both doctrinal and practical.

1. Attitudes to Disability in the Ancient Theology of St. Augustine

Disability in Saint Augustine’s interpretations and analyses originates in questions regarding psychophysical differences in the world

⁵ Gossbell, *As long as*, 109.

⁶ Laes, *Introduction*, 11.

⁷ Massmann, *Those Who*, 540.

⁸ Massmann, *Those Who*, 540.

⁹ Cf. Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 42.

¹⁰ Cf. Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 42.

of animals and humans. This is comparable to the views of St. Augustine on the created category of *monstrous births*, which Saint Augustine extensively discusses in *The City of God*. In Augustine's works, one can observe the essence of the philosopher's key thoughts and his innovative views on psychosomatic human differences and a truly humanistic approach to justifying the role of disabilities in society, which mainly concerned the deformations and differences in the structures of the human body in ancient times and references to the weakness of the intellect meant as an anomaly. Saint Augustine repeatedly shows his understanding and humanistic approach to disabilities when referring to various social problems of ancient times. The theologian does not use the term disability directly to denote psychosomatic differences but uses a set of concepts functioning in given times, which we include in the semantic scope of the concept of anomaly for analytical purposes. These are: "monster" (*monstrum*), "monsters" (*monstra*), "abnormal at birth" (*inuitata nascuntur*), "deformity" (*deformitas*), "partial deformities" (*deformitas partis*), "feeble-minded" (*pusillanimes*), "weak" (*infirmi*), and "fame" (*fama*). We also find that, contrary to Brock's claim,¹¹ St. Augustine did not identify disability as the exclusive category of wonder (*miraculum*), but also referred to medical-clinical aspects and observed bodily deformations.

1.1. Disability and the Normalization of the Phenomenon in *The City of God*

In books of *The City of God*, Augustine, using examples, considers disabilities in numerous ways, i.e., human disability, congenital and acquired. Analyses of Saint Augustine are critical for the development of Christian social thought because the author devotes attention to resolving the issue of the right to life of beings "abnormal at birth." Augustine does not directly use the phrase "right to life" but often justifies why human disabilities and people with bodily and functional differences are born and will be born. In Book XII, Augustine points out that abnormalities at birth are not something unique;

¹¹ Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 42.

they are not something new because differences and monstrosities constantly appear in the world of animals and plants and differ from each other. Augustine thus normalizes otherness by emphasizing the duty that nothing should be new, that “monstrous and irregular productions”¹² should be born under the sun. Thus, Augustine announced and confirmed as a social norm the right to life of “monstrous” newborns (*inuitata nascuntur*), i.e., offspring with visible deformities and somatic differences.

For men were before us, are with us, and shall be after us; and so all living things and all plants. Even monstrous and irregular productions, though differing from one another, and though some are reported as solitary instances, yet resemble one another generally, in so far as they are miraculous and monstrous, and, in this sense, have been, and shall be, and are no new and recent things under the sun.¹³

Fuerunt enim homines ante nos, sunt et nobiscum, erunt et post nos; ita quaeque animantia vel arbusta. Monstra quoque ipsa, quae inuitata nascuntur, quamvis inter se diversa sint et quaedam eorum semel facta narrentur, tamen secundum id, quod generaliter miracula et monstra sunt, utique et fuerunt et erunt, nec recens et novum est, ut monstrum sub sole nascatur.¹⁴

Saint Augustine, in the same Book XVI, explains the understanding of God’s intentions in the context of the birth of a monstrous child. Here, he means a child with a visible disability (*monstrum*), born of human parents. The author creates an assumption and then argues that the birth of a child with disability from human parents is not a failure of God, as the work (art) of an unskilled craftsman. Thus, the author clearly emphasizes the purposefulness of God’s creation of a child with disabilities. In this statement, Augustine lays

¹² Augustinus, *The City of God*, Book XII, 290.

¹³ Augustinus, *The City of God*, Book XII, 290.

¹⁴ Augustinus, *Civ. XII*, 13.

the foundations for the subjective equality of the human anomaly and able-bodied people born of human parents.

But supposing they are men of whom these marvels are recorded, what if God has seen fit to create some races in this way, that we might not suppose that the monstrous births which appear among ourselves are the failures of that wisdom whereby He fashions the human nature, as we speak of the failure of a less perfect workman?¹⁵

Sed si homines sunt, de quibus illa mira conscripta sunt: quid, si propterea Deus voluit etiam nonnullas gentes ita creare, ne in his monstris, quae apud nos oportet ex hominibus nasci, eius sapientiam, qua naturam fingit humanam, velut artem cuiuspiam minus perfecti opificis, putaremus errasse?¹⁶

Saint Augustine outlines a broad horizon of human differences and creates an interpretation of the approach to them and the humanistic understanding of them. Augustine refers to known cases of human structural and somatic anomalies. What is worth emphasizing, Augustine writes concerning the subject of his analyses and uses the expression “human” (*homo*). He also uses the phrase “fame” (*fama*) to describe disability in a person, viewed by the local community as a reason for fame. The subjects of Augustine’s analysis are adult unseparated twins (Siamese twins) with a rare genetic defect. The subject of analysis described by Saint Augustine has two heads, two chests, one stomach, four hands and two feet. The critical conclusion formulated by Augustine refers to the origin of a human offspring with a bodily structure different from its parents, which the philosopher, given such differences, undeniably recognizes as a child descended from Adam.

Some years ago, quite within my own memory, a man was born in the East, double in his upper, but single in his lower half—having

¹⁵ Augustinus, *The City of God*, Book XVI, ch. 8, 448.

¹⁶ Augustinus, *Civ. XVI*, 8, 2.

two heads, two chests, four hands, but one body and two feet like an ordinary man, and he lived so long that many had an opportunity of seeing him. But who could enumerate all the human births that have differed widely from their ascertained parents? As, therefore, no one will deny that these are all descended, from that one man, so all the races which are reported to have diverged in bodily appearance from the usual course which nature generally or almost universally preserves, if they are embraced in that definition of man as rational and mortal animals, unquestionably trace their pedigree to that one first father of all.¹⁷

Ante annos aliquot, nostra certe memoria, in Oriente duplex homo natus est superioribus membris, inferioribus simplex. Nam duo erant capita, duo pectora, quattuor manus, venter autem unus, et pedes duo, sicut uni homini; et tamdiu vixit, ut multos ad eum videndum fama contraheret. Quis autem omnes commemorare possit humanos fetus longe dissimiles his, ex quibus eos natos esse certissimum est? [...] Non itaque nobis videri debet absurdum, ut, quemadmodum in singulis quibusque gentibus quaedam monstra sunt hominum, ita in universo genere humano quaedam monstra sint gentium. Quapropter ut istam quaestionem pedetentim cauteque concludam: aut illa, quae talia de quibusdam gentibus scripta sunt, omnino nulla sunt; aut si sunt, homines non sunt; aut ex Adam sunt, si homines sunt.¹⁸

In analyses, Augustine sees a spectrum of differences and anomalies in the human structural body, from global ones to those related to a general different appearance or functions connected with sounds, movements, and then negotiates the humanity of people with anomalies, which Christians should not doubt.

What shall I say of the Cynocephali, whose dog-like head and barking proclaim them beasts rather than men? But we are not bound to believe all we hear of these monstrosities. But whoever

¹⁷ Augustinus, *The City of God*, Book XVI, ch. 8, 447.

¹⁸ Augustinus, *Civ. XVI*, 8, 2.

is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational, mortal animal, regardless of what unusual appearance he presents in colour, movement, sound, nor how peculiar he is in some power, part, or quality of his nature, no Christian can doubt that the springs from that one protoplast. We can distinguish the common human nature from that which is peculiar, and therefore wonderful.¹⁹

Quid dicam de Cynocephalis, quorum canina capita atque ipse latratus magis bestias quam homines confitetur? Sed omnia genera hominum, quae dicuntur esse, credere non est necesse. Verum quisquis uspiam nascitur homo, id est animal rationale mortale, quamlibet nostris inusitatam sensibus gerat corporis formam seu colorem sive motum sive sonum sive qualibet vi, qualibet parte, qualibet qualitate naturam: ex illo uno protoplasto originem ducere nullus fidelium dubitaverit. Apparet tamen quid in pluribus natura obtinuerit et quid sit ipsa raritate mirabile.²⁰

Another example of a difference in the structure of the human hand (a type of phocomelia) given by St. Augustine was to raise the question and resolve the origin of the man with disability. It excludes the existence of a separate race of extraordinary beings and reinforces with a rhetorical question the undeniable origin of man from the first man created by the Creator.

At Hippo-Diarrhytus there is a man whose hands are crescent-shaped, and have only two fingers each, and his feet similarly formed. If there were a race like him, it would be added to the history of the curious and wonderful. Shall we therefore deny that this man is descended from that one man who was first created?²¹

¹⁹ Augustinus, *The City of God*. Book XVI, ch. 8, 446–447.

²⁰ Augustinus, *Civ. XVI*, 8, 1.

²¹ Augustinus, *The City of God*, Book XVI, ch. 8, 447.

Apud Hipponem Diarrhytum est homo quasi lunatas habens plantas et in eis binos tantummodo digitos, similes et manus. Si aliqua gens talis esset, illi curiosae atque mirabili adderetur historiae. Num igitur istum propter hoc negabimus ex illo uno, qui primus creatus est, esse propagatum?²²

1.2. Social Judgements in Antiquity and the Origins of the Affirmative Model of Disability

Additionally, Augustine realizes that the disability is socially judged and judged harshly. Therefore, he reacts to the statements of others and their reports about people's differences and speaks critically about those disgusted by the "partial deformities" (*deformitates partis*) of a person with a visible physical, structural anomaly in the body structure, e.g., more fingers. Augustine criticizes the creation of judgments about disability based on fragmentary data, which means without considering the context or the entirety of the relationship or, as we assume, the humanity of a given person. The author strengthens the statement by emphasizing, that even if someone does not understand why God caused the anomaly and difference from the norm, God knows what He is doing, and no one should blame him for his work.

But He who cannot see the whole is offended by the deformity of the part because he is blind to that which balances it, and to which it belongs. We know that men are born with more than four fingers on their hands or toes on their feet: this is a smaller matter; but far from us be the folly of supposing that the Creator mistook the number of a man's fingers, though we cannot account for the difference. And so, in cases where the divergence from the rule is greater. He, whose works no man justly finds fault with, knows what He has done.²³

²² Augustinus, *Civ. XVI*, 8, 2.

²³ Augustinus, *The City of God*, Book XVI, ch. 8, 447.

Sed qui totum inspicere non potest, tamquam deformitate partis offenditur, quoniam cui congruat et quo referatur ignorat. Pluribus quam quinis digitis in manibus et pedibus nasci homines novimus; et haec levior est quam ulla distantia; sed tamen absit, ut quis ita desipiat, ut existimet in numero humanorum digitorum errasse Creatorem, quamvis nesciens cur hoc fecerit. Ita etsi maior diversitas oriatur, scit ille quid egerit, cuius opera iuste nemo reprehendit.²⁴

It is worth emphasizing that Brock²⁵ also refers to the social context of Saint Augustine's thought in his publications by analysing the social attitudes of the so-called sinful people towards disability treated as pity, including avoiding those considered a monster. The author writes that the approach to otherness was constantly the subject of Saint Augustine's interest and concern because "believing every human being to have a rational soul led him to the belief that there was hope for this sinful proclivity to be healed."²⁶

Meanwhile, Augustine justifies with further arguments the purposefulness of the disability's existence and its role in the social world. The philosopher notes that creating disabilities as God's intention may lead to even wider groups of people with differences. The author emphasizes the purposefulness of the existence of a human disability in the wisdom of God, who knows what things should be like and justifies them by complementing each other's similarities and differences, which can contribute to the beauty of all humanity. Augustine articulated that the disability, and therefore disabled people, exist not only because God has not failed but because they complement the beauty of humanity. The following statement about complementation is an innovative, affirmative, and inclusive thought about disability in the work of Saint Augustine.

The same account which is given of monstrous births in individual cases can be given of monstrous races. For God, the Creator

²⁴ Augustinus, *Civ.* XVI, 8, 2.

²⁵ Cf. Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 26.

²⁶ Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 26.

of all, knows where and when each thing ought to be, or to have been created because He sees the similarities and diversities which can contribute to the beauty of the whole.²⁷

Qualis autem ratio redditur de monstrosis apud nos hominum partibus, talis de monstrosis quibusdam gentibus reddi potest. Deus enim creator est omnium, qui ubi et quando creari quid oporteat vel oportuerit, ipse novit, sciens universitatis pulchritudinem quarum partium vel similitudine vel diversitate contextat.²⁸

The following concepts in which St. Augustine included analysis on the disability are the concepts of “amputation” (*amputatio*), “weakness” (*imbecillitas*), “fatigue” (*lassitudo*) and “numbness or slowness” (*torpor aut tarditas*). The book *The City of God* reveals more exceptional knowledge of Saint Augustine on the complicated adaptation to an acquired human anomaly and how a person with an acquired disability is functioning psychologically. Augustine notes with great empathy that a disabled person’s beauty is destroyed, as well as a person’s health and well-being.

The amputation or decay of the members of the body puts an end to its integrity, deformity blights its beauty, weakness its health, lassitude its vigor, sleepiness, or sluggishness its activity;²⁹

Membrorum certe amputatio vel debilitas hominis expugnat incolumitatem, deformitas pulchritudinem, imbecillitas sanitatem, vires lassitudo, mobilitatem torpor aut tarditas;³⁰

The empathetic and innovative approach of Saint Augustine’s attitude to disabilities is evident in his prescription for dealing with those who are unruly, weak, or feeble-minded. The author specifies pedagogical recommendations as admonishing the unruly,

²⁷ Augustinus, *The City of God*, Book XVI, ch. 8, 447.

²⁸ Augustinus, *Civ. XVI*, 8, 2.

²⁹ Augustinus, *The City of God*, Book XIX, ch. 4, 616.

³⁰ Augustinus, *Civ. XIX*, 4, 2.

supporting the weak and providing comfort to the feeble-minded (*pusillanimes*; having intellectual disabilities). The approach indicated below is an innovative idea. It is the opposite of abandoning children with disabilities, which was not uncommon in ancient times, their social exclusion or isolationism. Saint Augustine indicated not only the justification for the place in social life for disabilities but also the attitude of able-bodied people towards it, and people with disabilities.

In like manner it is said elsewhere, “Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men”;³¹

Propter quod dicitur proficientibus bonis et ex fide in hac peregrinatione viventibus: *Invicem onera vestra portate, et sic adimplebitis legem Christi*; item alibi dicitur: *Corripite inquietos, consolamini pusillanimes, suscipite infirmos, patientes estote ad omnes*;³²

Additionally, Saint Augustine outlined the space for people with intellectual disabilities (“feeble-minded”) to have access to a happy life and assured of the valuable contribution of disabled people to the world. Maliszewska points out that when writing about intellectual disability as a ‘handicap,’ St. Augustine did not rule out a happy life with the anomaly of people with intellectual disabilities because even the life of disabled people is good. The author believes that Augustine indicated that a ‘feeble-minded’ person can offer something to the world and is a gift.³³

In summary, Saint Augustine’s knowledge of social attitudes toward disability also reveals the philosophers’ and theologians’ attitudes toward otherness in people. This is especially visible in his commitment to explaining the human anomaly, the complex human psychosomatic diversity, the attitude of giving comfort

³¹ Augustinus, *The City of God*, Book XV, ch. 6, 392.

³² Augustinus, *Civ. XV*, 6.

³³ Maliszewska, *W stronę antropologii*, 106.

to feeble-minded people, and the fact that Christians should not doubt the human origin of people with the disability. Especially the thought of providing comfort to excluded people in ancient times, those low in the social hierarchy, the weakest, most clearly indicates the fullness of the innovative thought of Saint Augustine about disability. In our opinion, the pioneering anthropological thought of St. Augustine – the theologian of disability – as previously indicated by Brock,³⁴ also created the basis for the theoretical acceptance of cognitive, somatic, or physical anomalies and changed the approach to it in the theoretical and practical dimensions, on the plane of social life. Saint Augustine created the basis for a new social approach to disability in theological reflection and justification of the right to exist for people with disabilities, as well as including the causes and image of disability in God's plans.

Moreover, Saint Augustine defined the complementary social role of differences to the norm as complementing the beauty of humanity. Brock³⁵ adds that the thought of St. Augustine on the disability, changed the attitude towards disability among early Christians, which is worth noting against the background of the cultural historical realities of the Hellenic-Roman heritage on the disability and the time of the fifth century AD.

Given the above content, we would like to emphasize that Saint Augustine was a Christian philosopher and theologian who, through personal knowledge, in-depth observations of human differences, and philosophical reflection, gave rise to an affirmative model of disability³⁶ in the theological thought of Christianity. We also want to draw attention to the fact that, according to Brock³⁷ (who identified Augustine's exclusively empirical observations and thought on origins of disability with *divine wonders*), the theological thought of St. Augustine's idea of disability was somewhat forgotten in the Middle Ages, which gave priority to the science and thought of Greek philosophers. We would like to point out that, as described

³⁴ Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 30.

³⁵ Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 25–28.

³⁶ McCormack – Collins, *The affirmative model*, 157.

³⁷ Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 41.

in *The City of God*, Augustine did not use the word ‘wonder’ excessively in relation to his own analyses of disability, as we show in the text of the article. Additionally, we argue that his thought was neither forgotten nor abandoned in the Middle Ages. We reinterpret this idea in the next section, noticing the continuity of Augustine’s empirical thought in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas.

2. Attitudes to Disability in the Medieval Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas

Moving on to the analysis of the attitudes towards anomalies in the Christianity of the Middle Ages and the theology and philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, it should be noted that the previously mentioned view of Brock³⁸ on the abandoning of Augustine’s thought about disability in the medieval times and his critique of charity model of disability appears to be superficial or even unfair. Firstly, due to historical conditions, the Middle Ages saw the creation and development of institutionalized forms of care for people with distinct types of disabilities. There were unique places developed and dedicated to them, and many saints implemented their Christian charisma by serving the sick, even becoming a civilizational model explaining how to deal with people with disabilities or diverse types of diseases – e.g., Elizabeth of Hungary. These exemplary people, in practice, fulfilled Christ’s call to see God in others and their suffering, to see themselves in themselves and to include people with disabilities in the Church community and, more broadly, into the general human community (after all, this was the nature of the hospitals funded by Saint Elizabeth). The approach to disabilities in the Christian culture of the Middle Ages was therefore characterized by compassionate understanding of otherness, and creation of places to stay (reducing homelessness), and therefore can be considered inclusion.

Secondly, the need to consider disabilities that appear in people from birth or are acquired during life, to take care of weak people, and define such actions as particularly important was also developed in the medieval theoretical way, which we will analyse in the thought

³⁸ Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 40–41.

of a philosopher and theologian: St. Thomas Aquinas. Characteristically, this topic has not been discussed until now,³⁹ which does not mean it is not present in Aquinas's texts. Perhaps, a view of the lack of attitude or even wrong attitude to the subject of human disability results from previous attempts to read the doctrine of the medieval author only based on his metaphysical teachings, which, according to Romero,⁴⁰ but also us, is deeply insufficient. That is why the American author proposes to use the moral teachings of Aquinas, including *Summa Theologiae II-II* and in *De malo* where we can find a much deeper and inclusive model of approach to disability.⁴¹ Furthermore, the conclusion of the American author must be taken further. When analysing the issue of disability and the approach to it, it is worth exploring Aquinas's biblical commentaries, which were the primary form of his daily teaching. For Thomas Aquinas, disability can be understood as suffering. For example, in his commentary on the *Letter to the Hebrews*, Thomas Aquinas emphasized the need for deep solidarity and empathy when dealing with a person suffering in a way:

But it particularly pertains to a work of mercy to regard another is suffering as one's own.⁴²

Specialiter autem hoc pertinent ad opus misericordiae, alienam miseriam suam reputare.⁴³

Moreover, disability is a comprehensive concept, and every person can be described as having some kind of anomaly, can have disabilities or be sick, due to the lack of perfection in us, understood as the perfect functioning of all parts of our body. Therefore, according to Aquinas, in this sense, we all need help and mercy because, after

³⁹ Romero, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 6–7.

⁴⁰ Romero, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 6–7.

⁴¹ Romero, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 15.

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, *Letter to the Hebrews*, n. 729.

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb.* XIII, lect. 1, n. 729.

original sin, the original harmony of human nature was disturbed in each of us.⁴⁴

Finally, thirdly, the doctrinal thought of the Middle Ages did not differ significantly from the patristic thought (which will be shown, among others, in Aquinas's commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, often written concerning the Fathers of the Church) and, on the contrary, it moved towards a deeper understanding and acceptance of disabilities and person with disabilities. Moreover, when it comes to Thomas's interpretation of Aristotle, where Aquinas reinterprets the cold and logical, although devoid of mercy thought of the Stagirite, in the spirit of the Christian idea of caring for weaker people.

Additionally, the impossibility of identifying the phenomenon of suffering with moral evil or sin is indicated, according to Thomas Aquinas, by the genuinely suffering nature of Christ himself, who was without sin. Importantly, corresponding to the unfairness of Christian thought accusation of not looking at a person with a disability as simply a human being and not through the prism of anomalies, Thomas Aquinas points to the fact of Jesus' suffering as something that shows the "ordinariness" of his nature as a human being.

But occasionally, they signify the corruptibility of flesh and blood: *flesh and blood shall not possess the kingdom of God, nor corruption incorruption* (1 Cor 15:50). But here it does not refer to vices, for Christ assumed a nature without sin, but with the possibility of suffering because he assumed a flesh similar to the sinner: *in the likeness of sinful flesh* (Rom 8:3).⁴⁵

Aliquando vero ipsa corruptibilitas carnis et sanguinis. I Cor. XV, 50: *caro et sanguis regnum Dei non possidebunt, neque corruptio incorruptionem*. Sed hic non intelligitur de vitiis: Christus enim assumpsit naturam sine peccato, sed cum passibilitate, quia

⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *STh* I–II, q. 77, a. 3.

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam*, n. 138.

assumpsit carnem similem peccatrici. Rom. VIII, v. 3: *in similitudinem carnis peccati*.⁴⁶

2.1. Disability in Aquinas's Theological Doctrine and Biblical Commentaries

Therefore, according to Aquinas, participation in our human nature gives rise to the possibility of suffering in Jesus, which cannot result from any moral defect or sin. This is the most severe and crowning argument developed by Thomas Aquinas, which indicates that we cannot identify suffering or weakness with sin because occasionally, it simply has nothing to do with human sinfulness.

That Christ is a partaker of flesh and blood is not to be understood as referring to the vices of flesh and blood because he did not take on sin or commit any, but as referring to the very substance of animated flesh because he assumed flesh and soul. It also included the possibility of suffering because he assumed our nature capable of suffering.⁴⁷

[...] Quod autem hic dicitur quod Christus communicavit carni et sanguini, non est intelligendum secundum quod dicunt vitia carnis et sanguinis, quia non assumpsit culpam, nec commisit; sed secundum quod dicunt ipsam substantiam carnis animatae, quia carnem et animam assumpsit. Item est intelligendum de passibilitate carnis, quia assumpsit naturam nostram passibilem.⁴⁸

Moreover, Aquinas adds that the evil that affects a person is not necessarily related to the sin of a given person. Often, the disability may come from another, purely external source and have only external causes, i.e., arise because of causing bodily torment to someone, using taunting (stigmatizing), or taking actions such as

⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb.* cap. 2, lect. 4, n. 138–139.

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam*, n. 139.

⁴⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb.* cap. 2, lect. 4, n. 139.

imprisonment. In this way, the anthropological thought of Thomas Aquinas regarding suffering and disabilities in human life is based on Christology.

During life, evils were inflicted upon them in three ways: some by bodily affliction; some by mockery; and some by imprisonment.⁴⁹

In vita vero mala tripliciter illata sunt eis, quia quaedam quantum ad corporalem afflictionem, quaedam quantum ad irrisionem, quaedam quantum ad inclusionem.⁵⁰

At the same time, what is undoubtedly the evil identified by Aquinas with sin is the disease (infirmity) of the human interior – the human soul – as he points out when commenting on the same letter to the Hebrews – “Ista autem infirmitas est peccatum.”⁵¹

Internal harm is infirmity, concerning whose removal he says they *recovered strength from weakness*, as appears particularly in Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:17). But that infirmity is sin: *have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak* (Ps 6:3). Therefore, one who rises has recovered.⁵²

Nocuentum interius est infirmitas, de cuius remotione dicit *convaluerunt de infirmitate*, sicut specialiter apparet de Ezechiele, IV Reg. XX, 5 ss. et Is. XXXVIII, v. 1 ss. Ista autem infirmitas est peccatum.⁵³

This is confirmed by Aquinas’s use of the term “amentia” to designate a cognitive disorder not in terms of sin, but consequences caused by physical damage to the brain or other parts of the body.

⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam*, n. 644.

⁵⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb.* cap. 11, lect. 8, n. 644.

⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam*, n. 640.

⁵² Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam*, n. 640.

⁵³ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb.* cap. 11, lect. 7, n. 640.

It is worth noting that St. Thomas Aquinas writes about cognitive disorders and not intellectual disability – after all, the work of the intellect is understood as thinking; according to Aristotle, it is attributed to the soul and is not the effort of a sensory organ.⁵⁴ In turn, knowledge begins in the body's organs; hence, their damage significantly impacts the way of knowing the world but cannot be associated with sin. Of course, moral, or spiritual evil can be associated with a specific person only in the case of the soul and its choice – its sin.

In this way, the disease or suffering from stigma of a person not only does not have to be a stigma of God's punishment and responsibility for sin, but sometimes disability may even turn out to be a saving gift that helps protect us from going in the wrong direction. A person with disability understood by Thomas Aquinas is not as determined by evil, but rather as having a chance to go in the right direction. In contrast, those who are completely healthy but develop evil in their hearts can go in the opposite direction. Aquinas develops Augustine's teaching as follows:

If then, you ask which way to go, accept Christ, for he is the way: *this is the way, walk in it* (Isa 30:21). And Augustine says: *walk like this human being, and you will come to God. It is better to limp along on the way than to walk briskly off the way.* For one who limps on the way, even though he makes just a little progress, is approaching his destination; but if one walks off the way, the faster he goes, the further he gets from his destination.⁵⁵

Si ergo quaeras, qua transeas, accipe Christum, quia ipse est via; Is. XXX, v. 21: *haec est via, ambulate in ea.* Et Augustinus dicit: *ambula per hominem, et pervenies ad Deum. Melius est enim in via claudicare, quam praeter viam fortiter ambulare.* Nam qui in via claudicat, etiam si parum proficiscatur, appropinquat ad

⁵⁴ Romero, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 4.

⁵⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium*, n. 1870.

terminum; qui vero extra viam ambulat, quanto fortius currit, tanto magis a termino elongator.⁵⁶

This interpretation was also made in Aquinas' commentary on the Hebrews, when he discusses the faith of people affected by the disease and the goods intended especially for them. Aquinas again refers to one of the authors of the patristic era – this time to Gregory.

But just as those temporal benefits were given to them as to sick people for sustenance by the merit of their faith, so they were the figures of coming good things, which will be given to us by the merit of faith: *and these signs shall follow those who believe* (Mark 16:17). All of these Gregory explains of spiritual goods.⁵⁷

Sicut autem ista temporalia beneficia illis data sunt tamquam infirmis, ad sustentationem per meritum fidei ipsorum, ita fuerunt figura futurorum bonorum, quae nobis ex merito fidei dabuntur. Mc.: *signa autem eos qui crediderint, haec sequentur*, et cetera. Quae Gregorius exponit de bonis spiritualibus.⁵⁸

People with disabilities related to illness or suffering are able and called to achieve personal holiness. The disabling conditions themselves, such as illness, suffering, do not exclude them from this path. Sometimes, on the contrary, they can achieve it more perfectly. They might also participate in it and, as, help others. The example for Aquinas is Christ himself, who suffered and therefore was able to suffer with others, or the spiritual weakness of the apostle Peter, which allowed him to empathize with other people tormented by various difficulties.

The motive for mercy is mentioned when he says because *he himself also is compassed with infirmity*. That motive is infirmity,

⁵⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *In Joan.* cap. XIV, lect. 2, n. 1870.

⁵⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam*, n. 642.

⁵⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb.* cap. 11, lect. 7, n. 642.

and those who are sometimes infirm: *but we have this treasure in earthen vessels* (2 Cor 4:7). This is because he may have compassion for the infirmities of others. This is the reason the Lord permitted Peter to fall: *judge of the disposition of your neighbour by yourself* (Sir 31:18). Therefore, he says because **he himself also is compassed with infirmity**, namely, as to penalties and guilt: *have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak* (Ps 6:3); *for I am a weak man and of short time and falling short of the understanding of judgment and laws* (Wis 9:5).⁵⁹

Motivum pietatis ponit, cum dicit **quoniam et ipse**, et cetera. Istud motivum est infirmitas. Et illi qui praesunt aliquando infirmantur. II Cor. IV, 7: *habemus thesaurum istum in vasis fictilibus*. Et ratio huius est, ut ex se aliorum infirmitatibus compatiantur: et ideo Dominus permisit cadere Petrum. Eccli. XXXI, 18: *intellige quae sunt proximi tui ex teipso*. Et ideo dicit **quoniam et ipse circumdatus est infirmitate**, scilicet quantum ad poenalitates et culpam. Ps. VI, 2: *miserere mei, Deus, quoniam infirmus sum*. Sap. c. IX, 5: *homo infirmus, et exigui temporis*, et cetera.⁶⁰

Moreover, suffering may even become accepted or voluntarily chosen by people striving for holiness in this way because it may be a way for them to acquire greater goods. Such goods are certainly spiritual goods, at least in comparison to the goods of this world (and these include health as such). Therefore, disabilities and illnesses not only do not exclude people from participation in spiritual goods but may directly constitute a way to acquire them, and thus lead to greater participation in the work of salvation and in the community of the Church.

But it should be noted that some things are good and delightful in themselves, and other things sad and evil. But no one may prefer evil things for their own sake, but for an end, as a sick person chooses a bitter potion and sad things to delightful things by

⁵⁹ Aquinas *Super Epistolam*, n. 247.

⁶⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb.* cap. 5, lect. 1, n. 247.

reason of some greater good which he can obtain by them. And so the saints, by hope of the ultimate end of eternal happiness, chose affliction and poverty over riches and pleasures because by them, they would have been hindered from attaining the end they hoped: *blessed are you when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, and it follows, be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven* (Matt 5:11); *I am your protector and your reward exceeding great* (Gen 15:1).⁶¹

Sciendum est autem, quod quaedam sunt secundum se bona et delectabilia, quaedam autem secundum se tristia et mala. Mala autem nullus propter se praelegit, sed propter finem; sicut infirmus praelegit potionem amaram et tristia delectabilibus ratione alicuius maioris boni, quod per hoc potest consequi. Et sic sancti, propter spem finis ultimi aeternae felicitatis, praelegunt afflictiones et paupertatem divitiis et voluptatibus, quia per ista impediuntur a consecutione finis sperati. Matth. V, 11: *beati eritis cum male dixerint vobis homines, et persecuti vos fuerint, et cetera*. Et sequitur: *gaudete et exultate, quoniam merces vestra copiosa est in caelis*. Gen. XV, v. 1: *ego protector tuus sum, et merces tua magna nimis*.⁶²

St. Thomas Aquinas adds that we see this participation in God's plan of salvation most fully in the example of Christ himself. In this case, the ability of the Son of God himself to suffer did not exclude the state of happiness and full participation in the implementation of God's plan of salvation.

In Christ, the fruit was glorification; hence, he says, ***and being consummated***, for from the instant of his conception he was perfectly consummated as to the happiness of his soul, inasmuch as it was drawn to God; but he still had a nature that could suffer, although after his passion he could not suffer.⁶³

⁶¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam*, n. 616.

⁶² Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb.* cap. 11, lect. 5, n. 616.

⁶³ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolam*, n. 260.

In Christo fructus fuit glorificatio, et ideo dicit *et consummatus*. Nam ab instanti conceptionis suae fuit consummatus perfectus, quantum ad beatitudinem animae, inquantum ferebatur in Deum; sed tamen habuit passibilitatem naturae. Sed post passionem habuit impassibilitatem.⁶⁴

Aquinas replies that, contrary to the superficial view of the problem of disability, it cannot be identified with a person's sin, and this is undoubtedly the case with congenital disability. Thomas shows this by commenting on a fragment of the Gospel about a man born blind, pointing out that attributing guilt to him (or his parents) is simply a theological error and a harmful simplification resulting from the poor interpretation of the Holy Scripture by the disciples of Christ themselves.

It must be said, according to Chrysostom, that because the Lord said to the paralytic, when he healed him, *behold, you are made well: sin no more, lest some worse things happen to you* (John 5:14), the disciples thought that his infirmity was due to sin. They also thought that every human illness arose from sin, as Eliphaz said: *think now, who that was innocent ever perished?* (Job 4:7). Therefore, they asked whether he had been born blind due to his sin or that of his parents. It does not seem to have been due to his sin because no one sins before he is born, since souls do not exist before their bodies, nor do they sin, as some mistakenly think: *though they were not yet born and had done nothing, either good or bad... not because of works but because of his call, she was told: the elder will serve the younger* (Rom 9:11). Nor does it seem that he suffered due to a sin of his parents, for we read: *the fathers will not be put to death for their children, nor will the children be put to death for the fathers* (Deut 24:16).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb.* cap. 5, lect. 2, n. 260.

⁶⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium*, n. 1296.

Dicendum, secundum Chrysostomum, quod quia Dominus supra V, 14, scilicet quando paralyticum sanavit, dixerat ei: ***ecce iam sanus factus es: vade, et amplius noli peccare***, cogitaverunt discipuli, quod propter peccatum ei illa infirmitas accidisset, aestimantes ulterius quod omnis humana infirmitas proveniret ex peccato, secundum quod Eliphaz dicit, Iob IV, 7: *quis unquam innocens periiit?* Et ideo quaerebant utrum ex peccato suo vel parentum caecus natus fuisset. Sed quod ex peccato suo esset, non videtur: quia nullus peccat antequam nascatur, cum animae ante corpora non fuerint, nec peccaverint, ut quidam falso opinati sunt: secundum illud Rom. IX, 11: *cum nondum nati fuissent, aut aliquid boni egissent aut mali... non ex operibus, sed ex vocante dictum est ei; quia maior serviet minori*. Quod autem hoc ex peccato parentum passus fuerit, non videtur: quia Deut. XXIV, 16, dicitur: *non occidentur patres pro filiis, nec filii pro parentibus*.⁶⁶

Moreover, in the further part of the commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Thomas Aquinas clearly states that in the case of a man born blind, Christ excluded the possibility of this disability arising because of his sins or the sins of his parents.

But when the Lord says, ***neither this man nor his parents have sinned***, he means that his blindness did not come as a result of their sins, as if to say, *the blind man was not born due to their sins*.⁶⁷

Quod autem Dominus dicit ***neque hic peccavit***, intelligendum est eos non peccasse, ad hoc quod caecus nasceretur; quasi diceret, *quod eius caecitas non est consecuta ex eorum peccato*.⁶⁸

Disability, even perceived as physical weakness, can be a remedy for a person and others around, and an opportunity for spiritual growth for themselves and others. Physical disability in its various

⁶⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *In Joan.* cap. X, lect. 1, n. 1296.

⁶⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium*, n. 1299.

⁶⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *In Joan.* cap. X, lect. 1, n. 1299.

aspects as a part of *industria humana* may, be a necessary remedy to save the spiritual health of a person, or a group of people. This is how Aquinas describes the issues of physical suffering and even the death of small children. In this sense, the evil of disease may be a punishment for sin, but it is a remedy that aims to save a person from a greater, spiritual evil.

To understand why one person is punished due to the sins of another, we must realize that a punishment has two aspects: it is an injury and a remedy. Occasionally, a part of the body is cut off to save the entire body. And a punishment of this kind causes an injury insofar as a part is cut off, but it is a remedy insofar as it saves the body itself. Still, a doctor never cuts off a superior member to save one which is inferior, but the other way around. Now in human matters, the soul is superior to the body, and the body is superior to external possessions. And so, it never happens that someone is punished in his soul for the sake of his body, but rather he is punished in his body as a curing remedy for his soul. Therefore, God sometimes imposes physical punishments, or difficulties in external concerns, as a beneficial remedy for the soul. And then punishments of this kind are not given just as injuries, but as healing remedies. Thus, the killing of the children of Sodom was for the good of their souls: not because they deserved it, but so they would not be punished more severely for increasing their sins in a life spent in imitating their parents. And in this way, some are often punished for the sins of their parents.⁶⁹

Quare autem uno peccato alius puniatur, sciendum, quod poena duo habet, laesionem et remedium. Nam aliquando abscinditur membrum ut totum corpus conservetur: et sic poena huius laesionem infert in quantum abscinditur, sed remedium habet in quantum conservat corpus. Numquam tamen medicus nobilium membrum abscindit propter conservationem minus nobilis, sed e converso. In rebus autem humanis, anima nobilior est corpore, et corpus nobilium exterioribus rebus; et ideo numquam fit ut

⁶⁹ Aquinas *Super Evangelium*, n. 1297.

aliquis propter corpus in anima puniatur, sed potius in corpore propter remedium animae. Quandoque ergo Deus irrogat poenas corporibus, vel rebus exterioribus, propter remedium bonum animae: et tunc huiusmodi poenae non inferuntur ut laesivae tantum, sed ut purgativae in remedium. Unde et ipsa puerorum Sodomitarum occisio fuit ad bonum animarum: non quidem ad meritum, sed ne paternae malitiae imitatores, vivendo peccata cumulantes, atrocius punirentur. Sic etiam pro peccatis parentum pluries aliqui puniuntur.⁷⁰

According to Aquinas, by allowing disability in human's weakness, God wants to achieve other, much more essential goals through him, and the suffering human is actively involved in their implementation. This shows us the blind man's participation in preaching the Good News.

If, therefore, an infirmity occurs in order that God's works be manifested, and God is made known through this manifestation, it is clear that such bodily infirmities occur for a good purpose.⁷¹

Si ergo infirmitas contingit ut manifestentur opera Dei, et per ipsorum manifestationem Deus innotescit; manifestum est quod huiusmodi corporales infirmitates contingunt propter bonum.⁷²

In this way, God includes humans in implementing his saving plan and even wants to perform great works in the disability, and on the person subjected to it. It is characteristic that he does not speak the words addressed to the blind man but explains God's works performed on him to any of his other disciples, not even the apostles.

⁷⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *In Joan.* cap. X, lect. 1, n. 1297.

⁷¹ Aquinas *Super Evangelium*, n. 1300.

⁷² Thomas Aquinas, *In Joan.* cap. X, lect. 1, n. 1300.

Sometimes afflictions are sent to manifest the divine glory; thus, we read here, *that the works of God should be made manifest in him*.⁷³

Quandoque vero ad manifestationem divinae gloriae: unde et hic dicitur *ut manifestentur opera Dei in illo*.⁷⁴

To summarize the biblical teaching of Thomas Aquinas, the fact of suffering or disabilities of body structure, function, or behaviour is not the reality that determines individuals and their participation in the community of believers. Disability, understood as a weakness, does not define a given human person because it remains something “external” to his/her internal – spiritual state. This aspect is important regarding the possibility of participating in God’s plans, not the anomaly itself, even if it is very painful for humans.

And note that he says, *compassed*. For carnal men have the weakness of sin within themselves, for their reason and will in themselves are subject to sin. But holy men, because they are not subject to sin, indeed have weakness externally, and so they nevertheless are compassed by the weakness of the flesh: *therefore, I, myself with the mind serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin* (Rom 7:25).⁷⁵

Et nota quod dicit *circumdatus*. Carnales enim habent infirmitatem peccati in interioribus. Ratio enim et voluntas in ipsis subditae sunt peccato. Sancti vero habent in exterioribus, quia non sunt subiecti peccato, tamen sunt circumdati fragilitate carnis. Rom. VII, v. 25: *mente servio legi Dei, carne autem legi peccati*.⁷⁶

This approach emphasized by Aquinas’s use of the term *monstrosity* to refer to the process of unbalanced upbringing of a person,

⁷³ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium*, n. 1302.

⁷⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *In Joan.* cap. X, lect. 1, n. 1302.

⁷⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Super Evangelium*, n. 247.

⁷⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *In Heb.* cap. 5, lect. 1, n. 247.

which disturbs his/her functioning. In the sermon *Puer Iesus* writes about this in his sermon dedicated to the issue of sustainable development of young people.

A human being is composed of a soul and a body, just as the body is composed of various members. However, imagine that a body would grow in one member and would be little in the other members. This is monstrous. Likewise, when someone is a man according to the body and not according to the mind.⁷⁷

Homo componitur ex anima et corpore sicut corpus componitur ex ceteris membris, sed ponamus quod aliquod corpus crescat in uno membro et sit puerilis in aliis membris: hoc est monstruosum. Similiter quando aliquis est vir secundum corpus et non secundum mentem.⁷⁸

Importantly, however, a physical disability, does not mean to exclude someone, but to search for help in medicine, similarly as in the case of lack of mental development along with the development of the body. It is necessary to seek help by paying more attention to the teaching process.

If only one of a man's feet is growing and not the other one, he focuses all his attention on a doctor so that the other foot may grow similarly. Likewise, should you, whose body grows in age, focus all your attention so that your mind grows in age.⁷⁹

Cogitare debemus ut quantum proficimus aetate corporis proficiamus aetate mentis. Qui in uno pede cresceret et non in alio, totum studium poneret in medico quod cresceret similiter in alio pede. Similiter qui crescit aetate corporis, debes ponere totum studium tuum ut crescas etiam aetate mentis.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Puer Iesus*, 90–91.

⁷⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Puer Iesus*, 1, 1.

⁷⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Puer Iesus*, 91.

⁸⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Puer Iesus*, 1, 1.

2.2. Disability in Aquinas's Philosophical Doctrine and Commentaries on Aristotle's works

As for the interpretation of Aristotle's writings (assessed by many authors as a departure from the original Christian sensitivity, and a return to the inhuman practices of Antiquity), Thomas Aquinas carries it out in a direction that would be compatible with a Christian sensitivity, open to disability, and the inclusion of people with disabilities into communities. Such a reinterpretation was possible, thanks to the Middle Ages' discovery of the value of what is not political but has an undoubted social dimension. While Aristotle's political community is open only to full-fledged (implicitly also healthy) citizens, Aquinas's work also describes relationships other than political ones, which also included relationships between people with unequal status.⁸¹

Access to what is social is much broader in Thomas Aquinas. For example, while enslaved people, according to Aristotle, were utterly subordinate to their masters' and did not have the slightest rights, to access the official cult of the polis (for slaves were prohibited from being buried religiously⁸²) there are no such restrictions in the teaching of Thomas Aquinas. The Lord could not have authority over the spiritual life of people subject to Him and could not, order or prohibit them from getting married or taking monastic vows.⁸³ It is not, in our opinion, a coincidence, that this fragment of the commentary on Aristotle we added when discussing disabilities. Aquinas's views the texts concerning natural slavery in this manner. People who are incapable of managing their lives because of their internal inabilities (e.g., intellectual) would necessarily require guidance from others. Note that Aquinas clearly states that this would be for their good, which he emphasizes much more consistently in compared to the Stagirite, who is only interested in the welfare of the enslavers, not themselves. Aquinas sees the relationship between a man who rules his reason and one whose cognitive powers are disturbed, through the need to care for the other. This means that

⁸¹ Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II-II, q. 80-121.

⁸² Cf. Olszewski – Przanowski, *Wprowadzenie*, 88.

⁸³ Thomas Aquinas, *STh* II-II, q. 21, a. 4, ad. 3.

Thomas Aquinas, unlike Aristotle, sees the possibility of a profound relationship between people with disabilities that may even develop into friendship, and the relationship, should be mutually beneficial (and not only in metaphorical sense as Reinders see this Aquinas's concept⁸⁴).

Aquinas also deepens the issue of interdependence between people within the political and social community, already present in Aristotle. However, according to MacIntyre,⁸⁵ this concerns primarily biological dependence, in Thomas Aquinas and in Aristotle because, the issue is (in our opinion) much more critical concerning spiritual dependence. From this perspective, every person has certain difficulties, can have disabilities, and needs help from others. This is the general status of a human person, which must become accepted by society and, as much as possible, everyone should be allowed to perform their tasks in political or social community.

Aquinas adds that such a person should participate in the community's life as much as his/her circumstances and abilities allow. Therefore, there is no general norm here. However, neither is it in the context of any other participant in social or political life. Furthermore, there is a postulate to consider a given person's individual capabilities. Moreover, the exclusion aspect appearing in Thomas's interpretation of politics is unrelated to any disability understood as a disease. However, it relates to moral evil in a person's life.

Now if it happens that someone cannot unite with the company of the city because of his crookedness, he is worse than a man, and is as if he were a beast.⁸⁶

Si autem contingat, quod aliquis non possit communicare societate civitatis propter suam pravitatem, est peior quam homo, et quasi bestia.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Cf. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift*, 348–354.

⁸⁵ Cf. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational*, 68–79.

⁸⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Politics*, n. 31.

⁸⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Politic.* lib. 1, lect. 1, n. 31.

Furthermore, earlier, commenting on the exact text by Aristotle, Aquinas notes that various forms of actual exclusion of people with certain disabilities from the political community cannot mean that these people are by nature incapable of social life, but that they are excluded from it and expelled from other less critical reasons by other people who do not accept the disability (for example, due to poverty) or other anomalies related to fate, i.e., accidents causing amputation of limbs or body parts (eyes), treated as sufficient to throw someone out of the everyday life.

But it is possible that doubt could come to someone from this: that those things which are according to nature are innate to everyone, but not all men are found to be city-dwellers. And therefore, to rule out this doubt, he accordingly says that some people are not civic because of fortune, for instance because they are driven out (*expulsi*) of the city; or, because they are poor, they necessarily must till the fields or tend animals. And this clarifies that it is not contrary to what was said – that man is naturally civic – because other natural things sometimes lack something due to fortune: for example, when someone’s hand is amputated, or when he loses an eye.⁸⁸

Non autem omnes homines inveniuntur esse habitatores civitatum. Et ideo ad hanc dubitationem excludendam consequenter dicit, quod aliqui sunt non civiles propter fortunam, utpote quia sunt expulsi de civitate, vel propter paupertatem necesse habent excolere agros, aut animalia custodire. Et hoc patet quod non est contrarium ei quod dictum est, quod homo sit naturaliter civilis: quia et alia naturalia aliquando deficiunt propter fortunam: puta, cum alicui amputatur manus, vel cum privatur oculo.⁸⁹

In this context, we can see the influence of Holy Scripture and comment on how Thomas Aquinas interpreted the works of the Stagirite. The radical exclusivism of Greek political thought as seriously

⁸⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Politics*, n. 27.

⁸⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia Politic.* lib. 1, lect. 1, n. 27.

weakened opened the presence and action in the community of people deprived of this right in the ancient polis. This could not have happened in the Middle Ages without accepting the authority of Holy Scripture and the influence of early Christian teaching, which Aquinas assumed and developed in his doctrine.

Conclusion

Over the centuries, the Church has tried to interpret disabilities (*monstrous births*) in the sense of St. Augustine and develop a coherent response to the issue of the existence and non-rejection of people with diverse types of disabilities. The ideas of Christianity in the fifth century AD distinguished themselves in their humanism towards disabilities compared to other ancient cultures as more empathetic and understanding. In philosophical reflection, they developed a new theoretical construct of disability, which considered (despite the causes) the recognition of the humanity and dignity of people with disabilities, along with the recommendation to deny eugenics.

Philosophical reflection of the early theologian of disability, St. Augustine, was a breakthrough and an antithesis to the recommendations of Greek scientists and philosophers (Aristotle, Plato) by proposing rejection of eugenics and building intellectual and humanistic access for disability concepts to the field of perception and awareness of early Christians. Saint Augustine, according to Brock, reversed the Greco-Roman thinking about disability and precisely indicated his conceptualization of disability as: “beginning from the assumption that because God has created each human, they must be good, he had moved to the belief that some impairments had to be understood positively as divine speech to the world.”⁹⁰ Brock⁹¹ emphasizes that the conclusions of St. Augustine’s teachings were both bold and innovative because the language of anomalous births as “monstrous births” also had to be deconstructed.

⁹⁰ Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 28.

⁹¹ Cf. Brock, *Wondrously Wounded*, 28.

Moreover, it is worth pointing out that from the point of view of disabilities' access to culture and social privileges, St. Augustine was the first Christian theologian who laid the foundations for the above-mentioned *affirmative model of disability*. Even though Saint Augustine pointed out that disability (in itself) is evil, the work of sin, which he regretted, at the same time he condemned the ridicule of disabilities and people, especially the intellectually disabled, as emphasized by Maliszewska.⁹² This makes this theologian a critic of the normalized exclusion and stigmatization of disabled people in Hellenic and Roman culture. Moreover, St. Augustine demonstrated advanced and deepened pedagogical knowledge and understanding of the disability meant as intellectual disability, which we also consider innovative. Furthermore, we also notice that St. Augustine wrote his works from the perspective of contemporary disability studies, including consideration, understanding, and knowledge of the issues, somatic, physical, and intellectual anomalies.

Given the above, it seems too simplistic to see in Christian practice or doctrine a break with tradition or a departure in the Middle Ages from the principles previously proclaimed in antiquity in the face of disabilities. On the contrary, since antiquity, we have had a constant development of doctrine, and increasingly more profound recognition of problems related to the nature of disability and building a coherent approach. Worth noting is, however, the existing gap and lack of reception of the biblical commentaries of St. Thomas Aquinas and their values, when it comes to disability analysed in the article. Looking for this positive message in dry metaphysical treatises or commentaries on Aristotle is not easy. However, we can also find thoughts departing from the line of the Stagirite. This is important because biblical commentaries are the type of teaching in which Aquinas made precise reference to the teachings of the earlier Church Fathers, who were greatly respected by the theologians of the Middle Ages. Therefore, it would be difficult to propose a break with their current teaching line in Christian disability studies.

⁹² Cf. Maliszewska, *W stronę antropologii*, 106.

In addition to the interpretation of disabilities in the approaches of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, it is also worth to consider further elements of the approach to anomalies in the concepts of both theologians. They proposed various ways of including people with disabilities in what the Church community considered the most valuable, i.e., sacramental life, the highest form of Christian life in the opinion of theological authorities. We express the opinion that the analysed ancient and medieval Christian thoughts could sometimes embarrass our modern times and our approach to disabilities, understood especially as cognitive damage,⁹³ because, as Romero writes about it:

Aquinas presumes that a human being with a profound, lifelong cognitive impairment bears the image of God without defect and is capable of realizing proximate goods proportionate to human nature and supernatural goods that exceed human nature. Thus, Aquinas's presumption on what it means to be a human being excludes from the outset modern anthropological anxieties concerning whether one so afflicted is a 'person.'⁹⁴

In this way, Aquinas would most probably strongly oppose contemporary tendencies to exclude disability and people with various disabilities socially and culturally.

Niepełnosprawność i postawy wobec niej w myśli chrześcijańskiej św. Augustyna i św. Tomasza z Akwinu

Abstrakt: Niepełnosprawność jako kondycja człowieka budzi zainteresowanie filozofów i teologów od starożytności, poprzez średniowiecze, aż po współczesność. Autorzy podejmują próbę ukazania rozwoju i ciągłości chrześcijańskich poglądów na fenomen niepełnosprawności poprzez badanie myśli filozoficzno-teologicznej św. Augustyna i św. Tomasza z Akwinu. Z analiz hermeneutycznych przeprowadzonych w niniejszym artykule wynika, że wbrew stanowisku teologa Briana Brocka, myśl św. Augustyna opisująca niepełnosprawność nie koncentrowała się wyłącznie na kategorii cudów (*wonders*). Ponadto w średniowieczu nie zapomniano o pierwotnej otwartości tego Ojca Kościoła na niepełnosprawność. W tekstach Augustyna i Akwinaty pojęcie niepełnosprawności podlega rozwojowi. W ten sposób można także interpretować średniowieczne teksty

⁹³ Cf. Reinders, *The Future*, 94–95.

⁹⁴ Romero, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 15.

teologiczne odnoszące się do niepełnosprawności, jak i powracające w tamtym czasie do intelektualnego obiegu teksty Arystotelesa.

Słowa kluczowe: niepełnosprawność, konceptualizacja, św. Augustyn, św. Tomasz z Akwinu.

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