

## ***The View from Below: The Sexual Revolution and Persons with Disability***

Mary O'Callaghan, PhD

Public Policy Fellow

Center for Ethics and Culture, University of Notre Dame

The impact of the sexual revolution on persons with disabilities has been relatively unexamined, and yet may be central to understanding this social experiment. The treatment of those with disabilities is not simply one more example of how unfettered sexual freedom has gone terribly wrong. More importantly it reveals how the sexual revolution has rejected some of the most essential features of our humanity, features revealed to us by what theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the "view from below", the vantage point afforded by the most vulnerable. Bonhoeffer noted that this lens was the most authentic one through which to view a society. I propose to adopt that viewpoint here.

Even among those we consider most vulnerable, persons with disabilities have been disproportionately affected by the sexual revolution. Higher relative abortion rates, widespread medical acceptance of disability-selective abortions, and withholding of basic protections such as pain-capable status in utero, highlight the ways in which our society accords little value to the lives of children with disabilities. Mistreatment continues across the life-span with persistent discrimination and a higher incidence of sexual abuse of adults with disabilities. The sexual revolution has contributed greatly to these harms through its practices, particularly abortion, as well as through the ideological underpinnings of the movement, most notably the misappropriation of the notion of human autonomy. Certainly, the devastating assault on the lives and dignity of persons with disabilities wrought by changing sexual mores is troubling in its own right. However, the "view from below" makes clear that to reject the value and lives of those with disabilities is to reject those most fundamental aspects of our own humanity, such as mutual dependence and capacity for love.