

BOOK REVIEW

YONG, Amos, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007. 425pp. Pbk. ISBN: 978-1-60258-006-0. \$34.95.

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Amos Yong's study on disability consists of a combination of personal involvement, creative theology and engagement with contemporary medical and social sciences. The book is dedicated to his brothers, Eben and Mark. Eben was born with Down Syndrome. As Yong makes clear, Down Syndrome has affected family life, brotherhood and life in church and society. In this book he gives a profound reflection on what is at stake and he goes about this task as part of a constructive theology. In part one he gives an introduction and a rough overview of how disability was pictured and viewed in the biblical and historical past. Part two consists of a fine introduction and description of the ways in which Down Syndrome and disability generally have been received and constructed in the modern world. Disability and Down Syndrome were under almost complete control of the socio-medical perspective. Medicalization is the keyword here, and subsequently Yong describes the trajectory of disability in other cultural, feminist and world religious perspectives. This part offers a critique of medicalization and points to other possible perspectives on disability. Part three, which forms the heart of the book, attempts to reconstruct the main themes of Christian theology in such a way that appropriate place is given to people with disability. The goal is to imagine a world in which disability is not just a painful exception, but belongs to the way in which we as humans are part of God's creative and redemptive work.

Important for this project is what Yong calls the pneumatological imagination, an epistemic posture shaped partly by the biblical narratives of the Holy Spirit and partly by the Christian experience of the Spirit. The "many tongues of Pentecost signify both the universality of the gospel message and its capacity to be witnessed to by those who derive from the many nations, cultures, ethnicities, and languages of the world" (p. 11). The narrative of Acts 2 provides Yong with a rationale for his dialogue with science. Today the other languages of Pentecost can be understood to include the languages and discourse of the modern sciences. Contemporary

theology has also to listen to contemporary science to discover the activity of the Holy Spirit. Yong makes a bold methodological statement here. What he wants to argue for could also and more easily be achieved by an appeal to the work of the Spirit in creation. When our multi-faceted reality is in fact God's creation, we have to listen carefully to the sciences, which explore this reality.

Yong proposes a creative reconstruction of traditional theology. He overcomes the dichotomist (body-soul) or trichotomist (body-soul-spirit) anthropology by what he calls an emergentist anthropology. By this he means that the soul is "an emergent set of distinctive features and capabilities constituted by but irreducible to the sum of the body's biological parts" (p. 170). This understanding of the human being has many advantages. It excludes the dualism that has caused so many problems in Christian theology, and it includes the recognition that the human body and brain are essential features of human identity apart from which consciousness and self-consciousness are impossible. It gives space to the recognition that human identity is not exclusively determined by cognitive capacity but also by affective and relational capacities and possibilities, which are intimately connected to our body (p. 171). Human embodiment cannot be relegated to a secondary status, and this insight connects closely with insights from the Hebrew Bible. In applying this emergentist view in combination with the pneumatological imagination Yong achieves challenging perspectives and a reconstruction of the doctrines of creation, providence, christology, ecclesiology and eschatology in relation to disability. Worthwhile, for example, is the sharp distinction between healing and curing. Healing should not simply be identified with curing. Healing does not mean that the restrictions of disabled persons are taken away, but that the life-giving Spirit transforms the human existence from glory to glory. In this process the particularities of a person, including disabilities, are not so much eliminated as redeemed. This means that individual characteristics are preserved in eschatology, not as impediments but as possibilities for the gracious activity of God's Spirit. Yong's goal is not only to provide new insights that remain at the level of description, but also to contribute to a performative theology that informs, shapes and guides the practices of church and society, which is more inclusive concerning what it means to be human.