

Autumn Alcott Ridenour, *Sabbath Rest as Vocation: Aging toward Death* T&T Clark Enquiries in Theological Ethics (London: T&T Clark, 2018), ix + 261 pp., £85.00, hardback (ISBN 9780567692887).

Theologians working in the field of bioethics often experience an inner tension in their participation in public debate. How can they stay credible in a secular or multireligious environment without losing theological content? If they want to be too understandable, they lose their religious identity; if they talk too much Christian insider's language, they lose their audience. Ideally, theological ethics as a form of public theology should be bilingual.

Autumn Alcott Ridenour thinks things have gone wrong in this respect. She wants to speak plain theological language, responding to the challenge formulated by Lisa Sowle Cahill "not cave to public pressures by emptying theological language of its theological content when addressing bioethics and the broader concerns of health care" (8, n. 3). Her book develops a full-blown theological approach to the question of what it means to age toward death.

Giving full weight to the dimension of decline and decay in the aging process is part of her Christian alternative to anti-aging marketeers, the transhumanist movement, and medical overtreatment, who do not want to accept human finitude and mortality. With Augustine and Karl Barth, the author presents death and finitude dialectically both as a curse and as a calling. Aging is portrayed as a sign and preparation for the sabbath rest that awaits us in Christ in eternal union with God.

Neither Augustine nor Barth dedicated long reflections to aging and dying. Augustine offers an allegorical interpretation of the seven days of creation as analogous to the seven stages of human life in his *Genesis: Against the Manichees*. In CD III/4, Barth develops a phenomenologically rich description of the three stages of human life involving youth, maturity, and old age. The author of this research embeds the interpretation of these texts in a detailed analysis and systematic reconstruction of the entire theological anthropology of St. Augustine and Karl Barth. Two aspects thereof are especially fleshed out that are particularly relevant for an ethics of aging: in both Augustine and Barth, union with Christ is the center. Being human means participating in Christ's suffering and active acceptance of death. Second, in both authors the outlines of a virtue ethic become visible, as is convincingly argued. These contours invite Ridenour to develop concrete ethical guidelines for the elderly and their surrounding communities, reciprocally benefitting from one another. "Virtues for the aging include humility, gratitude, generosity, wisdom, prudence, fortitude, and hope. Virtues for those communities surrounding aging individuals entail respect, justice, friendship, mercy and love." In the explo-

ration and elaboration of these virtues in the final chapters, the experience of old age in a more existential sense finally becomes more substantial. Even a theologically well-informed bioethicist has to take quite a bit of dogmatics before she or he can harvest in morals.

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