



Catéchèse et Théologies du Handicap: Ouvrir Des Chemins D'amitié au-Delà Des Barrières de la Déficience

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BOOK REVIEW

Catéchèse et théologies du handicap - Ouvrir des chemins d'amitié au-delà des barrières de la déficience, Talitha Cooreman-Guittin, Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2020, 296 pp., ISBN: 978-2-87558-998-9.

The book provides a critical overview of the catechetical process in the Roman Catholic Church in France, from the perspective of intellectual disability (p.15). The main argument is that the most appropriate catechetical foundation for the inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities in the Church is to teach that vulnerability and limits are fundamentally positive traits (p.233). The book is structured in two parts, each of them being further divided in two sections (A and B) with 2 chapters each.

The first chapter orientates the reader into the topic. It defines intellectual disability, comments on the most relevant documents of the Roman Catholic Church on the topic, and offers a brief overview of the history of disability in Western Europe. The second chapter proposes an inclusive reading of three passages from Scripture: the creation of the human being (Genesis 1 and 2), the parable of the talents (Mt 25:14-30), and the healing of Bartimaeus (Mk 10: 46-52). Genesis is interpreted as saying that human beings have been created imperfect and vulnerable; the talents given by God to each servant are in fact the vulnerabilities each human being has received from God and that enable us to enter in communion with each other; the healing of Bartimaeus shows that persons with disabilities do not lack agency and are not necessarily unhappy with their disabilities. The third chapter looks at the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church (1992) in the framework of intellectual disability and presents the French Catholic pedagogical tradition of the past century. The second section opens by arguing that the official instructions for the catechesis of persons with intellectual disability in the Roman Catholic Church in France – the *Directoire générale pour la catéchèse* (DGC) published in 1997 and the *Texte national pour l'orientation de la catéchèse en France* (TNOC) issued in 2006 – were written without too much concern for persons with intellectual disabilities (p.140). The following chapter engages with the various pedagogical models employed in the catechesis of persons with intellectual disabilities and argues that the main principle behind them – that the content of specialized catechesis should not be focused on a minimal version of faith, but on the essentials of faith – is not always respected (p.160).

In the first chapter of the second section, the author claims that the anthropological presuppositions surrounding the *imago Dei* are influencing the catechesis for persons with intellectual disabilities. She then talks about the history of the *imago Dei* in the Christian tradition, emphasizing the central place cognitive capacities occupied before the twenty first century (pp.167-171). The second chapter explores the interpretations of the *imago Dei* in six disability theologians: Nancy Eisland, Jenny Weiss Block, Deborah Creamer, Hans Reinders, Thomas Reynolds, and Amos Yong. The first chapter of the second section examines the documents used in several catechetical formations in France in the light of the insights of the above theologians. The conclusion is somewhat disappointing for the author, the main concepts identified earlier (e.g. vulnerability and incompleteness) lacking completely (p.225). The final chapter proposes a catechesis that is “enabling and without boundaries” (*capacitant et sans frontières*), which means a catechesis that aims to change the negative perception of limits and vulnerability. The chapter concludes with three catechetical modules developed around

the exegesis of the three biblical stories presented in the second chapter of the first part: Genesis 1-2, the healing of Bartimaeus, and the parable of the talents.

Despite these remarks, I consider the book to bring an important contribution to the catechesis of persons with intellectual disability and I would recommend it to anyone interested in the process of transposing the conceptual apparatus of disability theology into a coherent educational programme. One can only hope the book will be soon translated into English so that the catechetical models proposed in the final chapter be tested in other cultural contexts as well.

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