

My dearest readers,

This is Angello back again, and welcome to another reading report. It may seem that the few who read the previous report were shocked by my verbal fluency and untangle in summarizing a very complex, robust academic book that was anything other than a book from a prominent High Pontiff. To be honest, I am literarily scarce, but when and while my reading report, you'll realize how intelligent I am in summarizing books by just making a reading report that highlights the main idea of the text, its supporting ideas, and, more importantly, a critical comment of such a book provided by my person.

On this occasion, I'll aim to make a reading report from the first book focused on autism and faith directly. Perhaps the Catholic doctrine does not accord with my Baptist Faith, but it would be necessary to make a reading report on a Catholic book as innovative as my graduation work! I was encouraged by my graduation work's assessor to make a session on Baptist Churches. Well, it may be something awkward to say that I plan to make the following reading report on a book written by a Roman Catholic priest who is autistic himself! I am looking to implement a special-needs ministry in my local Baptist Church here in Barranquilla and also replicate it inside other brethren Baptist Churches here in Colombia and then internationally! I just remember my Baptist pastor and my person were doing hard research work, including fieldwork. The thing was that he didn't know what to do with it, but the thing was, we were doing the fieldwork just for him to please me! Fortunately, a professor from my university interceded and designated two assessors for my work: A professor from the Psychology program and the coordinator of the Theology program at the University!

In fact, as a prize to my pastor, I must assert that the graduation work will have an amplified edition with the novelty that it will include an extensive biblical-theological framework of inclusion aimed at just Bible passages that portray and deal with disability. It will also abide by the "Salvation Plan from God for Autism".

I must also affirm that I hope to craft a Catholic edition of such an academic work. In this edition, I aim to write the "Catholic Framework of Inclusion", and within such a framework, conduct exhaustive research from Catholic books that come from official Catholic sources, to lay and religious authors who write about disability and the way of Catholicism. Within such a framework, I aim to write a section called "Alternative Devotions for Autistic Catholics" ... The rest is saved for me.

Now we're going to make a reading report based on the first religious book on Autism!

GOD LOVES THE AUTISTIC MIND (Fr. Matthew SCHNEIDER)
READING REPORT—CHAPTER I
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Complete bibliographical reference of the text (worked according to APA standards)

Schneider, M. (2022). Types of Autistic Prayer. In M. Schneider, *God Loves the Autistic Mind Prayer Guide for Those on the Spectrum and Those Who Love Us*. Pauline Books and Media.

Abstract of the text (Abstract is a complete summary of the content of the article. It should be short, but complete.)

Before deepening the first chapter of this book, this author embarked on the struggles autistic Christians tend to experience when trying to connect with the Lord. However, he states that prayer life relates directly to autism! Indeed, he confesses that most of the prayers we autistics use to say are indeed focused on our triumphs and difficulties, which, according to his reality, likely vary a little bit among us. We autistics are humans, and Fr. Schneider points out directly by addressing the core of prayer for every human soul. Since they connect the body and soul, human emotions and brain processes are explicitly involved in prayer. **Then, autistic brains and emotions are structured so differently than those of neurotypicals.**

The main idea of the text (The main idea is taken literally from the text. The main idea is selected after careful reading of the text. The main idea combines the text's fundamental elements under the author's words.)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (2644) emphasizes the multiple kinds of prayer in one division: "Blessing, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise". Fr. Schneider exhorts this way of prayer in a helpful explanation: "This is a helpful way of dividing prayer by the goal of that prayer. He now suggests that this sort of prayer is suggested in many books thereof. He now states that the prayer subdivisions will be shown in the devotions section of the present book rather than in the systematic section.

To accomplish his prayer goals, he will define each kind of prayer system according to what he'd read before which could match any of the five goals mentioned above:

Vocal Prayer and Liturgy:

When referring to vocal prayer, it is understood about vocal prayer that it includes some predetermined sets of words that are said aloud in silence. However, he states that this kind of prayer cannot be interpreted as magical incantations. Instead, as explained above, these prayers tend to have lots of

discernment, lots of understanding, and a lot of reflection. They should also be used for any intention, petition, or whichever kind of request the petitioner may have. That's simple. However, this sort of prayer needs not to be manipulated for any kind of pretext or vain desires of the heart (given that not all human desires are good). Fr. Schneider takes a good example of when a child prays the rosary for their intentions that their mom takes them to the ice cream shop. Instead, vocal prayer should be a way for God to relate with each one, and not for vain petitions. The Catechism (2700) states clearly that vocal prayer is the only way to commune with God rather than petitioning him: "It is more important that the heart should be present to him to whom we are speaking in prayer". It is a matter of fact that is the reality of what vocal prayer needs to be!

Now, I must take the advantage that Fr. Schneider states that repetition and continuity are satisfying most of the time in autistic individuals. Since having entered to seminary in 2001 (As a fun fact, I was born in 2000), every single morning he says a five-minute prayer with just one significant change of it in two decades. The Liturgy of the Hours each day. He now states that this kind of comfort can help him realize that God is asking to respond to him in an autistic manner. Now on, he says that if he repeats a certain prayer to help him unite with God, it is a good prayer. That gives him comfort that God wants Him to communicate with Him in a way he's more comfortable with.

Stimming and prayer:

Fr. Schneider himself confesses that all autistic individuals stim in some way. This is pointed out by William Stillman in a very interesting note about stimming based on the research of Neuroscientist Andrew Newberg. He (Stillman) notes that people who are calm and focused in a meditative manner have a different blood flow in the brain. Perhaps stimming and its variants can aid in focusing the autistic brain during the initial stages of prayer.

Fr. Schneider states that autistic people can even have the ability to stim while praying! There is something that catches my attention when he says: "God gave us our neurology with the need of stim, but he also allows that same stimming to help us come to him". He then states that spiritual writers encourage Catholic adherents to involve the whole body in prayer. He assumes that most people tend to be still when praying. By citing Psalm 46:10 specifically, he believes that this type of prayer is intended solely to calm oneself. Now, when they are calmed while stimming, suddenly they see the Presence of God as an autistic Christian.

Prayer of Location and Object

One probably already knows about this particular session in the present chapter of such an important book for Autistic Christianity: Prayer of location and object. In this session, Fr. Schneider explains that these particular sites play a larger role in the neurodivergent prayer rather than in typical prayer, and those are location and object: Pilgrimages, a Rosary, or even prayer corners, besides obviously making part of neurotypical prayer, might have an extra significance to autistic individuals. He now tells an anecdote that in his religious community, they develop a half-day morning retreat once a month. When he does this on his own, it makes him pray in a better way than at home. For example, when he lived outside Washington, D.C., he drove at least twice to Emmitsburg, Maryland, where St. Elizabeth Seton and Lourdes are shrines. Another anecdote about this is the fact that he drove to a historical village where, on Mondays, the grounds were open and (all) the buildings were closed on Mondays... Even at his home, he assumes he often finds a need to specify the location of prayer. Indeed, his room is (according to what I think) divided into well-established parts, which are working, sleeping, and (most importantly) praying, making him think like autistic individuals feel more sensitivity toward the sacred places one prays in.

This is the same concerning prayer objects (the rosary, a scapular, or even the chain of St. Michael). The anecdote for this part is that between 2008 and 2009, when he was at a center in Cincinnati (Ohio, U.S.), he had noticed a peculiar set of images on a pressboard, which portrayed the Men of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Those pictures were 6 by 8 inches (something for mathematical savants to resolve, though). When he touched them, it was like he was traveling all around the world. After a decade, he came back to Cincinnati, in contrast that they had replicated given since the original ones were starting to get worn. He assigned the task

to laminate the copies so they still looked like the originals. Afterward, he still holds them anywhere to press against himself toward prayer (in other words, he holds these images to focus more on prayer).

Mental Prayer

In this final section of the present chapter, Fr. Schneider points out that one needs to be on God's mind. However, when it comes to mental prayer, it doesn't require a pre-set praying formula. According to what our dear autistic priest says, this can be as short as pausing for fifteen seconds when starting a mystery of the Rosary to bring any mystery to the mind. It can also be as long as spending days at a time of retreat.

Now on, Fr. Schneider specified some examples of mental prayer. One good example is the so-called *Lectio Divina*. Other ones are the Ignatian Contemplation, the method of Saint Sulpice, as well as Father John Bartunek's method.

He now explains a mental prayer ritual composed of six steps: 1) Concentrate: In this step, I agree with Fr. Schneider when he says that the first thing is to enter the presence of God. He says that to start a good relationship with God, he needs to remember that he's starting to converse with God, leaving many other things on the side right now. In this step, it is preferred an act with humility followed by a short prayer asking for and expressing faith, hope, and love (three theological virtues within Catholic Theology, I think), which indeed, can help. Analogizing human communication, prayer is such small talk when one meets a friend and asks anything about them. Just like these, we can speed through praying to God. The most necessary thing to do is to make a routine to help enter God's presence. Hence comes the capture part. 2) Capture: Something important that Fr. Schneider points out is grasping the material in which he prays during the meditation. He, for example, picks up a Bible or a spiritual book, and reads a section (this is, indeed, very particular among Protestant Christians. More inclusively, within the Independent Fundamental Baptists). It is important to read a Bible passage or a short daily reflection, as it is often good to read from this section, then go back over it slowly. 3) Consider (for me, the steps 2 & 3 seem to interest me the most, and even I fail with that though): In this section, he now moves from simply reading the text to the thing that it wants: Scriptural Meditation. Using the Ignatian method of meditation, he is invited to use his five senses to fully embrace the scene in which he meditates. Now, he states two examples for this step in regards to scriptural meditation: When meditating on John 21, he first contemplates the sound of the waves lapping up on shore, the smell of the roasting bread and fish (the taste of them later in the story), then hearing the voice of Jesus when he feels the apostle's nets on his hands. Now he reflects on a truth of the faith described in the passage. In this case, Fr. Schneider takes as an example 1 John 4:16: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him". He then highlights what kind of meditation on such a passage can be done here, pointing to the meaning of the Greek word "Agape", for example, and thus successively. 4) Converse (well, this is amazing, because the autistic priest himself points out specifically on the mere sense that he's talking to God directly, seriously?): At this point, Fr. Schneider starts a real dialogue with Jesus to connect his meditation with his life. If reflecting on John 21, he might ask Jesus how he could respond more like the apostles. This kind of reflection (according to him) can help. In summary, this step is rather like a typical informal conversation with the Lord. 5) Commit (there is a sapiential passage that says "***When you make a promise to God, don't delay in following through, for God does not take pleasure in fools. Keep all the promises you make to him. It is better to say nothing than to make a promise and not keep it.***") This passage is found in the book of Ecclesiastes, a very hard-to-understand book from the Wisdom Book of the Christian Bible.) Now, in this pre-last step, Fr. Schneider surrenders to create some small resolutions from what he prayed about and offers them to Jesus. Taking the example of John 21, he had committed to revolve to do something tough that he's been putting off, or might resolve to listen more to family members. Another example is 1 John 4 one, which creates the resolution to express Jesus' love for a person who is seen and annoys him, or even having an internal attitude to become more aware of God's presence throughout the day. And finally, 6) Contemplate: Although prayer must lead him to imitate Jesus in this life, the ultimate goal is to safeguard his soul for heaven as well as to prepare himself for the resurrection day of his common life.

Critical comment (This can be a personal comment or ideas that the text generates).

In my Protestant way of prayer, I always struggle because I mostly petition God for many unrealistic paths. Indeed, there is a song from a certain Contemporary Christian Music group called D.C Talk named “What if I stumble”. In the first strophe, it asks, “Is this one for the people? Is this one for the Lord? or do I simply serenade the things I must afford?” In fact, that is what happens to me most of the time I have been praying. Ultimately, I’ve been praying to God in a digital notebook, petitioning Him in the same structure as praying in the traditional way (orally). I serenade Him with the things I must afford!

If vocal prayer (also known as repetitive prayer) can boost your mind and comfort with God, simply do it! Fundamentalist Protestant Christians claim that vocal prayer is unbiblical, citing Matthew 6:7-8 by claiming that Jesus Christ himself hates vain repetitions. However, now with an autistic priest saying the contrary, there is a lot of understanding of why autistic individuals are misunderstood and mistreated in non-Catholic communities!

As I am not a Catholic and do not know any Catholic orders and prayers, because for several years they were awkward to me, it is too late to say that the Catholic thing on prayer can be anything but a burden to me. However, as Fr. Schneider stated in the section “Stimming and Prayer”, stimming is a form of prayer. But in the Baptist Church, specifically during the pulpit, an autistic member of the body of Christ begins to stim, and can you guess what the little children do? they do not pay attention to the pulpit but pay attention to the autistic person, seeming to be a point of distraction to them, like the handicapped person could be the clown described by Pope Benedict XVI in his book “Introduction to Christianity”.

Oh well! If the sacred spaces and objects tend to be frequently associated with tranquility and peace of mind, I prefer to be more spiritual than religious myself. If Jesus Christ and the Bible are not a religion, why is there a bubble that stumbles more people in a non-Catholic Church, being such a bubble, an autistic

congregant and member of such a church? I've even seen more Protestant congregations tending to have no interest in implementing a special-needs ministry inside their churches! If autistic children need to socialize within a school setting, I'm so sorry to say this, but that is an awkward idea! Elon Musk (an autistic himself) once said:

"Do not confuse schooling with education. I did not go to Harvard, but the people who work for me did" (Jiménez, 2022)

Then, my dearest Autism parents, why do you strive hard to get your children to a place where, after all, they will finish excluding you, and even threaten them to expel them, and mostly, when you're not with them. So, why not homeschool them? Homeschooling itself is not religious at all; instead, it is a very helpful way to make your kids more intelligent than ever. But the thing is, where they will socialize can be at a playground or, even better, at your particular house of worship. The best thing you can do for your autistic child is to homeschool them. Even better, as explained by Fr. Schneider in the section on "Prayer on Location and Object", your child would be delighted by going to the Holy Land (Jerusalem, Israel) and will surely be "Saved by Grace" by visiting the place where the Lord was buried! Even better, if you are Catholic autism parents, the best thing you might do is to provide on-the-job training for your child to land a job at the heart of the Church (Vatican City State/The Holy See), where they can even work for the Holy Father.

In the following section, "Prayer of location and object", Fr. Schneider states the following:

"With our attachment to objects, we can designate the spaces for prayer and non-prayer. I think the repeated use of a particular object for prayer often helps to remind us of Jesus and separate our dedicated prayer time from other times. I find that sometimes we can easily connect a certain object to a certain task or a certain person. For example, by saying it is connected to the activity of prayer or the persons of Jesus and Mary, it can be a huge help to our prayer."

This can hardly remind me of my teenage years as a Baptist bigot. Every time I used to see an image or an altar and think to judge them. But, as a few teenagers, I was very immature at that time, when it was supposed that teenage years are a season for maturity. However, my behavior was like a child. I still have that behavior nowadays, but I'm still a good-hearted boy who loves humanity. When I was taking a Protestant course on theology and disability during the 2024 Spring (I mean, last year), I realized that my restricted theme on religion had indeed something special: Human Beings. Most autistic individuals obsess principally with music, the arts, sports, and even with biology, as most people with my condition are stereotypically obsessed with productivity and nature. However, in my case, it is not thus. Nevertheless, by reading principally the articles embedded within the course, the human condition from a religious perspective was my restricted interest. Thus, this blog was born, and while I studied theology at a local Presbyterian (but secular) university here in Colombia, the reading reports were some academic homework. Seamlessly, I ended up enjoying them and, afterward, I continue making reading reports, as evident at the present moment you are reading this article. So, praying the rosary, or even divining with a rare item of Saint Michael, makes part, indeed, of something spiritual and special within autistics. The thing is, if I frequently failed to pray to God verbally, and when typing my petitions, came out as arrogant, the Lord wasn't listening to my disparate prayers. On the contrary, if praying the rosary, reciting a novena, lighting a candle, or even divining with a special oracle called the "Chain of Saint Michael" can make the community of Holy Ones more emphasized as the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit) is the boos of them to answer the prayers. This is the objective of the present critical commentary on Fr. Matthew Schneider's work!

In the final section of the present book's first chapter, Fr. Schenider points out specifically how he makes the prayer rituals embedded in the previously analyzed section. The ritual can be done differently by autistic individuals than by neurotypical people. Indeed, something necessary that he clarifies is that we often tend to focus more on information and less on emotion, sampling his habit to get into a footnote of his Study Bible to check more about the passage. He also assumes that we tend to move from a bunch of specific points to a general principle rather than vice-versa, then neurotypicals tend to go the other way. If one wants to contemplate or imagine the scene or God's words, I want to know all the details. He now states that we, as autistic individuals, tend to remember a lot of details and make interesting connections. However, something that catches my eye when it comes to mental prayer is, specifically, distraction. He assumes that distraction is some kind of part for every human, without the intention of pretending that one is unholy. Hence, the self-

mistreatment way of being a failure. Seriously? Fr. Schneider assumes that we are not failures, even at times when we fall into distractions.

According to the explained by Fr. Schneider, there is no doubt that every single human has distractions. I also must confess that I mistreat myself every single time, you know, according to what the Apostle St. Paul states: ***“I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.”*** Perhaps mistreating myself is a synonym of self-discipline ([just take a look at my Bible study based on Hebrews 12:1-13](#). Here, I highlight three kinds of disciplines that are well-versed in there). I always struggle with distraction, and even with nervousness! But the best thing I can do is to self-discipline by writing and editing. Hence, the idea of making this reading report from Fr. Matthew Schneider’s book on autism and the Church, which is based on the Catholic Faith.

I must also highlight that, in most cases, there is a certain passage from the Gospel of Luke in which Jesus states: ***“But don’t begin until you count the cost. Who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? But don’t begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? “Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down with his counselors to discuss whether his army of 10,000 could defeat the 20,000 soldiers marching against him? And if he can’t, he will send a delegation to discuss terms of peace while the enemy is still far away. So you cannot become my disciple.”*** What does this passage remind me of all that was written by Fr. Matthew Schneider in the first chapter of his book regarding autism and the Catholic Faith? In reality, this passage was given to me by my Baptist pastor when he visited me at my house here in Barranquilla. From his visit to my home, I haven’t come back to my Baptist church but rather attend a local Catholic Church, and even better, I’m still pushing for the Archbishop and the Auxiliary Bishop of Barranquilla (my native city here in Colombia), taking a good time limit to these bishops for them to start creating my process to become a Catholic. I’m also graduating as a theologian here in Colombia. The thing is that I will be the first person with autism to graduate from the university’s theology program. So, what could I ask the most? The program is, indeed, secular, non-sectarian, and ecumenical. Hence, the idea of promoting my works in sites like Catholic365.com, or even here in my blog.

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