

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*

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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

consequences of humanity's fall, as well as recollecting to us our dependence as creatures and so the goodness of our existence as it participates in God; for the latter, explicit in his dialectic, death is evil – the sign of judgement – and good – constituting a natural limit to human identity. Instructive here are Ridenour's gestures towards the influence of Augustine's biographical context, his own grief and the 'dread of death' known by the parishioners to whom he preached, on the different emphases he makes at different times. Barth's biography is not likewise addressed; had it been, a useful source might be his 1966 letter to John Godsey, in which Barth discusses his own illness as part of the fall.

To live the paradox of ageing and death well, Ridenour sees that we must participate in Christ, in whose own paradoxes ours will find nourishment. Two fulsome chapters present us with Jesus: via Augustine, as one who both shares in and overcomes the anguish of the old through resurrection promise; and, via Barth, as 'passive' as well as 'active' in the Godhead and in time, in so being dignifying the decline of ageing. From these readings comes a vision in which, in Christ, 'aging and Sabbath rest correlate as a season of active contemplation with value for the community as a whole'.

The import of ageing as Sabbath rest is imagined in a final chapter in which Ridenour offers two lists: virtues to be embodied by ageing individuals as they 'sign' Sabbath, and virtues to be embodied by the communities who receive their aged as such 'signs'. Reasserting the virtues theologically is welcome, in light of a public discourse whose own renderings can mimic more than manifest (talk of 'hope' can slip into denial, while celebrations of something like fortitude can conceal a community's neglect).

A picture emerges from Ridenour's work which imbues the end of life with vocation in, not despite, proximity to death. The aged become 'signs' as they embrace rather than deny the marks of their mortality: resolving to hear Christ's eschatological promises as well as his present comfort, and embodying virtues arising from, not beyond, dependence.

From within this picture, Ridenour can return to those 'pressure points' with which she opened. Here, 'vulnerability' is critically juxtaposed against what she takes to be its denial in the 'idea that autonomy ... is the highest value to be achieved', which, she sees, undergirds modern medicine and arguments for physician-assisted dying.

'Vulnerability', as deployed here, starts to have a somewhat anodyne ring to it, treated as a stationary fact of our existence. Yet one wonders if it might have a more troubling edge, incorporation of which would clarify a further way that proximity to the end imbues ageing lives with meaning. For as much as we are vulnerable as dependent creatures, do we not – through all manner of sin – exacerbate one another's vulnerability such that some unjustly become *more* vulnerable? Acknowledging this edge of vulnerability might open the way to recalling the meaning of death not only in the end achieved in Sabbath rest to come or in the end natural to creaturely limits, but also, recollecting the boldness of Augustine and Barth, in the end which signifies a judgement on the ways in which we have broken one another, raised by Ridenour at the outset, but perhaps less vivid in the consoling conclusion reached.

Nevertheless, in gazing on Ridenour's picture of life at the end lived in light of the end, that end neither rose-tinted nor whitewashed, we will indeed enrich the words we offer into the pressing debates of our time.