

suspecting that he may himself be the best case against his own central claims' (*Democracy and Tradition*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 139). What is tradition but an amalgamation and reformulation of other traditions, adapted by people in creative ways to confront the challenges of the present moment? MacIntyre's contradictions, in many respects, are our own. We may now, twenty years after the initial publication of Perreau-Saussine's book in French, have a greater awareness of the risks of ceding the ground of 'tradition' to the politically purist forces that would destroy it.

Erin Raffety, *From Inclusion to Justice: Disability, Ministry, and Congregational Leadership* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022). 238 pp. US\$29.99. ISBN 978-1-4813-1694-1 (pbk).

Reviewed by: Talitha Cooreman-Guittin, Université de Fribourg, Switzerland.
talitha.cooreman-guittin@unifr.ch

This is an unsettling book. For those among us who are trying hard to build inclusive church-communities where people of all abilities are welcomed, it may come as a shock when Erin Raffety claims that practices of inclusive worship maintain power hierarchies by subtly demanding conformity from disabled people (p. 127). Indeed, according to the author of this book, generating programmes and policies meant to fully include disabled people, while continuing to profess able-bodied theology, ministry and leadership, is just another form of ableism that is rampant throughout America (and beyond). It is this form of injustice that Erin Raffety seeks to denounce and to overcome with her book *From Inclusion to Justice: Disability, Ministry, and Congregational Leadership*.

The premise of the book is threefold: it states that disability is not a problem but a dignified and valuable incarnate human experience through and in which God is at work (p. 3); the author observes that it is the able-bodied, rather than a Christ-centred, human experience that still determines the norm for pastoral ministry (p. 6); she claims that the experiences of disabled people are vital to theological understanding in helping us behold God, ministry, and leadership in unique ways (p. 10). Building on these premises, the book unfolds in nine chapters.

Chapter 1, 'The Problem of Inclusion', provides a detailed description of the ethnographic research that underlies the book, and which was conducted with 11 disabled persons in their ministry context in the Philadelphia–New Jersey–New York City area between June 2019 and January 2020 (p. 22). Relying on Tanya Titchkosky's work on inclusion and justifiable exclusion, Raffety shows how platitudes such as 'we have no disabled people in our church' or 'all are welcome in our church' often function as ableist apologia (p. 39), as these kinds of statements often silence exclusion because they still consider disability as a problem, albeit tolerated or even 'celebrated'.

Chapter 2, 'The End of Inclusion', identifies ways in which practices of inclusion may be outright harmful for disabled people because it often unknowingly perpetuates able-bodied biases. The author shows how disability theology is slowly moving away from the paradigm of inclusion because it is not going far enough. The pivotal moment in this movement could be the publication, in 2012, of John Swinton's article 'From

Inclusion to Belonging' (*Journal of Disability & Health* 16.2 (2012), pp. 172–90). Still, preferences for inclusion continue to undermine practices of ministries with the disabled (p. 46). Indeed, inclusion in existing institutions rarely disrupts the status quo and fails to provoke cultural or structural transformation. Re-interpreting the Bartimaeus narrative (Mk 10:46-52) and the parable of the Banquet (Lk. 14:12-24), Raffety argues that Jesus is not just asking 'us' to invite people with disabilities to 'our' tables. He is asking for something far more radical. Jesus doesn't want a rearranging of chairs, he is upending the table itself (p. 61).

The goal of chapter 3, 'Listening beyond Inclusion', is to urge the church to listen, lament and repent alongside people with disabilities. Raffety does away with problem-solving and transactional ministry to replace it with a true ministry of listening to the pain and suffering of disabled people and their families (p. 67). The *leitmotiv* here is Rom. 12:14 where the apostle Paul enjoins all to 'rejoice with the rejoicing, weep with the weeping'. Just as Mary sits at Jesus' feet (Lk. 10:38-42), the author urges the church to humbly sit still at the feet of the disabled and listen. Only by recognising the faithfulness of disabled people's lament, instead of hastily glossing over it, can the church find a new starting place for ministry with disabled people (p. 85).

Indeed, as Raffety argues in chapter 4, 'Listening beyond Rebuke', lament is prayer and protest. It functions as resistance and re-narration and appeals to the one who can remove the suffering (pp. 91–92). Thus, the reason why lament is such 'a meaningful discipline for both those who are lamenting and those who are listening is that it invites God, not us, to action' (p. 100). Drawing on the works of Emmanuel Katongole and John Goldingay, Raffety warns us not to mistake God's silence for our moment to speak, but to merely stand with those who suffer and to listen. When we seek to resolve lament, we assume a powerful role and forget that it is God, not we, who is called to action in prayer (p. 101). We can only repent from our ableism to join disabled people in lament, and this repentance must not masquerade as performance but be true penitence and turning toward God (p. 104).

In chapter 5, 'Following Jesus towards Justice', using the Beatitudes and continuing her reinterpretation of the Bartimaeus story, Raffety shows the importance of the recognition of Bartimaeus' faith by Jesus, as it showcases how disabled people are insiders to ministry and justice. However, their insights, their gifts, their faith are rarely integral to disability ministry (p. 119). Churches should 'nurture the calls of disabled ministers and leaders in order to receive Jesus' vision for justice' (p. 122).

This is where the book comes to its core. In chapter 6, 'Ministers Each and Every One', Raffety demonstrates how separate spaces for worship and ministry challenge and transform general practices of congregational worship, making worship more faithful and meaningful for the entire congregation (p. 128). Indeed, according to Raffety, God is working through disabled people to bring something new, free and more interdependent to contemporary worship, which is part of a shift toward a more diffuse and egalitarian form of interdependent leadership. This topic unfolds over the three last chapters.

Faithfully praying together in community with people of all abilities can be quite a challenge (pp. 129–34), and this pushes certain faith communities to offer separate spaces of worship for people with disabilities. This practice seems to go against the paradigm of inclusion. Or is it possible to distinguish between separated and segregated

spaces? Building on Sara Evans's terminology of free spaces, Raffety asks why faith communities feel the urge to create safe spaces for disabled people, and why the church itself cannot be a 'free space' (p. 137). It seems that a pastoral model of power still operates in the church, addressing disability through individualism, charity, and care rather than through a paradigm of advocacy and justice. Indeed, 'able-bodied leaders often have an anxiety and an urgency to bring people together' (p. 138), Raffety writes. She draws on the work of Paulo Freire to affirm that inclusion-ministry—led by able-bodied people—that focuses on integration while maintaining the structures of power will always maintain conditions for oppression. Instead, if able-bodied congregations nurture free spaces where disabled people can experience freedom and lead their own worship, this benefits not just disabled people but the whole church, because disabled people are then 'dignified and equipped through disabled ministry and leadership' (p. 143). This can only happen though if the able-bodied people in the congregation are willing to move aside, and accept the invitation of disabled people to worship God who wants us to be instruments of faith in one another's lives, reminding us that we are all 'both guests and hosts at the table of Jesus' (p. 145).

It is not enough, though, for the church to invite people to an existing table. What is needed is a sincere repenting of the sins of ableism and an outright desire to let go of the table in order to listen to disabled people and receive their ministry and leadership (p. 150). This paradigm-shift can only happen after a staunch 'Disabled Critique of Christian Leadership', as announced by the title of chapter 7, in which the author deconstructs contemporary literature for pastors in pews and teachings on Christian leadership in the academy. She argues that 'a theology of ability masquerades at the center of systems theory and adaptive leadership' (p. 152) which obscures the ministry and leadership of those who have been enslaved under the guise of normalcy. Far from naively believing that a disabled leadership would usher in the kingdom of God, Raffety argues that critiques offered by disabled readings of Christian leadership call into question the notion of leadership itself. She then goes on to deconstruct the concepts of adaptive leadership and family systems theory and the way leadership is taught in theological classrooms (pp. 153–58), concluding that 'the entire industry of Christian leadership is cloaked in power' (p. 163). A disabled perspective on Christian leadership leads the church to appreciate its decline, instead of fighting it, pointing to what it is about the church that has to die if it is to be resurrected.

In chapter 8, 'New Modes of Disabled Leadership', Raffety denounces the absence of disabled people from classrooms, sanctuaries, seminary professorships, pews and pulpits, and the unwillingness of able-bodied leaders to recognise this as a problem which perpetuates the status quo. In this chapter the author introduces the spiritual characteristics of misfitting and transvaluing. By telling stories of unlikely leadership modes, she provides 'glimmers of the kingdom as the Spirit disrupts convention, propriety, and conformity' (p. 168). Raffety uses Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's concept of 'misfitting' as an instrument of the Spirit of disruption and social change (p. 172). She explains how parents who take their disabled children into public spaces, asking others to tolerate their differences, engage in a process of reverse normalisation, subtly stretching the boundaries of normalcy. During her fieldwork she met with a community where disabled children were not infantilised in age-appropriate Sunday schools, but were invited to lead as ushers, communion servers, and greeters, in roles offering them dignity and showcasing their

ministry to others in the congregation (p. 173). This transvaluing work of the Spirit, however destabilising, should be nurtured and received by community leaders. Still, for disabled leaders to come to the fore, they need ‘mirrors’, people like them who are leading in service to the church (p. 180).

That is the subject of chapter 9, ‘Mirrors and Accomplices in the Kingdom of God’. This chapter holds quite a surprise that we are not going to spoil in our review. Beyond that, Raffety argues that it is not enough to proclaim that disabled people are in God’s image; rather the church must recognise that they are called by Jesus into ministry and transformed by the Spirit into leadership. This is not easy to accomplish, because standing up against a prejudiced system alongside those who are disabled is risky business and may even entail law-breaking (p. 186). That is why Raffety uses the term ‘accomplice’ for those who speak up and demand justice. Drawing on the works of Sharon V. Betcher, the author shows how the Holy Spirit has been colonised as an instrument of normalcy and propriety. In response, she argues that decolonisation must pry itself away from the legacy of oppressors, following the lead of the Spirit as advocate. She wants the church to reject interpretations of the healing narratives that see disability as a defect in need of divine remediation. While the healing solves the problem of disability for us, it leaves intact our comfortable systems and fraught theologies (pp. 187–88).

Nurturing the ministry of the disabled begins by listening, lamenting, repenting alongside, and learning from people with disabilities. These are real *actions*, that paradoxically demand that we *let go* of control, which is certainly why non-disabled people struggle to consider them as paramount to any ministry. But, however important it is to listen, lament, repent, and learn from disabled people, life in the Spirit requires us to become accomplices of people with disabilities, working side by side with them to confront and shift the system (p. 190). This, according to Raffety, is exactly what Jesus is asking for: tear the system down and create a new heaven and a new earth (p. 192). This is not an easy task and Raffety harshly critiques those who don’t feel up to it for being fearful and self-preserving (p. 192). Can the Kingdom of God be Betcher’s ‘Crip Nation’? Raffety certainly thinks so. She joins Willie James Jennings in pointing to the whiteness and the colonialism at the heart of Western Christianity and calls for a Crip Nation, where disability justice sees a ‘least of these’ who talks back and serves, in Jesus, and creates a new kingdom where the dividing walls among us are torn down (p. 193). Justice with Jesus is an attainable goal, Raffety writes, ‘only if we do not leave one another behind’ (p. 204).

This book is a passionate but demanding read, addressed to an audience acquainted with the premises of disability theology. With its staunch but very well-argued critique of the practice of inclusion, this book offers an important contribution to the field for experienced researchers at the intersection of religion and disability.

Mark Sampson, *The Promise of Social Enterprise: A Theological Exploration of Faithful Economic Practice*

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Reviewed by: Matt Williams, St Mary’s University, London, UK.

matt.williams@rt.to