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**Clifton, S. (2018). *Crippled Grace: Disability, Virtue Ethics, and the Good Life*. Waco, TX : Baylor University Press.**

Reviewed by Christopher Cat

Shane Clifton is a professor of theology and currently Director of Research at Alphacrucis College in Sydney, where he has studied and taught for the last 20 years. His principal scholarly contribution to the field of Pentecostal theology is flavoured by his postgraduate work at a Catholic University, his ecumenical and liberal openness, his passion for feminist and political theology, and his own (now 10 year) experience of spinal cord injury. His book *Crippled Grace*, published by Baylor University Press is part of the Studies in Religion, Theology and Disability series, edited by Melcher and Yong.

*Crippled Grace* is a wide-ranging reflection on the issues surrounding disability and flourishing. Clifton boldly asks the difficult and confronting questions, recognising his limitations and being prepared to not have comprehensive answers, while still setting a solid framework for understanding the dynamics of flourishing and challenges and issues that are presently hindering it for the disabled community. Paragraph after paragraph the work continues to offer wisdom and insight as Clifton shows a comprehensive awareness of the relevant ethical, practical and theological concerns.

The work has a distinctly political focus. It is an act of advocacy aiming to stimulate a dialogue across a variety of disciplines, with the view of contributing to the growth of

the social awareness of disabled flourishing, and insisting on the inclusion of disabled voices in the discussion. Clifton seeks to broaden current prejudicial and oppressive perspectives, create a solidarity that sees limitation as normative to all humanity, and push the church to engage with disability issues it has largely neglected. His chapter on disabled sexuality is particularly targeted to these ends.

Clifton draws from the virtue traditions, necessarily acknowledging their historicity and limitations, to set up his framework of flourishing. He successfully explores how such suffering can be defined as limited but virtuous living within interdependent community and friendships. He wrestles with the difficult tension between medical and social models of disability, that want to tell disabled people what they should want and how they should be instead of letting people frame their diverse experiences in their own terms. Therein is one of the great strengths of his work—his intertwining of scholarship with some compelling, living testimonies of disabled people (including his own) to show the outworking of his ideas. This gives his work a practical grounding while making the reading engaging, informative and empathy creating.

While he recognises that he cannot adequately address the full depths of his dialogue partners' concerns (ethical, scientific, theological, and disabled experiences themselves), his stated and committed bias to disabled flourishing as an interpretive lens potentially detracts from positioning the biblical themes he addresses in their own contexts. It is a difficult line he is walking. He presents very legitimate grounds for seeking an inclusive reading of the biblical text and correctly and commendably recognises the way in which many traditional readings add burden to the disabled and suffering. However, his move away from traditional readings may be too far for some readers. For example, firstly, in seeking a reading that can promote sexual flourishing for the disabled, he challenges traditional values that limit sexual expression exclusively to marriage. Secondly, he appeals to the tenets of a liberal theology grounded in evolution, with a desire for this path to move away from more traditional 'greater-good theodicies.' But the move is unconvincing. He is still left with the problem of finite creation being a choice of God for the greater-good of said finitude. Further, he does not reconcile his claim of the necessity of this finitude with the idea of an uncorrupted new heavens and earth, except to focus, correctly, on the spirit (attitude) of such a resurrected community. His scholarly engagement with the issues, shows an awareness of the counter arguments to his position, though at times his refutation lacks weight and clarity—again because of his central focus on flourishing.

The strengths of this work, particularly in regard to the enormous need for the social reform its wise and scholarly advocacy calls for, far exceed its admitted limitations. With the reviewers on the back cover, I concede that *Crippled Grace* is "required reading," both for pastoral workers, church leaders and anyone serious about genuine participation in Christian community in a world where suffering and limitation are universal experiences.