

human condition in a universal way. This approach surely has merit, but it also has significant dangers, as we have learned through the legacy of colonialism. Reynolds acknowledges these dangers when he discusses the problem of idolizing our own nation, culture and faith tradition, but fails to situate his response clearly in a contextual setting.

I found myself from time to time tantalized by Reynolds' references to his own doubts and struggles to develop his faith, but was disappointed that such references weren't developed more fully. That kind of discussion would have given the book more emotional power, and made it more readable for those without a theological education who are troubled by the questions it poses. As it is, the book engages the reader at a rational level and will be of most benefit to those who can engage it there.

In *A Troubled Faith*, Alan Reynolds offers a thoughtful, pastoral response to some of the great challenges to Christian faith in our times. No single book will be able to meet these challenges, but Reynolds' effort is a worthy one. It bears witness to a faith that is both reasonable and responsive to the yearnings of the human heart. Reynolds' gentle but confident style will be helpful both to those whose rational doubts keep them from

embracing Christian faith, and to those who are committed, but who want to deepen their ability to respond to these troubles.

— Ross Smillie.

**SPIRIT AND THE
POLITICS OF
DISCERNMENT
Minneapolis: Fortress
Press, 2007, 250 pages.**

In this book, Sharon Betcher, of the Vancouver School of Theology, applies the category of disability to discussions about Christian resistance to empire. Writing of her own experience as an amputee, she weaves this into conversation with disability studies, especially as it converges with postcolonial theory. She engages political, economic, bio-medical, and theological discourses that marginalize persons with disabilities, proposing an alternative "physics of Spirit" that affirms disability.

The book begins by exposing the roots of conventional notions of health in "hegemonic ways of seeing" (Franz Fanon). Considering health a modern ideology connected to global capitalism, Betcher highlights its orientation toward controlling bodies, its way of "seeing" wholeness in terms of efficiency, productivity, and autonomy. This pathologizes

disability, turning people with disabilities into objects to be saved from their fates, “cured” through medical and technological feats.

Betcher goes on to show how the allegedly noble desire to alleviate suffering colludes with imperial power. She is persuasive in arguing that even liberal theologies like those of Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, which tout compassion and inclusiveness, mediate hegemonic notions of health and wholeness. They construe redemption as healing and rescue from social censure while privileging the very discourses of power that project “otherness” upon those whose disability (and race, gender, etc.) invalidates and set them apart from the “normal” in society.

As a remedy, Betcher recommends rethinking Spirit “on the slant,” from the perspective of uneven and twisted bodies so as to disrupt dominant discourses, even those of liberal humanitarianism. Here, the constructive goal of the book comes into focus: to de-colonize and retrieve Spirit as “a theological concept supporting multiple, diverse forms and habituations of corporeal flourishing.” (p. 24)

Along with Moltmann, Betcher affirms Spirit as the animating principle of all life, splaying in affective energies that surround us

and binds us in interdependent relationships with each other and all creation. She further suggests, drawing from Rita Nakashima Brock, that Spirit is not a transcendent wonder-working cure-all, but an immanent force that connects members of the community, healing by empowering creative agency, not simply by including “the helpless” or by restoring somatic intactness, but by opening physical spaces of non-domination and mutuality.

Re-framing Spirit in this way opens alternative readings of biblical testimonies. For example, people with disabilities in the Bible—a “Crip Nation”—are not simply passive targets for redemptive “healing” but are agents that “speak back” and confer judgment upon Empire. Their claim to pain and bodily difference destabilizes imposed wellbeing by prophetically exposing the pretentiousness of the sovereign claim to control. Miracle stories, therefore, should be seen as an anti-hegemonic discourse, sparking the remaking of the world.

Indeed, for Betcher, the Gospels are not about cures or inclusiveness, but about liberating those held captive by debilitating systems of indebtedness and dispossession. Jesus’ proclamation of God’s reign signals Jubilee, an annulment of debt that places “the poor” at the

speaking center of their own lives. The hope is decolonization, ushering in a new kind of community founded upon kinship and interdependence and animated by Spirit, physically.

Betcher takes this farther by advocating “becoming disabled”, strategically sidestepping aspirations for wholeness and cures and so unhitching from empire’s sway by focusing instead on embracing life amidst its limitations. In concert with French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, Betcher suggests that disability, illness, and suffering can be a capacious opening to creative agency, a way toward affirming life in joyful equanimity, neither in tragedy nor triumph, but in “keeping trust.” Such trust enters into life in its fragility, transforming pain into moral action and genuine compassion for others. An illustration is found in Hildegard of Bingen, who discovers divine empowerment through her illness. Betcher concludes: “Trust offers

proximity to divine potency, to the Spirit’s presence to life.” (p. 204)

Despite this suggestive conclusion, however, much remains unclear about trust and its connection to “divine potency” as Spirit. Perhaps this is a factor of the book’s frequent use of abstract language drawn from postcolonial theory and postmodern philosophy. Nonetheless, more constructive theological precision could better support the alternative spirituality Betcher proposes and balance the writing’s strong tilt toward decolonizing critique. It also might offer readers outside the academy accessible ways to make pastoral applications.

Yet it would be unfortunate if only academics read this book, for the author’s personal reflections and erudite analyses are full of insights that will serve not only those interested in disability, but anyone seeking to engage the disabling mechanisms of empire.

— Thomas E. Reynolds