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**Book Review: Hans Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008). x + 404 pp. US\$36.00/£19.99 (pb), ISBN 978--0--8028--6232--7**

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principle and policy that will undergird political judgment. This is the occluded question of the life of the civil polity as one amongst others. How will the receiving society deliberate on immigration questions so that its authorised leaders may make sound judgments? The question might simply be: *Are borders all bad?* These books lead us through perspectives that illuminate that question without actually taking it up as the other-side-of-the-border question. It is here that, to my mind, the third section misses an opportunity.

Both books, in different ways, provide excellent and engaged surveys of the immigration question, with useful endnotes and, in Carroll's case, an appendix of resources which includes internet sites. Read side by side they will serve as good and eirenic Christian introductions to a debate that rages in the US, overtaken as it has been by a security agenda, and will serve not only for the intended audience in North America, but also for Christians elsewhere who wish to understand the concerns of their brothers and sisters.

**Hans Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).**

x + 404 pp. US\$36.00/£19.99 (pb), ISBN 978-0-8028-6232-7.

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Hans Reinders has a friend. She is called Kelly. She has red hair. He met her when she was 12 years old, in a group home for people with intellectual disabilities. He has known her now for years. Kelly is a micro-encephalic: a significant part of her brain is missing. Every so often she sighs, but that's about it. She doesn't 'do' much else, nor is she likely to in the future. She will never reach even a minimal stage of self-determination; she will never employ personal pronouns; in fact her carers find it difficult to ascribe mental states to her without falling into the trap of self-deceiving projection (it's as if she's happy...).

*Receiving the Gift of Friendship* is Reinders' attempt to reassess anthropology and ethics, both philosophical and theological, in light of his friend. Introducing her in the first chapter, the question Kelly prompted for him was this: 'What is the point of treating someone as a human being when one's belief about what it means to be human implies that she is not, in fact, a human being?' (p. 24). But lest it be thought that the question he raises of the humanity of the profoundly disabled is a loaded one, Reinders clarifies from the outset that his discussion is not going to lead to his asking when it is morally permissible to end their lives. His agenda is wholly different from that of Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer's notorious *Should the Baby Live? The Problem of Handicapped Infants* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). On the contrary, 'my aim in this book is...to eliminate the suggestion that Kelly's humanity presents us with a moral quandary... I am trying to understand what makes approaching Kelly as a human being an intelligible act' (pp. 30–31).

Here, then, is a practice in search of a justification: What beliefs about the world, about God and about human beings need to be postulated in order to sustain a radically inclusive approach according to which Kelly is treated like 'one of us'?

A good deal of the first diagnostic section of the (tri-partite) book takes up a quarrel with the disability-rights movement that emerged in the early 1990s. The product of the

coming-together of various different intellectual currents and paradigms (post-structuralism, civil rights, identity politics), Reinders can nevertheless identify a unifying factor, and that is the movement's overall aim: to fight the historical exclusion and stigmatising of disabled people by opening up spaces, both physical and social, in which they can represent themselves. Of course, Reinders does not question the importance of improving access and fighting prejudice. What he does contest is the *sufficiency* of this approach to disability. For, despite the movement's rejection of 'essentialism' and its scorn for 'the metaphysics of human nature' (thought to have resulted historically in a normative anthropological account according to which disabled men and women are judged 'defective specimens'), there is clearly still a concept of human nature operative in the disability movement, which has to do with the emancipatory framework that guides their thinking. 'Scholars in the field of disability studies are guided by a concept of human nature that understands human *telos* in terms of the freedom of the self' (p. 52). Here is a representative example Reinders cites (from an essay entitled 'What Can a Foucauldian Analysis Contribute to Disability Theory?'): 'The outcome of these (historically disempowering) practices for disabled people has been the systematic closure of opportunities for agency. By the end of the nineteenth century confinement, institutionalization, and dependency had become the reality of disabled people's lives. Disabled people became people who could not do things for themselves, who were a burden, a group in need of intensive and intrusive systems of surveillance' (quoted on p. 76). Now, while all this may very well be true, Reinders' point is that none of it applies to the *profoundly* disabled. With all the access in the world Kelly will *never* be able to 'do things for herself'. She would never be able to take up the 'opportunities for agency' a just society might secure for her; realistically, her existence will always constitute 'a burden'. There is no way around that, and therefore the irresistible conclusion is that the disability-rights movement has perpetuated the problem it sought to solve—developing normative conceptions of humanity that exclude the profoundly disabled.

If the disability-rights movement is Reinders' first target in this book, where his criticism is far-reaching and profound, the second is Roman Catholicism. But this is where he gets into trouble. Catholic thought on 'being human' moves for him between two opposite poles—*genesis* and *telos*. On the one hand, the Catholic Church has intervened in debates about abortion by saying that Aristotle's dictum that human beings are born from human beings is all we need to know about when life begins—that is, the question of *genesis* settles the moral and political question of *inclusion*—and there is no question that Kelly is biologically a member of the race *Homo sapiens*. But on the other hand Catholic thought has, in Reinders' view, answered the question of what it means for human beings to 'live in accordance with their nature' (the question of the *telos*, 'point' or 'flourishing' of our existence) by pointing to the development and proper use of powers of intellect and will, thereby sustaining 'culturally dominant conceptions of what it means to be human [which] exclude human beings with a profound intellectual disability' (p. 89).

The first problem here is simply the adequacy of Reinders' understanding of what he considers the 'official' position 'reflected in the documents and publications of the Roman Catholic Church' (p. 88). Reinders seems to think that Catholic anthropology is still stuck in an early modern, pre-Vatican II, pre-Henri de Lubac theory of pure nature according to which, among many other things, the *telos* of a human life can be viewed simply in terms

of its earthly existence and the successful operation of its natural faculties (and so stuck in an anthropology which excludes the profoundly disabled). However, to corroborate this characterisation Reinders then cites a host of John Paul II's encyclicals which say exactly the opposite (and we may presumably take the late Pope as an authoritative voice within modern Roman Catholicism?). That is, John Paul shows himself to be *repudiating* the theory of pure nature when he claims that humans are called to a fullness of life which *exceeds* their earthly existence and which they cannot achieve of their own accord. And worse, when Reinders comes to the thinker he considers the arch-villain of the piece (in regard to espousing theological anthropologies demeaning the disabled), the influential Roman Catholic philosopher Robert Spaemann, the text Reinders takes up is one from which he quotes selectively. For in his essay 'On the Anthropology of the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*' (Pontificia Academia Pro Vita, 2000) we find Spaemann explicitly disavowing 'the fiction of a *nature pura* and a merely natural perfection of humanity, which man would have been able to reach by his own powers'.

The second problem with Reinders' dismissal of Roman Catholic anthropology is the dilemma he establishes for any theologian wanting to undertake the task of *describing* human beings. For it seems that *either* you say there's something distinctive about human beings—say, that they can take responsibility for things not directly concerning or benefiting them (such as the stranger or the environment), in which case people who will never be able to *do* anything are automatically designated sub-human. *Or* you 'scale-down', refuse to say anything about human beings in general that you would not also say about the profoundly disabled in particular, and interpret any evidence to the contrary as sheer coincidence (in which case you deny there is any material content to God's decision in creation that humankind bear his image).

In fact, though, this lose–lose situation is only forced upon us when, with Reinders, we deny the purchase of the fall, underestimate the reality of 'the negative' and ignore the issue of health. Reinders consistently refuses to discuss the fact his friends are ill because he seems to think that to question their *health*, to ask if their bodies and minds are working as they were given to, is automatically to question their *value*. But not only does this *not* follow; it also causes Reinders significant problems when, in the 'constructive' last third of the book, he focuses on friendships with the profoundly disabled he has either experienced firsthand or encountered in the L'Arche communities founded by Jean Vanier in the 1960s and flourishing to this day. For example, in Henri Nouwen's account of his first days working at L'Arche he relates having been asked to help a boy called Adam through his morning routine—waking him, bathing him, getting him dressed and shaved. When this proves laborious and time-consuming, Nouwen admits trying to rush Adam. The consequence? 'A few times when I was so pushy he responded by having a grand mal seizure', necessitating that Nouwen bring him back to his bed and cover him with blankets 'to keep him from shivering violently' (quoted on pp. 342–43). Nouwen's point is to show how the experience brought him face to face with the effects of his own impatience. But what *we* are brought face to face with is the phenomenon of *suffering*. A boy convulsing under the covers, something not as it should be, something awry in the world. And it is *this* phenomenon, this inescapable aspect of profound disability, to which Reinders will fail to do justice as long as he remains silent about both the cosmic ramifications of the fall (and the 'bondage' not simply of entities who, unlike the profoundly

disabled, wilfully rebelled against their maker, but the bondage of *all* creation) and the promise of the resurrection of the body. Will *that* entail the cessation of grand-mal seizures? Will it be possible for me to communicate with my cousin Jack on that other shore? By now I may be asking too much of any theologian, but I would like to know what my faith permits me to hope for.

For Reinders, a spectre stalks the land of Europe—the spectre of eugenics. That is the fear that grips him, in this book as much as in *The Future of the Disabled in Liberal Society* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), and given the role the pre-natal scan has come to play in Western obstetric care, it is an understandable fear. But Reinders's desire to protect against so evil an eventuality has led him, ironically, to join forces with the most extreme wing of the disability-rights movement in completely denying the reality of disability. And this fails to account for the experience of many of the profoundly disabled men and women Reinders writes about, as well the experience of the people who have devoted their lives to caring for them, and also the hope that, at some point or other, 'in his wounds we are *healed*'.

**Anthony Bash, *Forgiveness and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).**

xi + 208 pp. £45.00/US\$85.00 (hb), ISBN 978-0-521-87880-7.

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Anthony Bash's book on forgiveness is one of the latest additions to CUP's New Series in Christian Ethics. Bash's aim is to reflect on forgiveness from a Christian perspective while acknowledging that the subject 'is no longer the preserve of only those within the Christian tradition' (p. ix). Thus the book engages with reflection on forgiveness within disciplines other than Christian theology—psychology, philosophy, law and politics. At the same time Bash observes that forgiveness has become 'a relatively neglected topic in scholarly Christian writing' (p. ix). His aim is therefore also to bring the voice of theology back into the conversation. Indeed, the book is meant to show that while modern discourse has a contribution to make to Christian thinking on forgiveness, the same applies vice versa.

The book engages with a wide range of subjects relating to forgiveness. There is nevertheless an argument that develops throughout and connects the various chapters, or at least the first six of its ten chapters. Bash sets out with the claim that forgiveness is a 'moral response to wrongdoing' (p. 3). It is, first of all, a response to *moral* wrong; that is, wrong for which the agent is culpable. Secondly, forgiveness is a *moral* response to wrongdoing: forgiveness is categorially different from, say, forgetfulness. Furthermore, forgiveness is not the only moral response to wrong, nor always the right one. The traditional Christian view of forgiveness, we are told in Chapter 2, is that it is an 'act of undeserved favour', imitative of God's love (p. 24). Yet since the twentieth century there have been 'significant changes' affecting the way forgiveness is understood and dealt with. Among these is the pursuit of 'quality of life' (p. 29), which explains why