

own words are particularly humanising. One recounts how Christian family members were unhappy about her going to a Bible study group (p. 150). This was both illustrative of “decency” in action (the assumption that prostitutes were not clean enough read the Bible) and of the exclusion sex workers experience from the Christian community. Such experiences inevitably lead to responses to the texts which many Christians will find diametrically opposed to their own.

For some of us this is surely where the value of a book like this is found. Although some important insights are produced, most of the scriptural interpretations are not convincing in a historical-critical respect. Indeed, Ipsen takes care to state that she is not claiming to be producing “one correct reading” (p. 7) and neither does the group consistently produce a homogenised reading. Ipsen does not hide the group’s frequently divergent interpretations. Rather the value is in sensitising us to the way that our cherished sacred texts can be received by those with radically different experiences and assumptions to us.

Ipsen argues that many of the injustices that sex workers experience stem from biblical and religious foundations. These readings, then, also invite the church to critique its own teaching and practice around the politics of sex work (legalisation, etc) and its ministry (if any) to sex workers. If our texts can be read in a way that is harmful to sex workers, which Ipsen’s work demonstrates they can, then at the very least we have a responsibility to mitigate that harm when those texts are used in Christian worship and study. It is a powerful reminder that the words and stories of scripture can be interpreted in more ways than one, and that if we are engaging with people from different cultures and life experiences we cannot assume the meaning we intend is the one someone else will receive.

Ipsen writes clearly and presents the sex workers’ voices sympathetically. While the targets of this work are particularly feminist and liberation hermeneutics and biblical scholarship in general, it will also be invaluable for those churches and Christian ministries who connect with sex workers in their communities. Ipsen does not give us a Christian reading of the Bible, but a reading by politically-conscious excluded and oppressed sex workers. In doing so we are challenged about our own blindness to and assumptions regarding sex workers in both the Bible and in our communities. Few other books can offer such an education.

William C. Gaventa, *Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018. (338 pp.) [ISBN: 9781481302791]

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William Gaventa’s *Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness* is a compelling blend of interdisciplinary engagement, robust scholarship and insightful pastoral commentary. Having spent his life in chaplaincy and advocacy roles with disabled people, their families and support workers, Gaventa’s book reflects his commitment to building understanding across the health and human services and navigating fresh ways of reflecting on the lived experience of disabled persons. Whilst not exclusive in nature, there is an underlying

focus on intellectual and developmental disabilities. In particular, this volume challenges the reader/practitioner to re-observe the relationship between the oft-times disconnected notions of “disability” and “spirituality.”

Gaventa proposes that a recovery of how each of these constructs relates to the other will enable a more holistic approach to empowerment of, and ministry with, disabled persons and their wider communities. In other words, social service provision and faith communities that do not engage with the full personhood of disabled people truncate the potential agency and richness of both. The book is therefore a call to cross discipline understanding, respect, and purposeful engagement (p. 61).

The central thesis of the work is that rather than disparate entities, spirituality and disability, understood as both socially constructed worlds and personal story, lead towards each other (p. 60). The notion of spirituality often arises in times of trauma, suffering, limit or vulnerability – thus spirituality leads to a richer understanding of disability. In reverse, a consideration of disability constructs, theories, and service delivery frameworks leads to questions of personhood, identity, meaning, and purpose. Gaventa proposes that consideration of individual spiritual practice and the traditions of faith communities within health and allied service planning would restore a balanced understanding of our diversity and interconnectedness.

The book is structured around five main sections, moving from foundational understandings of disability and spirituality through to closer reflection on spirituality and the individual, spirituality and the family, spirituality and the professional, and then a final section which highlights the nature of our shared humanity, expressed in friendships, relationships, and community. Each section of the book is embedded in the lived experiences of particular individuals or groups of people with whom Gaventa has engaged over his years of interfaith ministry. This is one of the strengths of his approach. Whilst the volume is well researched and academically sound – the theories and proposals are not dissociated from their formative voices, practical implications or social outworking.

In the first section of the book, Gaventa outlines his understanding of disability and spirituality. He presents a “brief history” of the process of naming and defining disability. Then, using a combination of institutional observation and narrative research, he highlights that the “tragedy” of disability is often loneliness, lack of connection and lack of affirmation, embedded in structures and approaches to disability, rather than any actual impairment (p.17). He subsequently reviews diagnostic tools and their implications, arguing that contemporary “quality of life” frameworks, person-centered and human-rights based approaches to disability lead to, “...forms of language and discourse that are fundamentally spiritual” (p. 23). A case in point is the QOL framework from the University of Toronto which describes QOL as, “the degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his or her life” (p. 34). The model utilises the language of being, belonging and becoming – notions that Gaventa highlights as the spiritual dimensions of life.

In regard to spirituality, Gaventa argues that the core values of disability services – independence, productivity, and inclusion, emerge from spiritual notions of personhood and identity (matters of the heart and soul), meaning (what is sacred to and for me?), connection (to self, others, time, and place, the sacred)

and life purpose (vocation, call and being able to contribute) (p. 52). He notes the limits of independence, productivity and inclusion if they are not tethered to a broader understanding of what it means to be human noting, for example, that none of us are truly independent, that productivity easily slides towards utilitarianism, and that inclusion falls short of friendship and belonging (p. 272).

In the second section of the book, Gaventa reviews various “abstract” faith development models and then considers “formation” as a key framework for understanding spiritual development. Essential to this process is the notion of rituals, symbols, stories, friendships, and relationships that form us as people (p. 90-99). The third section of the book, which references the broader family “adjustment” experience and presents frameworks for supporting family members, also highlights the construct of “respite care,” understood as a Sabbath rest for caregivers. Gaventa reviews the developments taking place in respite care and notes the potential for faith communities to provide creative forms of respite (pp. 167-172). In the fourth section of his book Gaventa addresses the complexity of professional integrity, avoiding proselytising and government funding issues (p. 178.). Later in the section he discusses tools such as the FICA spiritual history tool (developed by Dr Christina Puchalski) that enable professionals to address issues of spirituality across diverse traditions (p. 181). Whichever tools are utilised, coming to know the “spirit” of a person, Gaventa cautions, takes time, trust, and patience (p. 185).

In his conclusion, Gaventa notes that all people and perspectives contain both limits and gifts. Whilst scientific and social models of disability have demonstrated reluctance to include spirituality, he notes that recent theological scholarship reflects serious attempts to address unhelpful religious responses to disability (e.g. blame, abuse, rejection, justification of separation). The challenge is that variations of these unhelpful responses remain. In my opinion it is a point of painful irony that those called to love without limit, live as one body, and embrace the marginalised have perhaps witnessed their inadequacy in the spotlight of what might be regarded as largely secular disability rights initiatives of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

William Gaventa’s work is a prophetic call to refrain from attitudes and practices that silo both people and systems of knowledge (p. 268). Dialogue across disciplines enables a wholeness to emerge that is universally beneficial. An overarching strength of this volume is its gracious tone. Gaventa does not point fingers – he constructs bridges and invites informed conversation. As such, his work is broadly accessible and is, I would suggest, essential reading for disabled people and their families, professionals and service providers, along with faith communities seeking to redress the ultimately unhelpful separation of disability and spirituality.