

Citing Francis de Sales, Levering gives us this invitation: 'Jesus himself is lovingly and mercifully begging us to share in his love, now and forever, as are the saints. They are experiencing everlasting happiness, joy, and peace; why do we not choose to join them?' (p. 43). Considering St Macrina, Levering tellingly points out that her dignity resides not primarily in her achievements and human relationships, but in her participation in the Church's prayerful praise, joyful thanksgiving, and humble works of mercy.

In the most exhilarating passage of the book, Levering rather belatedly introduces the practice of baptism, showing how Aquinas conjoins the crossing of the Red Sea (washing away sin) with crossing the Jordan (opening the gate of eternal life). As Joseph Ratzinger puts it, 'The whole process of dying is, if we accept it in faith, the realization of our being baptized' (p. 133). Participation in Christ's death and resurrection is thus the meaning and the hope of dying. This is the central claim of the book: Levering gently and unerringly dismantles all alternative explanation and counsel. Distancing himself from the 'continuity' assumptions of Plato, the Quran and N. T. Wright (a rare triad indeed), Levering compellingly concludes that the key scriptural texts 'point to mysterious eternal participation in the divine life, a real communion with infinite tripersonal life' (p. 162).

Levering is engagingly sober about the prospect of a good death, other than that which is really a synonym for a good life. But his judicious arguments and inspiring, yet understated, conclusion, make one wish for one further chapter: on the unique witness of one who goes forth with solidarity and surrender into the loving hands of God.

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William C. Gaventa, *Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness*

(Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), pp. xix + 338. \$39.95.

Brian Brock

School of Divinity, History and Philosophy, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB24 3FX
(b.brock@abdn.ac.uk)

In *Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness* William C. Gaventa distills a lifetime of work in care institutions and churches to foster better ways of meeting people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Gaventa's passion is to support people with disabilities and their families while pressing service organisations to address spirituality and to take more seriously the supporting roles faith communities might play.

His book offers a bumper crop of models and procedures to help pastoral carers and care professionals sensitively to engage with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families throughout the life-course. General points are regularly but judiciously offered to show creative and insightful examples of how care professionals might go beyond 'care provision to customers' to achieve more human professional services. Religious communities in which everyone's gifts are taken with full seriousness are also depicted in marvellously fine-grained detail. Gaventa's central

aim is to foster trust between people with intellectual disabilities, churches and care providers. Trust emerges out of the experience of compassion and commitment, of feeling listened to personally, as well as through skilled care and treatment.

That Gaventa himself embodies this trust-building sensitivity is more than apparent, and near the end of the book he presents this spiritual sensitivities as very like those of a coach who, 'invites people into a new, sometimes scary world, models and demonstrates new abilities and skills, and also works from where people are, listening to all questions and helping them to learn their own skills, gifts and capacity to meet the challenges in front of them' (p. 257). As a worked performance of this sensitivity, this book very effectively evokes fresh ways of looking at a whole range of practices.

Gaventa begins the book by interrogating the ethical and theological implications of diagnosing and labelling disability. A brief survey of the history of disability rights movements shows them to have sprung from religious roots and still to be carriers of spiritual values. Attending to the origins of ideas of universal human rights in religious ideas like the image of God, for instance, can be understood as a healing work furthering the highest moral aspirations of modern believers of all types as well as nonbelievers. The term 'spirituality' usefully overcomes traditional boundaries between religion and science as well as between different sorts of believers and unbelievers by pointing to the universality of the need for humans to have an identity, meaning, connection and purpose. In other words, the most common usage of spirituality language is incorrect: it is not the opposite of religion. 'Spirituality' names the deepest features of every human's aspirations, identity and need to belong.

A second section traces spiritually dense moments in the life-course of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities: as they are born and grow, as they transition from the world of children to the adult world, and as they age and die. Here the focus is on helping faith communities move away from understandings of their life together in which cognitive knowledge and performance-driven rites of passage in effect bar people with disabilities from taking part. The treatment of why, and how, religious communities might help youth transition from childhood into the adult world is one of the most powerfully constructive in the book.

A third section deals with the journey of grief, adjustment, exhaustion and joy travelled by families of children, and then adults, with intellectual disabilities. Once again the rendering of the problems faced by families is penetrating, as are the suggestions to congregations about how they might welcome people with intellectual disabilities by offering them and their families an experience of Sabbath – known in secular terms as 'respite'.

In a fourth section Gaventa calls caring professionals to grow beyond the assumption that good care entails eschewing personal relationship to focus on providing high-quality care. Professionals need to rediscover their role as a vocation, a call that resounds through the last sections of the book. Friendship between social workers, healthcare providers and care assistants will need regularly to cross the modern boundaries between 'client' and 'professional' if modern healthcare and social support organisations are not to become as inhumane as the old institutions in which people lived isolated and friendless lives.

A final section offers models for building true community in and around modern social support and healthcare systems. Building true community within the demanding constraints of modern care systems is absolutely essential for the flourishing of *all* people, and Gaventa takes religious communities to be an untapped well of potential spiritual community builders.

There are clearly some gains in addressing diverse ‘religious communities’ by way of a very loose umbrella term like ‘spirituality’ to organise the discussion. The chief gain is the freedom it gives Gaventa to draw together concrete stories through that allow spiritual community builders in many walks of life to begin to see how they ought to view the world if they are to foster community, trust and friendship beyond the care and rights statutorily due to people with intellectual disabilities. In this *Disability and Spirituality* is a resounding success.

Less successful, perhaps, is the assumption that the ‘spirituality’ animating the book is not noticeably Christian. The examples of creative practice that Gaventa offers are overwhelmingly drawn from Christian churches, lightly sprinkled with success stories from Jewish communities. Examples of Muslim and other religious communities getting it right are noticeably absent. Gaventa might be right that the problems faced by different religious communities are all basically similar, and that his Christian-shaped spirituality promises to energise the practices in all of them. These are questions that can only be answered by non-Christian reviewers. In a Christian theological context, however, it is probably best to understand this book as an attempt to display what it looks like when an observant Christian melds themes and ideas from his own scriptural tradition with winsome examples from (Protestant) churches. Such works of Christian hospitality promise not only to enrich the lives of those often called disabled, but all of us.

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Autumn Alcott Ridenour, *Sabbath Rest as Vocation: Aging toward Death*

(London: T&T Clark, 2018), pp. ix + 261. £85.00.

Jessica Scott

Faculty of Divinity, West Road, Cambridge CB3 9BS (jgs42@cam.ac.uk)

A shift has occurred, of late, in the interest of Christian ethicists in matters ordinary and everyday over the high-stake dilemmas more associated with their field’s focus. Autumn Alcott Ridenour’s work does not ultimately incline in one of these ways over the other but demonstrates the wisdom of inclining in one way *before* the other: whilst she begins by naming the ‘pressure points’ of an ethics of old age – the products and practices of the anti-ageing movement, the rise of transhumanism and Baconian medical practice and its incorporation of physician-assisted suicide – she returns to these headline issues only after she has constructed a theological account of the meaning of ageing towards death for all. This she does in dialogue with Augustine and Barth, uncovering a vision of life at life’s end ‘as sign and sacrament for the coming Sabbath rest through prayer and virtue’. Only within the clarity of this landscape of ordinary good living can those landmark questions be broached.

In painting this landscape, Ridenour begins by asking how the meaning of ageing and death has been devised, first, by Augustine and, then, by Barth. In both she finds ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ readings: for the former, death and ageing are the