

Abstract

Community and Communion: A Comparative Analysis of Jean Vanier and Stanley Hauerwas on Theology and Disability

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Over the last four decades, Jean Vanier and Stanley Hauerwas have continued to be leading voices in the field of theology and disability. As Vanier reflected on his experiences at L'Arche and as Hauerwas included the mentally handicapped in his theological project, they both gave voice to the spiritual and theological dimensions of intellectual disability. This thesis is a comparative analysis of Vanier's and Hauerwas's writings regarding people with intellectual disabilities with particular focus on their relationship to the church. By comparing each writer's methodology, anthropology, and ecclesiology, I argue that Vanier and Hauerwas share both an Incarnational anthropology as well as a sacramental ecclesiology. Because their methodologies are reversed, however, their Incarnational anthropologies and sacramental ecclesiologies are not identical, especially regarding the importance of the visible church. Where Hauerwas and Vanier agree, however, is their shared belief that people with intellectual disabilities have the unique ability to show us the face of God and so change the lives of "normal" people who enter into community and communion with them.

In the chapter on methodology, I suggest that Hauerwas's and Vanier's methodologies face in opposite directions because of the nature of their work. Vanier's retrospective theological realism comes from his experience of living, eating, working, and praying with the residents at L'Arche and is grounded in his spiritual journey. Hauerwas, on the hand, uses the mentally handicapped as part of his theological agenda which argues that the narrative-based Christian ethic stands in opposition to the project of modernity which values individualism and autonomy.

Through their experiences of being with (as opposed to doing for) people with intellectual disabilities, Vanier and Hauerwas began to see how important such lives are for the church as it attempts to offer a unique vision of humanity, one based on the Incarnation of Jesus and not on cognitive ability. The second chapter on anthropology explains the differences between Vanier's and Hauerwas's understandings of humanity in relation to Jesus. Hauerwas bases the uniqueness of humanity on the Incarnation because, in Jesus, God chose to become a human. The definition of humanness, therefore, should not be based on criteria like IQ or rationality, but on what *kind* of people we are. Vanier also bases his anthropology on Jesus' Incarnation but sees the link between Jesus and humanity in Jesus' identification with the poor and weak. Because we have all experienced feelings of fear, loneliness, and isolation at some point, Vanier believes all humans are equal and, when we are able to encounter aspects of ourselves in people we see as "other," we can grow and become more fully human.

Hauerwas's and Vanier's similar Incarnational anthropologies contribute to their understanding of the church as sacramental in nature. The way we are to become more human, for Vanier, is to participate in what he calls the *sacrament of encounter*. Though Vanier is grounded in his Catholic faith, as L'Arche began to grow it included other Christian denominations and eventually other religious traditions. Vanier found that he encountered the "other" most fully in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, but since those sacraments were unavailable or unappealing to some traditions, he came to see the sacrament of encounter, as found generally in daily interactions and particularly in the act of washing one another's feet, to be a way of encountering the other for all. While this is a powerful premise, it is somewhat frightening for Hauerwas who believes that the church, and the sacraments of eucharist and baptism, must be visibly and recognizably Christian if they are to have the effect of embodying Jesus' presence and allowing the reality of God's redemptive narrative to be made known. Hauerwas's ecclesiology is sacramental because he believes the sacraments play vital roles in the sanctification of individual Christians, *and* because the church as a whole acts as a sacrament for the world by showing what it looks like to follow Jesus. This is the point where Hauerwas and Vanier diverge most, yet they both continue to come back to Jesus in their methodology, anthropology, and ecclesiology.

Finally, this thesis will conclude by summarizing the major points and connecting them to areas of further research as well as practical and personal applications, through which we might experience the type of community and communion Vanier and Hauerwas have both found in being in relationship with people with intellectual disabilities.

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by

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Submitted to the Faculty of the
School of Theology of the University of the South
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Sacred Theology

April 2014

Sewanee, Tennessee

Approved _____ Date _____

Adviser

_____ Date _____

Second Adviser

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How God shapes that body called “handicapped” through baptism is surely paradigmatic for any account of sanctification. That the holiness that is “of God” is constituted through the vulnerability of the presence of the other is one of the defining marks of the church. Moreover, such presence is made possible by a community which has been shaped by the diversity of gifts required to live out the Decalogue.

-Stanley Hauerwas

People who gather to live the presence of Jesus among people in distress are therefore called not just to do things for them, or to see them as objects of charity, but rather to receive them as a source of life and of communion. These people come together not just to liberate those in need, but also to be liberated by them; not just to heal their wounds, but to be healed by them; not just to evangelize them, but to be evangelized by them.

-Jean Vanier

Introduction

In a society where full expression of life, the freedom to self-determine, and the ability to seek economic and personal achievement are the founding principles,¹ anyone who is unable to live according to these values because of an intellectual disability automatically becomes “different” or “other”. Because people with intellectual disabilities are unable or unwelcome to participate in these cultural constructs, they are often excluded, neglected, and deemed worthy of charity at best, or considered sub-human at worst. But what happens when we stop viewing people with intellectual disabilities as “different,” sub-human, or charity cases and start treating them as not only equal but also as valuable members of both society and the church? The answer is that lives, of both able and disabled people, are changed. Jean Vanier and Stanley Hauerwas are both examples of individuals whose lives have been significantly influenced by encountering people with intellectual disabilities. Through their lives and writings, Vanier and Hauerwas have had a tremendous impact on contemporary discussions of theology and disability, what it means to be human, and what that means for the church. The goal of this thesis is to place Vanier and Hauerwas side-by-side, comparing each writer’s methodology, anthropology, and ecclesiology, with special focus on how their understanding of the relationship between God and humanity should guide our interactions with and care for people with intellectual disabilities. I will also argue that Vanier and Hauerwas both have an *Incarnational anthropology* and a *sacramental ecclesiology*, which are particularly evident in their writings on people with intellectual disabilities.

¹ Thomas Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence*, Philadelphia, 1776. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

The academic field of theology and disability is relatively new, having come out of a Christian response to two competing models that claim to define disability: the medical model and the social model.² In the medical model, the primary relationship is between a doctor as a specialized care-provider and a person with an intellectual disability as an individual patient who needs treatment in a hospital or institution. “According to the medical model, disability is a problem that is experienced by an individual; it represents a deviation from a state of normality because of an impairment. Medical professionals have the job of correcting (curing) or ameliorating this problem so as to achieve a state of normality for the individual.”³ This method is inherently reductionist in its view of the human body/self as broken and in need of fixing and, because of this, it places the patient in a dependent and often vulnerable role. The patient also has little voice in this relationship, not only because he does not have the same level of specialization as the doctor, but also because he is understood as lacking the cognitive ability to make his own choices and determine his own treatment.

In opposition to the medical model, the social model began when a number of people with disabilities came together to form the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) after feeling excluded and silenced at a meeting of Rehabilitation International in 1981.⁴ The social model, “shifts the emphasis from the disabled person as a patient with a problem to the disabled person as a citizen with rights.”⁵ Furthermore, in the social model, the “problem” of disability is not in the person who is disabled at all. Rather, the problem is with the

² For a more complete summary of these two models see Roy McCloughry and Wayne Morris, *Making A World of Difference: Christian Reflections on Disability* (London: SPCK, 2002), 8-24.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵ *Ibid.*

greater society whose social, economic, and political structures exclude people with disabilities from fully participating in society. Therefore, disability is seen as a human rights issue similar to issues of race, gender, and religion, and advocating for the rights of disabled citizens naturally includes political involvement that goes beyond the hospital and even beyond nationalities. Essential to the social model, however, is the importance of the autonomy of the disabled person as someone who should not be advocated *for* or spoken *on behalf of*. Rather, the slogan of UPIAS, “Nothing about us without us,” encapsulates this model’s focus on the power of the disabled to control their own lives as equal members of society.

As a result of the growing interest in disability advocacy in the secular world, disability research and study remained largely in the social sciences and humanities until more theologians and biblical scholars began to join the conversation in the 1990s. The following overview of major authors and works is meant to give some background to the field of theology and disability as well as Vanier’s and Hauerwas’s place in (and out) of it. Vanier and Hauerwas could be considered *in* the field of theology and disability because they both produced some of the first attempts at a Christian understanding of disability with their early writings in the 1970s and 80s. Through small books on L’Arche and various essays on disability, Vanier and Hauerwas were trailblazers in a field that has now produced some very important works. One such seminal work is *The Disabled God* by Nancy L. Eiesland, which identifies the theology of disability with liberation theology and argues that “the dissonance raised by the nonacceptance of persons with disabilities and the acceptance of grace through Christ’s broken body necessitates that the church find new ways of interpreting disability.”⁶ A decade later, Hector Avalos edited *This Abled Body*:

⁶ Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 23.

Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies which put this new field in conversation with biblical studies, grounding theological speech in the biblical narrative. That same year, Amos Yong published another work titled *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity*.⁷ Yong takes a detailed look at the multi-faceted issues concerning disability, through the lens of his experience as a theologian and as a brother of someone with Down syndrome, and seeks to reimagine the possibilities for disability in relation to theology and the church.

Helping to accomplish that goal, Brian Brock and John Swinton recently edited *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader*, which seeks to give voice to Christian writers in ages past in order combat the church's chronological snobbery and show that past writers such as Augustine, Julian of Norwich, Calvin, and Kierkegaard (to name a few) have also grappled with questions of disability and theology. Brock and Swinton found that "what emerges, in overview, is that throughout the history of the West, Christian thinkers have been concerned to articulate in their own characteristic ways how humans are related to each other by Jesus Christ."⁸ This is certainly true of one other theologian who helped popularize theology and disability in the 1980s and 90s, Henri Nouwen. Though his life and work deserve to be explored in their own thesis, Nouwen bridged the gap between L'Arche and the academy as well as the gap between the academic field of theology and disability and popular spirituality both in and outside the church. Nouwen was very close with Vanier and even left his career in theological education to become the pastor at L'Arche Daybreak in Toronto. Perhaps his most well-known and influential book to come out of his experiences with L'Arche is *The Return of the Prodigal Son* which explores each

⁷ Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007).

⁸ Brian Brock and John Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 19.

character in the parable.⁹ Still, his many other works have also been well-loved by a generation of people interested in spirituality and disability and he remains a popular and respected figure in this area.¹⁰

What is important with this brief survey of attempts at a Christian model of disability is that almost all of them make explicit reference to Jean Vanier and/or Stanley Hauerwas, who, each in his own way, is a major figure in this field. Vanier and Hauerwas are so important that they are the subject of the final two chapters of *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, coming just after Bonhoeffer and Barth. Further proof of their prominence lies in the fact that each man has had a book written about his writings on theology and disability and these books include essays from professionals in a variety of fields.¹¹ Though they have made such a huge contribution to the field of theology and disability, Hauerwas's and Vanier's lives and work cannot be confined to this one area of study. Indeed, the reason they are so influential is precisely because of their ability to engage with disability in a variety of contexts and, in doing so, get at the heart of what it means to be human and to be followers of Jesus.

The question of what it means to follow Jesus, and the fact that they both include people with intellectual disabilities in their answers, is the link that binds Hauerwas and Vanier together. How their answers differ, however, is important for understanding their respective methodology,

⁹ Henri J M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Meditation On Fathers, Brothers, and Sons* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

¹⁰ Nouwen has been a part of my devotional life for a few years now thanks to the Henri Nouwen Society's daily devotional emails of Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1997). Another work of his, *Adam: God's Beloved* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997) is more directly about his time at L'Arche though it is not as popular as *The Return of the Prodigal Son*.

¹¹ John Swinton, ed., *Critical Reflections On Stanley Hauerwas' Theology of Disability: Disabling Society, Enabling Theology* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2004) and Hans S. Reinders, ed., *The Paradox of Disability: Responses to Jean Vanier and L'Arche Communities from Theology and the Sciences* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010).

anthropology, and ecclesiology with regard to theology and disability. For Vanier, following Jesus meant leaving a career in the British Navy and, after a brief stint in academics, resulted in his inviting two men with intellectual disabilities to live with him in a small apartment in France. With that move, Vanier began what is now an organization of 145 homes for people with intellectual disabilities across the world called L'Arche International. Alongside L'Arche, Vanier also began a support group for families and friends of people with disabilities called Faith and Light, which is also a worldwide community. Vanier began L'Arche in 1964 and from then on has written extensively about his experiences at L'Arche and how those homes have shaped his understanding of Jesus, humanity, and the church.

For Hauerwas, following Jesus meant dedicating his life to ministry in the church at a young age and subsequently pursuing a career in theology because he was “not entirely convinced that he was a Christian but [was] convinced he needed to know more before he deserved an opinion on the subject.”¹² Though Hauerwas is most likely convinced that he is a Christian at this point, he is still trying to figure out what it means to live out that claim in the world. Living it out involves re-thinking all sorts of topics including: pacifism, abortion, euthanasia, sex, suffering, preaching, the church, liberalism, and (I would argue) most importantly, the mentally handicapped. Fueled by his bricklayer work ethic and unashamedly Texan charm, Hauerwas's career in theology has brought him via Notre Dame to Duke University where he recently retired as the Gilbert T. Rowe Professor Emeritus of Divinity and

¹² William Cavanaugh. “Stan the Man,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael G. Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 19. Hauerwas's profession of dedication to ministry in the church came at his home church, Pleasant Mound Methodist near his hometown of Pleasant Grove, Texas and Hauerwas recognizes part of the reason he did it was because he wanted to be saved like the other youth, “figuring that if he were a minister, God would have to save him.” Ibid.

Law. In 2001, Hauerwas was named “Best American Theologian” by *Time* magazine, an honor which he reluctantly though graciously accepted, saying,

Those who know me did not miss the irony of the occasion. After all, I have made a career criticizing the accommodated character of the church to the American project. I am then rewarded for being the great critic of America by one of the standards of American life? We live in a strange world, but I have tried to make the most of it, that is, I have tried to use *Time*’s designation as a form of secular power that might be used for God’s purposes.¹³

What I find most interesting about how these two men are linked is that, regarding their work on theology and disability, both men dabbled in the other’s speciality. Vanier got a PhD and was a university professor for one semester before spending the rest of his life living with people with intellectual disabilities. Hauerwas, on the other hand, has friends who have intellectual disabilities but did not choose to live with them. Instead, he has allowed those friendships to inform his long and illustrious life in academia. In a sense, Vanier has been a *practitioner of* theology and disability whereas Hauerwas has been *theologizing about* disability.¹⁴ Because Vanier and Hauerwas are not coming from the same place or attempting to do the same thing (as the chapter on methodology will show), the goal of this thesis is not to *contrast* Hauerwas and Vanier, but to *compare* them. In comparing them side-by-side, I hope to tease out their views on theology and disability by looking closely at three aspects of their life and work: methodology, anthropology, and ecclesiology. By doing so, I will argue that the differences between their methodologies directs the specific aspects of their Incarnational anthropologies and sacramental ecclesiologies.

¹³ Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child: A Theologian’s Memoir* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2010), ix.

¹⁴ On that note, however, it is important to recognize Hauerwas’s first marriage to Anne, who had bi-polar disorder and manic depression. Though these are forms of mental illness not intellectual disability *per se*, Hauerwas’s home life was marked by Anne’s struggle for many years and certainly influenced his understanding of theology and disability. See *Hannah’s Child* for further details, especially 123-78.

Before explaining how I will approach the chapters on methodology, anthropology, and ecclesiology, it is important to provide this disclaimer: Dividing their thoughts into these three categories, while helpful for understanding the nuances between their views, may be counterproductive to their overall goals. What is so compelling about both Vanier's and Hauerwas's writing is the way they are both able to articulate such lofty topics as humanity, the church, and God so concretely and succinctly while at the same time staying grounded in the practical implications of what those topics mean for individuals and the church. So, I pull apart what was not intended to be separate in the hopes that considering each cord will make the rope that much stronger. In service of this goal, each of the chapters will be split into two sections, one on each author. The ordering of these section-splits, however, is intentionally not uniform. In the methodology chapter I will begin with Vanier before moving to Hauerwas. In order to keep us thinking about Hauerwas, I will begin the anthropology chapter with Hauerwas and follow with Vanier. In the same fashion, I will then begin the ecclesiology chapter with Vanier and end with Hauerwas. I have chosen this ordering for two reasons: 1) Neither author goes first or last and so neither is assigned, even if subconsciously, a ranking of better or worse; 2) I find it more helpful to articulate each author's views by flowing from one section to the other rather than flipping back and forth. I hope this ordering is not a distraction but helps us to compare these important figures more effectively.

The first of these three chapters will be on Vanier's and Hauerwas's methodology. Methodology is the study of a set of methods, rules, or ideas that are important in a field or, in this case, a person's writings. Though not totally removed from his personal life, Hauerwas's methodology is more typical of that of a scholar—he employs various rhetorical and philosophical

arguments in service of his particular point. Conversely, though Vanier has a PhD in philosophy, his methodology is much more intertwined with his own life story and his spiritual journey. This chapter will consider what methods Vanier and Hauerwas use in their work on people with intellectual disabilities as well as how they use those methods to accomplish their goals. This chapter will not seek to judge the validity of either methodology but will instead consider how their different methods enabled them to find such powerful things to say about people with intellectual disabilities. Understanding what their methods and motivations were in writing about the disabled will also help us to better understand the reasons behind their anthropologies and ecclesiologies.

The second chapter will look at Hauerwas's and Vanier's anthropologies, or, their understanding of what a human being is and what makes us truly human. Both Hauerwas and Vanier begin their anthropologies with Jesus Christ, but as the difference in their methodologies will show, they both came to and leave from this Incarnational starting place for different reasons. For both writers, however, anthropology becomes a "chicken and egg" question of "Which came first: their understanding of humanity or their interactions with human beings?" Similar to this question, Vanier's and Hauerwas's anthropologies are paradoxical in the way they understand the nature of rationality and disability, wholeness and suffering, and a person's proximity to God. They meet again, however, in concluding that what is most important for anthropology is not determining a set of criteria by which we can determine humanness. Rather, being (or becoming) human is about what *kind* of people we are and how we live our lives, especially with the poor and weak, i.e. people with intellectual disabilities.

The final chapter will take up Vanier's and Hauerwas's view of and hope for the church and its relationship to people with intellectual disabilities. This is perhaps where Vanier and Hauerwas diverge most noticeably in how they understand the importance of the visible/institutional church and its relationship to the disabled. One thing they do have in common, however, is their belief in the sacramental nature of community, though they understand the sacraments in different, though not wholly opposed, ways. Ecclesiology is the last chapter because of how much their methodology and anthropology influence and are encompassed by their views on the church. It is also last because as this is a theological thesis done at an Episcopal seminary, and it is my hope that the insights gained from Vanier's and Hauerwas's ecclesiologies might inform and transform real churches and real people's lives.

To conclude this thesis, I will reiterate the important points from the first three chapters, describe further areas of research, offer some ideas for practical application, and provide personal reflections about how their work has influenced my own understanding of theology and disability. By way of an introduction to those reflections, it is worth briefly describing my own interest in and affinity for people with intellectual disabilities, both of which are indebted to a place called HUGS Camp. HUGS (Helping Understand God through Sharing) Camp, sponsored by the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, offers the quintessential camp experience to people with intellectual disabilities by enlisting the help of high schoolers who are not intellectually disabled. These high schoolers are buddied up with the HUGS campers, and adult counselors plan, oversee, and run the camp for one week each summer.¹⁵ HUGS Camp celebrated its 25th anniversary this past summer and I have been involved as a counselor and musician at HUGS

¹⁵ The camp is held annually at what was once the Diocese of North Carolina's camp and conference center, but after being sold to the State of North Carolina, is now The Summit at Haw River State Park in Brown Summit, NC. For more information, visit www.hugscamp.com

since 2007. HUGS Camp is the closest I have been to glimpsing the Kingdom of God and it is because of the way the labels of “normal” and “different” faded away when I became friends with campers like Taylor, and Toma, and Kyle.

I must admit that before my first time at HUGS Camp in 2007, I never wanted to go. I knew other youth who had gone and they told me what a life-changing experience it was, but I did not want to go because I was afraid. I would like to think that I was afraid that I would not have been a good helper camper, but I know I was simply afraid to interact with the disabled. At the time, the only exposure I had to anyone with an intellectual disability was a girl named Jessica in my grade at school who had Down syndrome. I always felt uncomfortable when other people would make fun of her behind her back, but I never stood up for her or actively engaged with her as a friend. After having my world turned upside-down at HUGS Camp, my view of people with intellectual disabilities immediately changed and I have felt very comfortable interacting with such people ever since. Of course, it is not always easy to become friends with people with intellectual disabilities and such friendships can be difficult at times. Nevertheless, I have seen the pure joy and love that such friends can share, as well as the pain and hurt that comes with it, and that has been hugely formative for me in my own spiritual and now academic journey.

Before we begin with the rest of this thesis, let us first take a moment to go over some vocabulary. As is the case with almost every book on disability, part of the introduction must examine the various terms associated with intellectual disabilities and to whom those terms refer. In this thesis you will see such terms as: “retarded,” “mentally handicapped,” “disabled,” and

“people/individuals with intellectual disabilities.”¹⁶ Each of these terms has meant different things at different times. For example, Hauerwas’s earlier essays used the term “retarded” because that was the acceptable term at the time. Though using “the R-word” as either a term for the disabled or a playground insult are both looked down upon today, “retarded” began to be used in an attempt to stop using even worse terms like “mental,” “idiot,” “spastic,” and “mongol.” And yet, because of the ongoing “euphemism treadmill” and the uncanny ability people have to make anything an insult (i.e. “gay,” “lame,” “intellectual,” etc.) terms only have a certain lifetime until they are no longer acceptable. Using terms well is important, however, because of the danger of belittling, insulting, or further marginalizing an already vulnerable group of people. And yet, to even speak of a “group of people” or the “handicapped community” fails to recognize that there is no singular group or community of individuals with intellectual disabilities and it forgets that they are in fact individuals with particular stories, lives, and feelings. With that said, I will be doing two things with terms in this thesis. At times I will mirror the language of Vanier and Hauerwas in order to honor their use of the word as well as highlight the time in which it was used (i.e., Hauerwas and “retarded”). At other times, when speaking more generally, I will use “people with [intellectual] disabilities” to emphasize that they are people, not problems.

The exact definition of intellectual disabilities and which conditions that term includes is an ongoing conversation. Hauerwas never explicitly defines what he means by “retarded” or “mentally handicapped” but by drawing out his implicit assumptions about this type of person,

¹⁶ For more thorough explanations of the definitions and appropriateness of these and similar terms, see Brock and Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 8-11; Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 25-9; and especially McCloughry and Morris, “Appendix 2: Language—Getting it Right!”, *Making A World of Difference*, 130-32.

Swinton defines Hauerwas's use of these terms as the "group of humans beings [who are] deemed to have limited communication skills, restricted or no self-care skills, and significant intellectual and/or cognitive difficulties; it also assumed that they will require some kind of full-time care throughout their lives."¹⁷ This definition of people with mental handicaps represents the identity of the "core members" in L'Arche homes. Vanier's concept of disability involves each of the aspects of Hauerwas's definition, but it is grounded in the language of "poor" and "weak" as found in the Beatitudes. As the rest of this thesis will show, both Hauerwas and Vanier know that these superficial terms cannot do justice to both the richness in those we see as "poor" and the weakness present in those of us who see ourselves as "strong." For now, let us agree that no one term does justice to the particularities of a disease, syndrome, or disorder, nor to the person who lives with it. Let us use these incomplete terms as gestures of respect and humble recognition of the complexity and sanctity of people with, and without, intellectual disabilities.

Another issue regarding language and the mentally handicapped is the use of the words "child" or "children" when referring to people with intellectual disabilities. The jargon of "children" fails to recognize that the mentally handicapped grow in age just like everyone else. Though their mental and physical development is necessarily at a different stage than their age (else they would not be considered mentally handicapped or developmentally slow), naming them as "children" conditions both the mentally handicapped and those who wish to be their friends to view the relationship as one of child/parent, or at least child/care-giver. Vanier notes that when he began L'Arche he referred to the first two residents as "boys" but admits, "it was

¹⁷ Swinton, "The Importance of Being a Creature: Stanley Hauerwas on Disability," in Brock and Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 513.

the language of the time, and I would never employ it today.”¹⁸ Hauerwas’s use of the language of “children” is not as clear, however, because though he refers to “retarded children,” he does so in the context of how society thinks about children in general but does not attempt to clarify his terms in such cases—that is, whether he means literal children or not.

Finally, it is worth noting a few other key words that will recur throughout this thesis. A major part of Hauerwas’s theological project is to name our society for what it is. He uses such terms as, “liberal,” “individualistic,” “Western,” “capitalist,” and “modern,” to describe the nature of our society as based on rationality, independence, and competition. He uses these terms specifically in opposition to the nature of the Kingdom of God, which is based on an ethic of love and service, as found in the visible church as distinct from the world. The “church” is another term which needs explaining for both Hauerwas and Vanier as well as my use of it in this thesis: “church” with a lower case *c* will be used to refer to the catholic (also lower case) and universal, yet still visible (as opposed to invisible), church. It is therefore not specific to any one denomination though it can be used in reference to one. “Church” with a capital *C* stands for the formal institution and structures of the [Roman] Catholic Church, of which Vanier has been a lifelong member and to which Hauerwas wishes he could convert if it were not that he would have to give up his Protestant heritage.¹⁹ Lastly, in the section on anthropology, there is much talk about humanity, humanness, personhood, and what it means to be a human/person. All of these refer to that basic question of “What is a human?” though the answers Vanier and Hauerwas provide may change the way we understand that question altogether.

¹⁸ Jean Vanier, *Our Life Together: A Memoir in Letters* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 2008), xi.

¹⁹ This is an intentional jab at Hauerwas’s self-proclaimed “ecclesiastical homelessness” having “belonged” to churches in the Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, and Episcopalian traditions. “God’s little joke on me is that now I am an Episcopalian or, more accurately, a communicant at the Church of the Holy Family” in Chapel Hill, NC. It seems Hauerwas has found some peace in the *via media*. See Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 254-5 and 278-9.

And now, at long last, let us begin this journey through Hauerwas's and Vanier's methodology, anthropology, and ecclesiology regarding people with intellectual disabilities and their importance in society and the church.

Chapter 1: Methodology

In this chapter, we will consider what motivations and goals Jean Vanier and Stanley Hauerwas have had for their work with the mentally handicapped. This includes both their personal histories and external factors, as well as internal revelations and agendas. The observation above that Vanier and Hauerwas both dabble in each other's specialty is particularly important in understanding their methodologies in relation to one another. As this chapter will show, Vanier's works are written *out of* his experience of living at L'Arche and consist primarily of personal reflections that are intended both to share his insights as well as to introduce his readers to the love and mystery of Jesus as found in community. Hauerwas's works, on the other hand, are written *because of* his theological and philosophical convictions and though they of course come from his career in academia, are not as bound to his lived experience as Vanier's. Thus, their methodologies face in opposite directions as they seek to bring together their personal and academic experiences with their spiritual and intellectual visions as shaped by people with intellectual disabilities.

Jean Vanier

On August 4, 1964, Jean Vanier moved into a small dilapidated house in the tiny French town of Trosly-Breuil. The next day, two men from the Val Fleuri mental institution, Raphaël Simi and Philippe Seux, moved into the house with Vanier.¹ Thus began a new way of life for Vanier, Raphaël, and Philippe as they learned how to live, eat, work, play, and pray together.

¹ There was also a third man named Dany who initially moved into the house as well, but due to his severe disabilities, he returned to Val Fleuri where he could receive the high level of care he needed.

Vanier's experiment of living with the mentally handicapped came from his deep-seated conviction that Jesus loves those who are poor and weak. What made Vanier continue to live with the mentally handicapped and what made L'Arche become a worldwide movement was deeper than simply providing housing or even friendship for the mentally handicapped. Vanier quickly learned that, although the able-bodied "assistants" help the "core members" (those with mental handicaps) of L'Arche very much every day, the core members also have a tremendous impact on the lives of the assistants. "The poor reveal to those who come to be with them how to live compassionately on the level of the heart. They evangelize us. They show us the way of the beatitudes."² This mysterious reversal of roles is essential to L'Arche and this section will explore how it compelled Vanier not only to continue to grow L'Arche, but also to write about what he learned over many decades of living and learning with people with intellectual disabilities.

While Vanier's life and the story of L'Arche are documented elsewhere, certain experiences in Vanier's life before L'Arche led him to begin living with the mentally handicapped and are relevant for understanding his motivations and methodology. Often, world-renowned philanthropists and peacemakers are compelled to engage with global or systematic injustice because of their prior personal experiences of caring for individuals. These stories begin with one person and spread to many. Vanier's story, however, is just the opposite. The son of a respected and high-ranking Canadian diplomat, Jean Vanier was brought up with an acute awareness of and responsibility for the common good. This led him to enlist in the British Navy at the beginning of World War II, when he was just thirteen years of age! After eight years of

² Jean Vanier, *The Heart of L'Arche: A Spirituality for Every Day*, L'Arche Collection (Toronto, Ont., Canada: Novalis, 1995), 50.

successful service, Vanier’s intuition told him that, though he supported the Navy and had no qualms with it, his true vocation was elsewhere. Vanier’s sense of his life as a vocation grew out of his strong love of and faith in Jesus and his practice as a Roman Catholic. He left the Navy because his “deepest desire was to be a disciple of Jesus and live the Gospel message.”³ He did not know whether he would be called to the priesthood but he did know that he desired community, which he did not find in the constant struggle to climb the ladder of rank in the Navy. “All my life I had been taught to climb the ladder, to seek promotion, to compete, to be the best, to win prizes. This is what society teaches us. In doing so, we lose community and communion.”⁴ Vanier’s focus shifted from being a part of the global vision of the world’s strongest navy, to a smaller community—the community of academics and education—as he pursued a life of following Jesus.

When Vanier left the Navy in 1950 to follow Jesus, his mother wanted him to have a spiritual director and connected him with Père Thomas Philippe. Père Thomas was a French Dominican priest who had founded and was running an “international study and retreat center for lay people who wanted to know something of the spirituality of the Church”⁵ on the outskirts of Paris called L’Eau Vive (Living Water). At L’Eau Vive, Vanier did manual labor, studied, and was engaged in intentional community as he sought his true vocation. Two years after arriving at L’Eau Vive, he was asked to take over the directorship—because Père Thomas had been summoned to the Vatican to be reprimanded for some of his more unorthodox practices—but without Père Thomas’s vision for it, L’Eau Vive closed four years later. Vanier “felt bonded to

³ Vanier, *Our Life Together*, 3.

⁴ Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 18.

⁵ Vanier, *Our Life Together*, 4.

Père Thomas, however, and sensed that [his] future was to remain united to him, for he was truly a man of God.”⁶ Vanier’s intuition would prove to be correct but had to wait twelve years to come to fruition.

During the intermediate years, Vanier acquired a PhD in philosophy with a dissertation titled “Happiness as Principle and End of Aristotelian Ethics,” graduating *cum maxima laude* from the Institute Catholique de Paris. After completing his doctoral studies, Vanier was offered a job teaching at St. Michael’s College, University of Toronto starting in January of 1964. Before he began the job, however, Vanier helped Père Thomas move to Trosly-Breuil in the north of France where Père Thomas had been hired as the new chaplain to the Val Fleuri mental institution. It was then that Vanier had his first, and ultimately life-changing, interaction with people with intellectual disabilities. Though Vanier was a charismatic and insightful teacher at St. Michael’s during his first term, he “had a deep conviction that [he and Père Thomas] had been called together by Jesus to accomplish something.”⁷ This conviction led Vanier to leave St. Michael’s after just one semester and move to Trosly to be closer to Père Thomas. When he arrived, Père Thomas suggested that Vanier invite some men from Val Fleuri to live with him. This turned out to be the “something” to which Vanier felt God was calling him. It began with Vanier inviting Raphaël and Philippe to live with him and grew into the world-wide community known today as L’Arche International.⁸ Vanier had gone from serving in the world’s strongest

⁶ Vanier, *Our Life Together*, 4.

⁷ Carolyn Whitney-Brown, “Introduction” to *Jean Vanier: Essential Writings*, Modern Spiritual Masters (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2008), 28.

⁸ Vanier called the first foyer in Trosly “L’Arche” after Noah’s ark which he saw as a symbol of both security and renewal. As more foyers were opened around the world, they took the same name often with their location following (i.e., L’Arche Atlanta). Now L’Arche International, which is shorthand for the International Federation of L’Arche Communities, is the organization of and governing body for all 145 L’Arche communities in over 40 countries. For more information on L’Arche International see www.larche.org

Navy, to living in a community of intellectuals, and finally to engaging in personal relationships with the mentally handicapped. Before L'Arche could shift the paradigm of how to care for the mentally handicapped, Vanier's vision had to first be focussed down from global welfare to individual interactions with the poor and weak. That is how Vanier learned that his life vocation would be to, as he puts it, "change the world one heart at a time."⁹

None of this would have happened, however, if Vanier had not trusted his intuition along the way. Trust and intuition are very important for Vanier because they got him to the place of starting L'Arche *and* because they continued to guide him as L'Arche grew and became more complex. Vanier's first experience of the power of trust and intuition came when he told his father he wanted to join the Navy. After giving his reasons and making it clear that this was what he believed he needed to do, his father said, "I trust you. If that is what you want to do, you must do it."¹⁰ Looking back, Vanier knows the importance of his father's reaction saying that it "gave me permission to trust my intuitions and to just do what seemed right."¹¹ Trust is an important concept for L'Arche because Vanier believes that "trust is founded on the belief that you are important, that you are precious."¹² Because his father trusted him, which showed that his son was important and precious to him, Vanier was able to pursue his intuition and follow God's will for his life.

Of course, trust and intuition alone might not have led Vanier to leave the Navy or St. Michael's, or to invite two men with mental handicaps to live with him in a small village in

⁹ Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 162.

¹⁰ Vanier, *Our Life Together*, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 1.

France. Rather, these things were signs of the Holy Spirit acting through his intuition and were based on Vanier's understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus, and his trust in Him. Vanier says, "There is such a thing as *intuition*. We feel or sense things. They are not planned. That is where the Spirit intervenes, inspiring us to do things we had not planned."¹³ This was the same spiritual intuition that moved him to have compassion for the men in Val Fleuri and do something which he had not planned. When asked about his motivations and reasons for starting L'Arche, Vanier either responds by saying, "I didn't have reasons, I just trusted and loved," or by likening it to choosing to get married saying, "You do it because it's obvious; you just do it. There was a sense of urgency: let's just do it and follow the signs of the Spirit."¹⁴ So, when Vanier first saw the horrors of what life can be like for people with mental handicaps in an institution, he trusted his intuition on what needed to be done about it. "This naive but irreversible step was one born, by his own account," writes his biographer and friend Kathryn Spink, "of a desire to 'be good' and to 'do good' to people with disabilities."¹⁵ He knew the power of love and belonging from the trust his family showed him and he trusted his intuition that creating a similar environment of love would be life-giving for people with mental handicaps. "When I welcomed Raphaël and Philippe there wasn't a specific or rational reason—it just seemed obvious. They were crying out for relationship, and I could provide it."¹⁶ The initial motivation for Vanier to begin L'Arche was the movement of Holy Spirit in his intuition that he

¹³ Jean Vanier, *Drawn Into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 76.

¹⁴ Vanier, *Our Life Together*, 6.

¹⁵ Kathryn Spink, *The Miracle, the Message, the Story: Jean Vanier and L'Arche* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 2006), 1.

¹⁶ Vanier, *Our Life Together*, 6.

could provide a loving relationship for these men. This intuition was founded on Vanier's robust spiritual life and his deep sense of Jesus' love for the poor and weak as found in the Gospels.

At this point it is necessary to point out that Vanier's intuition and trust in the Holy Spirit were certainly the motivating factors that led him to begin L'Arche, but they did not provide the sole basis for all that he has written about L'Arche since its conception. Instead, Vanier's writings *reflect* on what he has learned at L'Arche and present those findings in a simple yet profound way. In his chapter on Jean Vanier in *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, Hans S. Reinders describes Vanier's method as retrospective:

L'Arche is lived rather than thought of, so that when in Vanier's work we encounter a profound Christian vision, it is important to realize that it is only in hindsight that this vision emerged. Put differently, Vanier's life in L'Arche has guided and developed his reading and writing, not the other way around. In the beginning was the deed.¹⁷

This is essential for understanding Vanier's work as a whole as well as the next part of this section which will consider Vanier's biblical influences as he came to realize them through living at L'Arche. Those influences are three aspects of Jesus' ministry to the poor in the gospels: the Beatitudes, the Parable of the Great Banquet, and John's use of μένω in the fourth gospel.

At the very beginning of L'Arche, when Vanier first started living with Raphaël and Philippe, Père Thomas suggested that Vanier "center [L'Arche] on the Beatitudes."¹⁸ In this section of the Sermon on the Plain Jesus proclaims, "Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). Vanier sees people with mental handicaps as very poor indeed. They are poor because they have been abandoned and rejected by society and lack

¹⁷ Reinders, "Jean Vanier's Theological Realism," in Brock and Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 470.

¹⁸ *The Heart Has Its Reasons: The Story of Jean Vanier*, directed by Martin Doblmeier (Vision Video, 2007), 34:48 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5V4BtAv5Ks>. Accessed February 28, 2014.

friendship, love, and community. They are poor because they are not rich in the things society values such as independence, wealth, and physical and intellectual ability. Jesus came to “bring good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18) and so Vanier says that those in L’Arche “are called to live in a special way the mystery of poverty and weakness of Jesus who came to be with the poor and weak.”¹⁹ Vanier’s Beatitudinal Christology is evident not only because Jesus’ ministry to the poor saturates Vanier’s books and letters, but also because it is how he begins his book, *The Heart of L’Arche*, the first two chapters of which are titled, “The mystery of Jesus,” and “A spirituality centered on the mystery of the poor.”²⁰ Vanier recognizes that the language of “poor” and “weak” used in the gospels can be difficult for people today because those labels “go against certain cultural norms that want everyone to be strong.”²¹ But he is not a blind optimist; he does not try to brush over the fact that people with mental handicaps can be very hurt, broken, sorrowful, and weak. But, through loving and stable relationships within a community of care and support (as opposed to often hostile and fear-filled mental institutions) their pain can indeed be transformed into joy and their wounds healed.

The way Vanier knew this could be accomplished was to make L’Arche as much like a home as it could be. Spink notes that the first L’Arche homes were “born of a desire to create homes—not institutions but *foyers*, with all the associations of family life gathered about a shared hearth that the French word conveys—where people with disabilities and assistants could experience together the joy and the difficulties of a community life inspired by the Beatitudes.”²²

¹⁹ Vanier, *The Heart of L’Arche*, 15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

²² Spink, 2.

One of the most important functions a home provides is an environment for celebration, and especially celebration around a meal. At L'Arche, celebrations of birthdays and other occasions break up the routine of everyday life and provide opportunities for joy. Vanier finds Jesus' Parable of the Great Banquet as particularly poignant and inspiring for L'Arche. "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you" (Luke 14:13-14). Jesus is right that the poor cannot repay the rich by throwing them a similar banquet, but that does not mean that the poor have nothing to offer. On the contrary, Vanier found that the mentally handicapped are not the only L'Arche residents who are poor and in need of healing. Rather, the poor and weak not only offer cause for joy and celebration through the sharing of a meal, but they also enable the rich and the strong to see their own weakness and poverty:

The poor person is one who is in need, who recognizes this need and cries out for help. Weakness is frequently considered a defect. But are we not all weak and needy in some way? We all have our vulnerable points, our limits and our handicaps. When we recognize our weaknesses, we can ask for help; we can work together. The weak need the strong but, as we are discovering in L'Arche, the strong also need the weak.²³

The mutual healing Vanier discovered at L'Arche is the most important reason why Vanier continued to trust his intuition and grow L'Arche in Trosly and eventually across the globe. Without the healing and growth of both the core members and the assistants, L'Arche would have been just another model of one-sided charity for the mentally handicapped. Instead, L'Arche communities allow both the weak and those who consider themselves strong to become vulnerable to the point of asking for the help they need.

²³ Vanier, *The Heart of L'Arche*, 12.

This kind of mutual healing does not happen, however, simply because the presence of the weak inherently encourages an atmosphere of introspection and openness for the strong. Instead, it comes from the commitment of the members of L'Arche, both the assistants and core members, to live together through the good and the bad times, as they give and receive life together. As seen in this excerpt from an unpublished talk, Vanier found that at L'Arche the weak can and do *teach* the strong how to love and how to live by their giving and receiving of life:

As we respond to this fundamental cry for friendship, [the mentally handicapped] begin to transform and to heal us. We can either hide our vulnerability behind a strong, protective ego, or else we can discover that our vulnerability is a source of communion and unity. ... In this way they have awoken in me what is deepest and most precious: a desire to give life to others and to receive life from them through a communion of hearts.²⁴

This role reversal through which the weak heal the strong was once likened to the “Copernican revolution” by a bishop who said, “You in L'Arche are responsible for a Copernican revolution: until now we used to say that we should do good to the poor but you are saying that the poor are doing good to you!”²⁵ This is the mystery of the Beatitudes that Vanier discovered at L'Arche. The poor are blessed because they can give true life and communion to the rich. This is why L'Arche was such a paradigm shift for the care of the mentally handicapped, and this is why Vanier found his vocation there and wrote about it. And yet, the source of this kind of Beatitudinal communion lies deeper than simply living together; it comes from the abiding presence of Jesus in the residents at L'Arche. This communion will be discussed in relation to the sacrament of the eucharist in the chapter on ecclesiology, but for now, let us consider Vanier's understanding of the importance of Jesus' abiding presence as found in the Gospel of John.

²⁴ Vanier, “Unpublished talk,” in *Essential Writings*, 42.

²⁵ Cited in Spink, 10.

After leaving the Navy and joining Père Thomas at L'Eau Vive, Père Thomas encouraged Vanier to "let [himself] be drawn into the mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John" and this journey has had a major impact on Vanier. After decades of his own encounter with the mystery of Jesus in John, Vanier wrote a kind of commentary on the gospel using "meditative prose...that I hope will lead people to be drawn slowly and prayerfully into the mystery of Jesus."²⁶ The key to Vanier's interpretation of the Fourth Gospel is the author's use of μένω to describe Jesus remaining or abiding with his disciples and ultimately all who believe in him. In a 1996 circular letter from L'Arche Trosly, Vanier reflects on how L'Arche embodies Jesus' proclamation of good news to the poor through presence saying, "What is this good news that responds to the cry of the poor? It is a simple message which is communicated not so much through words as through *presence and commitment*: 'You are loved. You have value. You are precious. Your life has meaning. You can do something beautiful with you life.'"²⁷ Vanier's understanding of presence and commitment was realized in everyday life at L'Arche but Vanier had been grounded in the language of the Beloved Disciple well before L'Arche began. What's more, Vanier understands Jesus' abiding presence to be determinative of the author's identity (and consequently ours as well). "[The Beloved Disciple] never calls himself by name, and that is significant; he speaks of himself only in relationship to Jesus, as if his real value and identity flow from this relationship."²⁸ Human identity in relationship to Jesus is the topic of the next chapter, but for now, it is important to note that the mystery of Jesus' abiding presence as enabling encounter and providing identity was instrumental in giving Vanier language to describe

²⁶ Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus*, 8.

²⁷ Vanier, *Our Life Together*, 425 (italics added).

²⁸ Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus*, 11.

what he was experiencing at L'Arche. "If John uses [μένω] to signify 'staying in a particular place,' he uses it even more to signify a friendship where we 'dwell' in another person. A 'mutual in-dwelling' is a permanent, deep friendship. It is an intimate, dynamic relationship between two people dwelling in one another."²⁹ Jesus' abiding with us as found in the Gospel of John is the essence of Vanier's understanding of mutual in-dwelling on which we base our identity and through which we are able to encounter one another. Before we consider human identity and encounter for Vanier, let us first turn to Hauerwas and the methodology of his theological project.

Stanley Hauerwas

Jean Vanier writes about the mentally handicapped because he experienced the transformative love of Jesus in everyday life with the mentally handicapped and because of his hope that by sharing his experiences and insights, others may be inspired to seek out community and healing. While Stanley Hauerwas cares deeply about the welfare of mentally handicapped people in general and values the friendships he has made with certain mentally handicapped people in particular, Hauerwas writes about the mentally handicapped because they help to illuminate what he sees as destructive implications of the ethical system of the modern liberal and capitalistic society. Using the mentally handicapped as an illustrative tool, Hauerwas is able to call out these shortcomings in a wide range of areas including medical ethics, birth and abortion, the priority of personal freedom, the pace of society, and others. He does this by critiquing much of what our culture assumes is normative, things that he as a Christian finds to be antithetical to the gospel. Future sections will consider Hauerwas's particular views on

²⁹ Vanier, *Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus*, 39.

anthropology and ecclesiology concerning the mentally handicapped, but first let us take a look at his motivations and methodology for his work on Christian ethics and the mentally handicapped.

As a Christian theological ethicist, each of the many specific issues with which Hauerwas engages, including the mentally handicapped, is founded on his understanding of the life of Jesus and how that life should shape individuals who call themselves Christians. Identifying as a Christian, for Hauerwas, requires much more than adhering to a set of intellectual beliefs. Rather, it is a distinct and fundamentally different way of being in the world, a way that is founded in the story of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This fundamentally different way-of-being is what Hauerwas means when he uses the term “Christian ethics.” In his introduction to *Vision and Virtue*, Hauerwas defines Christian ethics as “the conceptual discipline that analyzes and imaginatively tests the images most appropriate to score the Christian life in accordance with the central conviction that the world has been redeemed by the work and person of Christ.”³⁰ This is why Hauerwas writes Christian ethics—to figure out what it means to live the Christian life.³¹

In his introduction to *The Hauerwas Reader*, John Berkman notes that Hauerwas’s strength comes not from attempting to “utter a ‘final’ word on a particular subject,” but “lies, rather, in the vision he has of what it means to live theologically, of teasing out the multifaceted implications of living in a way that God’s existence and character make all the difference for

³⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 2.

³¹ This paragraph was adapted from an essay I wrote titled, *Stanley Hauerwas and the Mentally Handicapped*, Sewanee Advanced Degrees Program, 2013.

how followers of Jesus Christ are to be and to live.”³² Berkman also notes that Hauerwas is often misunderstood by many of his readers because he

is not interested in answering the questions that are typically posed, but rather seeks to ‘reframe’ those very questions, as that is, according to Hauerwas, part of what is required by a response faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. One of Hauerwas’s great strengths lies in exposing (what are often tacit) assumptions at work in contemporary secular and theological ethics which he takes to be incompatible with Christian faith.³³

John Swinton calls this method a “theology of indirection”³⁴ by which Hauerwas bypasses the surface-level questions and false-dilemmas on which many ethicists and theologians get stuck and tries to get at the heart of what he sees as a fundamental difference between the way Christians (should) see the world and the way the world sees the world. “In the case of disability, he [presents classic theology indirectly] by using the experience of people with profound intellectual disabilities to re-describe both God and human beings in opposition to false representations presented within modernity.”³⁵ Perhaps the king of theological one-liners, Hauerwas has described his task as a theologian and Christian as “not to make the world more just but to make the world the world.”³⁶ What makes Hauerwas so controversial is that his opinions often oppose the dominant voices of our culture, including prominent Christian figures. Because he writes on such a wide range of subjects, he also has the unique ability to generate a very eclectic mix of both supporters and opponents.

³² John Berkman, “An Introduction to *The Hauerwas Reader*,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 5.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Swinton, “Stanley Hauerwas on Disability,” in Brock and Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 514.

³⁵ Ibid., 515.

³⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 154.

The foundation of Hauerwas's opposition to those dominant voices is, writes Berkman, his "philosophical conviction that a coherent moral life is necessarily narrative- and tradition-dependent."³⁷ According to Hauerwas, the Christian story stands in opposition to the "project of modernity," a project which he claims is "to produce people who believe they should have no story except the story they choose when they have no story."³⁸ The non-story of modernity and liberalism is a problem for Hauerwas because it fails to provide a narrative-based ethical framework like the Christian story does for Christians. "The language of the gospel," Hauerwas writes, "includes, but points beyond, judgments about particular actions and practices to the nature of the self and how it is formed for our life project."³⁹ The first section of the next chapter will deal specifically with Hauerwas's understanding of the nature of the self especially in relation to people with mental handicaps, but here it is important to note Hauerwas's use of the Christian narrative as normative for his ethics. The Christian ethic, unlike the wide range of liberal stories, is normative for all Christians and requires actions based not on universal humanistic sentiments, but on specifically Christian claims about the nature of reality and our role within it. Instead of writing their own story, Christians are a part of the cosmic story. This story begins with God creating the world, continues through God's covenant with Israel, and climaxes in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because Christians locate their lives within this story, Hauerwas believes their ethical system, or how they live, should reflect the values that this narrative and tradition uphold.

³⁷ Berkman, "Introduction," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 7.

³⁸ Stanley Hauerwas, "Preaching as Though We had Enemies," *First Things* May (1995): 4.

³⁹ Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue*, 1.

Of course, the idea of “Christian ethics” is itself a modern invention, as Hauerwas points out in his 1997 essay, “How ‘Christian Ethics’ Came to Be.”⁴⁰ In this essay, Hauerwas recounts the progression of “ethics” from an all-encompassing way of life to a department in a theological, philosophical, or medical school. “For the ancients, pagan and Christian, to be schooled in philosophy or theology meant to submit one’s life to a master in order to gain the virtues necessary to be a philosopher or a Christian. Ethics, in such a context, was not some ‘aspect’ or life, but rather inclusive of all that constituted a person’s life.”⁴¹ This changed when spiritual direction became a standard part of monastic communities and the need developed to have a system of thought around the necessary penance involved in reconciliation. Documents like the *Penitentia* and the *Summae Confessorum* further separated ethics from theology and doctrine and required that certain people specialize in this new discipline. Over the centuries, these systems became more and more intricate (and at times convoluted) which led to the Reformation and a greater separation between theology and ethics because grace became separated from works. Eventually, “as it became less and less clear among Protestants what it ‘means’ to be Christian there have increasingly been attempts to ‘do’ ethics,” says Hauerwas.⁴² This is thanks in large part to the Enlightenment which brought the problem of relativism to bear on the moral life, forcing ethics to become “that quest to secure a rational basis for morality so we can be confident that our moral convictions are not arbitrary,”⁴³ because they had been based on things like religion that are relative, not universal truths. Kant, Schleiermacher, and Barth

⁴⁰ Hauerwas, “How ‘Christian Ethics’ Came to Be,” (1997) in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 37-50.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 37-8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 44.

have all had their say on the proper place for ethics in the Christian tradition and, after noting their contributions, Hauerwas concludes this essay, and his overall point about ethics as incorrectly distinct from theology, by citing Barth's *Dogmatics* "which sought to do nothing less than displace human self-consciousness as the legitimating notion for the creation of ethics independent of God's revelation in Christ." Barth thus "returned theology to the presumption that there can be no 'ethics' separate from theology, particularly when theology is understood as an activity of the church."⁴⁴ This is the crux of Hauerwas's argument that the Christian ethic is and should be distinct from the prevailing cultural ethic which is based on the non-story of modernity and the prioritization of autonomy and independence.

Two decades earlier, Hauerwas made the same point in the essay, "Aslan and the New Morality," found in *Vision and Virtue*.⁴⁵ In this essay, Hauerwas references part of C.S. Lewis's *The Silver Chair* in which Prince Rilian of Narnia is cast under the spell of the witch Queen of the Underworld which makes him forget his true identity as a Narnian. During his dramatic rescue, one of the characters, Puddleglum, stands up to the Queen and makes it clear that even if all of Narnia—trees and grass and sun and moon and stars and Aslan himself—were made up, he would rather be on Aslan's side than hers. The essay goes on to critique Christians (and mainly Christian ethicists) who "confuse illusion with reality, for only when we understand the nature of our self-deception can we begin to appreciate that we belong to the land of the sun."⁴⁶ Hauerwas

⁴⁴ Hauerwas, "How 'Christian Ethics' Came to Be," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 49.

⁴⁵ Hauerwas, "Aslan and the New Morality," in *Vision and Virtue*, 109.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 96. "The land of the sun," (i.e. the reality of Narnia where the sun is real and where Aslan reigns) represents living by the Christian story, not a story made up by the Queen who contends that the sun is just their mental projection of a glorified lamp.

argues that Christians have been taken hold by the “new morality” which is not based on God’s redemptive narrative culminating in Jesus Christ but on popular culture:

As the new moral theology has become more concerned with the ‘whole person’ and his ‘entire life,’ in great danger of becoming foreign to Christian theology, it has sacrificed any mechanism to test concretely the relation of our explicit theological claims with the ways of life assumed to be warranted by them. Thus these claims may become but an ideological justification for practices that are based on different presuppositions about the nature of the world.⁴⁷

Hauerwas’s fear is that Christians will not realize when the choices they make in life do not reflect the values of the God’s story but instead reflect what the world has convinced them is the true reality of the all-important quest for power and self-fulfillment.

Hauerwas’s Barthian (and “Lewis-ian”) understanding of ethics as living out the revelation of God in Jesus Christ has profound significance when one remembers, as Hauerwas does, that the story of God’s interaction with the world is fundamentally about *weakness*. Later in *Vision and Virtue*, in an essay titled “The Christian, Society, and the Weak: A Meditation on the Care of the Retarded,” Hauerwas writes, “In his weakness, God comes to us not to dominate in the name of the good, but to serve in the reality of goodness, to reveal the nature of the good.”⁴⁸ Weakness is a sign of the nature of God because it is made visible in the life and work of Jesus whose servanthood provides *the* model and standard of living for Christians who wish to follow him. Therefore, weakness is not something that should be avoided at all costs nor should we strive to gain power over the weak. Instead the weak are to be lifted up, cared for, and loved in the name of Jesus. “I do not gain significance,” he says, “by trying to relieve all suffering; that would be another form of trying to establish my power. Rather, my hard task is to learn to love

⁴⁷ Hauerwas, “Aslan and the New Morality,” in *Vision and Virtue*, 99.

⁴⁸ Hauerwas, “The Christian, Society, and the Weak: A Meditation on the Care of the Retarded,” in *Vision and Virtue*, 190.

this one retarded brother who can never understand the very opportunity of love he offers.”⁴⁹ By practicing a Christian ethic based on the servanthood of Christ, Christians have a story that upholds weakness instead of manipulating it toward one’s own ends. Because of this, Hauerwas argues that Christians are in a unique place to care for and live with the mentally handicapped, saying, “Christ makes it possible for me to love my retarded brother in a way that is radically different from the possessive love that thrives on the need to be needed.”⁵⁰ This will become important for Hauerwas’s support of L’Arche’s Christian grounding as we will see in the chapter on ecclesiology.

Though Hauerwas uses the language of weakness and suffering in his theology of disability, one thing that Hauerwas does *not* do with his work on the mentally handicapped is attempt to answer the question of *theodicy*. Though he lifts up the mentally handicapped as valuable members of society to be loved and welcomed by Christians, Hauerwas does not deny the fact that people who are mentally handicapped do suffer and that their suffering is not a “good” thing. But Hauerwas believes questions of theodicy—the attempt to understand the reality of suffering alongside the claim that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and good—are misguided. While we can learn much about life and ourselves from interacting with the mentally handicapped, Hauerwas is clear that

these possible good fruits do not warrant the implication that God wills these [mentally handicapped] children for such purposes; this would make the Lord of this world into a weak and petty monarch who would stop at nothing to get his way. Such children are not directly willed by God; rather he is the kind of God who makes it possible for them to be present among us in a nondestructive way. In their presence we learn how difficult, how

⁴⁹ Hauerwas, “The Christian, Society, and the Weak,” in *Vision and Virtue*, 190.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.

terrible, and how wonderful it is to say that God is love and that his love is most perfectly revealed on a cross.⁵¹

Instead of focusing on how God could allow such suffering, Hauerwas directs the question of theodicy back to the questioners. “Why do we question God when faced with suffering?” he asks. We ask not because we care intellectually, but because we have to when we are faced with a child who is suffering. There seems to be “no point” to their suffering, we often say, and because there is “no point” we question God’s goodness. But, Hauerwas says, “by ‘no point’ I think what we really mean is that we cannot situate this life with its suffering in any ongoing story carried by a community that can make this suffering person’s life its own.”⁵² Christians should be able to handle suffering; it is the crux of the gospel. Thus, Hauerwas believes Christians are in a unique place to offer a message that neither blindly brushes over suffering nor accepts it as given. Rather, because of the Christian story, they can offer their own lives as the support necessary to give a suffering person the dignity and care they deserve as a child of God and vital part of that story. God does not create suffering—God redeems it. Christians can be a living testament to the power of God to transform broken lives, and Hauerwas believes it is the task of the church to invest in this journey of redemption and reconciliation with the mentally handicapped and thereby proclaim the goodness of God and God’s story over against modernity’s story which does not accept suffering or weakness.⁵³

⁵¹ Hauerwas, “The Christian, Society, and the Weak,” in *Vision and Virtue*, 192. Here the use of “children” is not counterproductive, as noted in the Introduction, because Hauerwas is indeed talking about the welcome of babies with disabilities.

⁵² Stanley Hauerwas, *God, Medicine, and Suffering* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 2.

⁵³ This paragraph was adapted from an essay I wrote titled, *Stanley Hauerwas and the Mentally Handicapped*, Sewanee Advanced Degrees Program, 2013.

While the theological and philosophical arguments Hauerwas uses to support his understanding of the mentally handicapped and Christian ethics are very important, in “Timeful Friends: Living with the Handicapped,” Hauerwas is quick to note that, “To be able to write for and with the mentally handicapped requires that you know people who are mentally handicapped. By ‘know’ I mean you must be *with* the handicapped in a way they may be able to claim you as a friend.”⁵⁴ This is a profound statement for two reasons. First, it gets to the heart of Hauerwas’s point that to care for the mentally handicapped means being a friend, not providing the most recent medical techniques, or worse, providing “charity” out of a sense of pity. “For,” as Hauerwas says, “care is not simply ‘doing’ things for these children, even when such ‘doing’ involves our best technologies, but it means knowing how to be with and regard these children with the respect they demand.”⁵⁵ Second, it shifts the focus of the friendship away from the “normal” person and onto the person with special needs. This gives the mentally handicapped the power, not the would-be friend, because it is they who determine what friendship looks like and thus who can live up to that standard or not. In other words, if the way you are interacting with a mentally handicapped person would not be received as friendship by that person, then you do not have the authority to write about the mentally handicapped because you have not entered into a deep enough relationship with them. Of course, it can be difficult with certain individuals, such as those with very limited cognitive or communicative abilities, to determine whether they view you as a friend or not, but many people with special needs can and will let you know if they do not like you. If this is the case, more work is needed to write about them authentically.

⁵⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, “Timeful Friends: Living with the Handicapped,” in *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 144.

⁵⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, “Having and Learning to Care for Retarded Children,” in *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 148.

One such experience of knowing someone with a mental handicap came very early in Hauerwas's career when he was still in South Bend, Indiana at Notre Dame. At the time, Hauerwas was worshipping at a United Methodist church called Broadway Christian Parish. One of the members of the parish was a man named Gary who was mentally handicapped. Though high-functioning enough to sometimes read in church, Gary had limited mobility which made his trips up to the altar for communion very long. Hauerwas recalls Gary's importance to the congregation as they learned to welcome him and celebrate his presence in their midst.

The ten-foot trip took two or three minutes, and the whole church waited with bated breath for Gary and [his mother] to make it. Once they did, we all would follow. But we were led by Gary and [his mother]. If they weren't present, you could feel the congregation worry whether we ought to have Eucharist that day. It wasn't clear to us that we were all gathered.⁵⁶

Gary's presence in this church had a profound influence on Hauerwas's vision for the church and the mentally handicapped, which we will discuss below. More importantly, through his friendship with Gary as a member of the Body of Christ, Hauerwas came to realize the connection between Christ's weakness and the mentally handicapped and began to write about theology and the mentally handicapped. In other essays, Hauerwas also mentions other individuals with mental handicaps, for example Anna and Boyce to whom he refers in *Dispatches from the Front*,⁵⁷ and with whom he has a relationship which seems to support his theological musings on the mentally handicapped.

⁵⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, "Finding God in Strange Places: Why L'Arche Needs the Church," in Stanley Hauerwas and Jean Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness*, Resources for Reconciliation (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2008), 44.

⁵⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1994), 181.

One criticism that is levied against Hauerwas, however, is that in his writings about “the mentally handicapped” or the “mentally retarded” he almost always uses those categories, rather than speaking about individuals with intellectual disabilities. Individuals like Gary, Anna, and Boyce do show up but as John Swinton notes in *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, Hauerwas’s memory of people with disability is distant and “his interest falls not on *particular* disabled individuals or even on specific families; rather, his attention is focused on the *category* of profound intellectual disability and how the experiences associated with it have become problematic with modernity.”⁵⁸ In “Timeful Friends: Living with the Mentally Handicapped,” Hauerwas wonders why he took an interest in the mentally handicapped at all, fearing that he was using them as a part of his intellectual agenda. “Once I had been drawn into the world of the mentally handicapped, however, it did not take me long to realize they were the crack I desperately needed to give concreteness to my critique of modernity. No group exposes the pretensions of the humanism that shapes the practices of modernity more thoroughly than the mentally handicapped.”⁵⁹ Reflecting on this essay, Hauerwas is, however, honest about his use of the mentally handicapped as part of theological project:

In brief, I ‘use’ the mentally handicapped to try to help us understand what it means for us to be creatures of a gracious God. For I think it a profound mistake to assume that a strong distinction can be drawn between those who are mentally handicapped and those who are not mentally handicapped once it is acknowledged that we are equally creatures of God, who, as Augustine observed, created us without us, but who refuses to save us without us. The mentally handicapped remind us that the ‘us’ that is saved is the body constituted through Christian baptism that is anything but an individual. If we take seriously the practices of the church such as baptism, we are all, mentally handicapped

⁵⁸ Swinton, “Stanley Hauerwas on Disability,” in Brock and Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 521.

⁵⁹ Hauerwas, “Timeful Friends,” in *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 145.

and the non-mentally handicapped, creatures drawn into a kingdom of patience making possible our friendship with God and one another.⁶⁰

The next two chapters will look at the illusion of difference between “us” and “them” as well as how the practices of the church, e.g. baptism and eucharist, do in fact make these relationships possible. Here, however, we can see how Hauerwas’s later writings (the quote is from 2005) have been influenced by Jean Vanier and L’Arche.

Swinton hypothesizes that Hauerwas’s awareness of his potentially inappropriate or even damaging use of the mentally handicapped came when Hauerwas “began to engage with the work of Jean Vanier and reflect on the lived experience of the L’Arche communities. This may have grounded Hauerwas’s thinking in important ways and enabled him to recognize the significance of the people behind the category.”⁶¹ The exact date Hauerwas became aware of Vanier and L’Arche is unclear but in *Hannah’s Child*, Hauerwas mentions a former student David Jenkins who was an assistant at the Vine, a L’Arche community in London, and says “I think it was David’s involvement with L’Arche that first caused me to realize that this was a movement I needed to learn more about.”⁶² At this point in his memoir, Hauerwas has just begun dating his soon-to-be wife, Paula, and a year later, they were engaged on October 27, 1988. It seems safe to guess, then, that Hauerwas first became aware of the need to investigate Vanier in the second half of 1987. Furthermore, the first time Hauerwas cites Vanier or L’Arche in a published essay (that I could find) is in his 1998 “Timeful Friends: Living with the Mentally Handicapped.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Hauerwas, “Reflection on Dependency: A Response to Responses to My Essays on Disability,” in Swinton, ed., *Critical Reflections On Stanley Hauerwas’ Theology of Disability*, 193.

⁶¹ Swinton, “Stanley Hauerwas on Disability,” in Brock and Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 523.

⁶² Hauerwas, *Hannah’s Child*, 212.

⁶³ Hauerwas, “Timeful Friends,” in *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 143-56.

Regardless of Vanier's influence on Hauerwas, what is important to note here is Hauerwas's use of the mentally handicapped (individuals and/or the category) to expose liberal presumptions, which is the goal of his entire theological agenda. Swinton summarizes this saying, "Hauerwas does not see people with profound intellectual disabilities in terms of ethical dilemmas. The question is not 'What can we do about the problem of the disabled?' Rather, the important question is why we see disability as a problem or an ethical dilemma in the first place."⁶⁴ Reframing the question like this is the basis of Hauerwas's methodology for all of his ethics and especially for his work on the mentally handicapped.

As noted in the introduction, that both Stanley Hauerwas and Jean Vanier dabble in the other's specialty is indicative of the main difference between their approaches to what they have written about theology and disability. That difference is that Hauerwas is arguing *for* his vision of what it means to live an authentically Christian life and Vanier is writing *from* his experience of an authentic life lived with mentally handicapped people. Hauerwas's vision is based on philosophical and theological premises and theories learned in the classroom and Vanier's reflections are based on the healing and growth he has received at L'Arche. Hauerwas wishes to convince others with sound arguments and a "theology of indirection" and Vanier wishes to inspire others with his retrospective "theological realism."⁶⁵ To note that Hauerwas and Vanier are essentially looking in opposite directions as they write is not a value judgement. Vanier was not writing for academic readers who required careful research and well-crafted arguments just as Hauerwas was not intending to write insightful stories of healing and transformation for a

⁶⁴ Swinton, "Stanley Hauerwas on Disability," in Brock and Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 514.

⁶⁵ The quoted terms were coined by Swinton and Reinders respectively in *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 514 and 467. I am very much indebted to Swinton and Reinders on this point.

general audience. Vanier spent a semester teaching at university and then dedicated his life to living with people with mental disabilities. Hauerwas has spent important but limited time with the mentally handicapped but has dedicated his life to articulating the implications of his vision of a truly Christian ethic. Both men have lived authentically in the paths they have chosen and both men owe much of their influence to what they have learned from people with mental disabilities.

Despite these differences, one way in which Vanier and Hauerwas are similar regarding their methodology is their understanding of how society is based on individualism and power. Vanier reflects on the state of competition and exclusion in society in *The Challenge of L'Arche* saying,

It seems that every group, in order to feel it exists, must relate to another group that it considers inferior. The same is true of each person. Very quickly each one wants to prove that he or she is right and the other wrong. A whole system of competition and success, so deeply ingrained in Western civilization, is based on the need to prove that 'I am better than you.'⁶⁶

Hauerwas holds a similar view of society which, as described above, comes down to the fact that, "as modern people we think we are meant to be autonomous beings."⁶⁷ Both Vanier and Hauerwas also agree that the true nature of reality is found in God's narrative of redemption through Jesus Christ. In this way, both exhibit the same "theological realism"⁶⁸ about this narrative and share their experience and theology of dependence and community over independence and isolation. The next chapter will discuss how Vanier and Hauerwas understand the nature of humanity within this narrative.

⁶⁶ Jean Vanier, *The Challenge of L'Arche* (Ottawa, Ont.: Novalis, 1981), 256.

⁶⁷ Hauerwas, *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 145.

⁶⁸ Swinton, "Stanley Hauerwas on Disability," in Brock and Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 519.

Perhaps one difference that is more subjective but still intriguing is the type of reception their methodology has received as their works have become more widely known and read. As part of his introduction for *The Hauerwas Reader*, John Berkman notes that “[Stanley Hauerwas] is one of those rare influential theologians who has spawned a new (both positive and pejorative) adjective: ‘Hauerwasian.’”⁶⁹ Hauerwas’s understanding of the practical implications of the Christian life are so radical they are often met with skepticism or outright denial from both the church and the world. And yet, he has acquired a loyal following of students and colleagues alike.⁷⁰ Of course, Vanier is not without his critics, but he does not seem to attract the same kind of “love him or hate him” response from his readers. This may be due to the difference in their approach to their writing. Because Hauerwas is arguing a point, not reflecting on lived experience like Vanier, his works lend themselves to acceptance or rejection more so than a more neutral, though compelling, account of the power of the weak to heal. That is not to say that Vanier does not care deeply about what he writes or that he does not want his readers to feel the same. He, however, does not try to argue his way to this end in the way that Hauerwas has made a career of doing. Still, just as Hauerwas wants his students to think like him, and not for themselves,⁷¹ Vanier also wants his readers to see the world the way he sees it, the way that leads to healing and transformation through living with the marginalized. This may be the reason why Vanier includes so many more *stories* about people with intellectual disabilities than Hauerwas.

⁶⁹ Berkman, “Introduction,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 3.

⁷⁰ Being a disciple of Hauerwas does not always work out well, however, as I know of one youth minister in Nashville, TN who was fired because his ecclesiology was so high, thanks to his self-proclaimed Hauerwasianism, that he made youth feel bad for missing church because of sports or social commitments.

⁷¹ In “Stan the Man” from *The Hauerwas Reader*, 26, Cavanaugh explains this point. “His opening-day lecture to his Divinity School classes usually involves some form of the claim, ‘I don’t want you to think for yourselves. I want to make you think like me.’ This is Stanley’s attempt to disabuse his students of the Enlightenment illusion of individual sovereignty. In MacIntyrean fashion, Stanley believes that theology is a craft learned by putting oneself under the authority of a master of the tradition.”

“It is hard to be interesting,” says Vanier, “if we speak in general terms about those with disabilities; people are not always terribly interested. It is the story of a specific person that touches the listener.”⁷² Whatever their methodology, Vanier and Hauerwas have both changed the lives of many who have listened to their challenging views on society and people with intellectual disabilities. Let us now focus on their understanding of what it means to be a human, regardless of intellectual ability.

⁷² Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 90.

Chapter 2: Anthropology

The previous chapter was an attempt to show what motivated Jean Vanier and Stanley Hauerwas to write about people with intellectual disabilities. Informed by their faith and deeply moved by people with such disabilities, Vanier and Hauerwas wrote about the disabled in large part to share their understanding of what it means to be human. This next chapter will thus summarize and compare Hauerwas's and Vanier's takes on what it means to be human, or, their anthropology. The foundations of both Vanier's and Hauerwas's anthropologies have less to do with the formal study of humans than it does with one human in particular, who lived and died (and rose again) 2,000 years ago: Jesus. As noted above, Jesus led them both to engage with people with intellectual disabilities, and it is Jesus who grounds their view of what it means to be human. Basing their understanding of humanity on the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity is a very theological place to start but both Hauerwas and Vanier go on to offer much more about what it means to be human in today's society. Hauerwas goes about this by questioning how humans are understood within the story of liberal individualism—a story which seeks to determine the criteria for personhood apart from Jesus. Vanier also recognizes the power of the liberal story to shape human identity, but he focusses more on the experience of *becoming human* through recognizing the brokenness of every human, disabled or not. Being human means becoming human through the power of healing and growth that a community of broken people living together intentionally can provide. Their understandings of what it is to be human shape Hauerwas's and Vanier's hopes for humanity and specifically the church, which is the topic of the third chapter. But first, let us begin with Stanley Hauerwas and penguins.

Stanley Hauerwas

In an interview for the Centre for Public Christianity in Australia, Hauerwas says,

To be a human being is to, first and foremost, recognize that God become one of us in Jesus Christ. I'm making that move as a way to avoid beginning with a general anthropology of human uniqueness. What makes us unique is that God did not become a penguin; God became a particular human being in Palestine, 2,000 years ago. Therefore, to be human means that we recognize that our lives are constituted, first and foremost by God's refusal to let us destroy ourselves and how we do that is through recognition of vulnerability.¹

For Hauerwas, what makes humans exceptional from other animals is not our advanced cognitive ability or physical prowess; it is because God chose to become one of us (and not a penguin).

Relying on cognition or physical ability to define humanness leads to lines and boundaries that can be dangerous for people who may not live up to such standards. He goes on to say in the same interview that using characteristics like rationality to define personhood "means that certain people such as the mentally disabled bear the burden of proof about whether they're human beings or not, and I think that's a disastrous development."² Hauerwas's approach to anthropology is centered on his understanding of humanity in the truth of the Christian narrative.

To begin anywhere else does not sufficiently acknowledge the ultimate significance of God's Incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth. Beginning with Jesus becomes very important, as noted above, because Jesus' life is marked by weakness and vulnerability. That is how Hauerwas makes the connection between the intellectually disabled and their unique ability to show us God. This is, again, why Hauerwas uses the mentally handicapped in his writings. "My reflections on the challenge the mentally handicapped present to some of our most cherished conceits about

¹ Stanley Hauerwas, "Being Human" Interview, Centre for Public Christianity, Posted June 27, 2012, <https://publicchristianity.org/library/being-human#.UulWQv0cBKk> Accessed January 27, 2014.

² Ibid.

ourselves,” Hauerwas says, “is best understood as my attempt to develop a theological anthropology.”³ Now, let us consider what exactly Hauerwas is doing by connecting Jesus, the mentally handicapped, and human suffering to create his theological anthropology.

The question of the criteria for humanness, in particular the humanity of the mentally handicapped, is important to Hauerwas because he believes it exposes the callous underside of the presumptions of the story of modernity if taken to its logical end.⁴ Hauerwas takes up this argument in his 1973 essay, “The Retarded and the Criteria for the Human,” where he discusses the then recent trend in ethics to formulate a set of criteria for being human and critiques the findings of Joseph Fletcher’s article “Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man.”⁵ This essay is Hauerwas’s foundation for his theological anthropology as it exposes what liberal individualism would have humans be as opposed to the Christian view of humanity.

“Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man” was an attempt by Fletcher to determine the criteria for humanness because he says, “synthetic concepts such as *human* and *man* and *person* require operational terms, spelling out the which and what and when. Only in that way can we get down to cases—to normative decisions.”⁶ To answer this question, Fletcher offers a list of fifteen positive propositions and five negative propositions for what defines humanness. Hauerwas summarizes these propositions saying,

To be man we must be capable of self-awareness, self-control, have a sense of time, futurity and past, be capable of relating to others, show concern for others, be open to

³ Hauerwas, “Reflection on Dependency: A Response to Responses to My Essays on Disability,” in Swinton, ed., *Critical Reflections On Stanley Hauerwas’ Theology of Disability*, 193.

⁴ The following three paragraphs have been adapted from an essay I wrote titled, *Stanley Hauerwas and the Mentally Handicapped*, Sewanee Advanced Degrees Program, 2013.

⁵ Joseph Fletcher, “Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man,” *The Hastings Center Report*, Vol. 2 Issue 5. (Nov. 1972): 1-4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Abstract.

changes, have a proper balance of rationality and feeling, and have a unique identity. Negatively, men are not any of the following: anti-artificial, essentially parents, sexual, worshippers, or a bundle of rights.⁷

Fletcher also claims that, “*homo* is indeed *sapiens*, in order to be *homo*. The *ratio*, in another turn of speech, is what makes a person of the *vita*. Mere biological life, before minimal intelligence is achieved or after it is lost irretrievably, is without personal status.”⁸ This, along with the twenty propositions above, leads Fletcher to determine that anyone who has an IQ below the 40-mark on the Stanford-Binet test is “questionably a person” and that anyone with a score of 20 or below is not a person.⁹

Against this view, Hauerwas facetiously contends that at some point or another, most people will fail to maintain at least one of these conditions and suspects that, “some of us are in perpetual peril of losing our status as humans.”¹⁰ Furthermore, Hauerwas wonders how “operational” these criteria really are, noting that it would be very hard for a doctor to observe demonstrable evidence that someone has self-control. Despite these observations, Hauerwas is less concerned with the specifics of Fletcher’s conditions and assumptions than he is with what Fletcher’s work tells us about the kind of people we are. “This ‘profile’ of man does not,” Hauerwas suspects, “provide operational criteria any doctor would recognize, but it is rather a statement of the working assumptions about the value of human life that are alive in our culture.”¹¹ These assumptions, based in the non-story of modernity, severely inhibit our ability to view the mentally handicapped as valuable members of society, and for this reason Hauerwas

⁷ Hauerwas, “The Retarded and the Criteria for the Human,” in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 159.

⁸ Fletcher “Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man,” 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰ Hauerwas, “The Retarded and the Criteria for the Human,” in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 160.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

wishes to expose them as fundamentally opposed to what it means to be human according to the Christian story.

This is Hauerwas's point in his 1975 essay, "Must a Patient Be a Person to Be a Patient? Or, My Uncle Charlie Is Not Much of a Person, But He Is Still my Uncle Charlie." In this essay, Hauerwas argues that, "we are trying to put forward 'person' as a regulative notion to direct our health care as a substitute for what only a substantive community and story can do."¹² The concept of personhood in medical ethics, Hauerwas explains, began as a check on a utilitarian approach to patients in which one patient might receive experimental or harmful "care" from a doctor in order to benefit the rest of society. Personhood began with the idea that a covenant existed between the doctor and patient, which if tampered with by such a utilitarian ethic, would destroy the trust necessary to go to the doctor in the first place. Personhood, however, came to be used in the opposite way, not to protect individuals, but to define who did not live up to the standard of personhood in order to nullify moral dilemmas found in the care of such non-persons. Examples of this include selective abortion, the mentally handicapped, and people who are in a vegetative state. Hauerwas argues, however, that the reason we care for someone is not because they are a "person" (the use of which he notes is seldom found in everyday life outside of the medical realm) but because a person is "Uncle Charlie, or my father, or a good friend."¹³ "Rather," he argues, "whether or how we decide to care for [a child born with disabilities] depends on our attitude toward the having and caring for children, our perception of our role as parents, and how medicine is seen as one form of how care is to be given to children."¹⁴ These

¹² Hauerwas, "Must a Patient Be a Person to Be a Patient? Or, My Uncle Charlie Is Not Much of a Person, But He Is Still my Uncle Charlie," in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 127-8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

attitudes originate from the stories of which we are a part and Hauerwas's fear is that the liberal individualism of the West has forgotten the moral foundations which encouraged medical care in the first place. The departure from this grounding is why the concept of personhood became so controversial and Hauerwas wonders if Christians and Jews should consider establishing an alternative medical ethic that fits with their convictions. Though this suggestion seems to be more of a rhetorical maneuver than a realistic option, his point is that the concept of personhood is dangerous for those who fail to qualify as persons because it takes away the *personal* aspect of medical care. Without Fletcher's definition of personhood, doctors, patients, and families may face some tough questions about life and death, but to forgo these questions by disqualifying a person's humanity based on arbitrary/impersonal criteria is an option Hauerwas does not want to see on the table.

The effort to determine the criteria for humanity as being a functional participant in the prevailing worldview, Hauerwas believes, undergirds "an ideology for the strong. For example such criteria clearly embody our assumption that man's rational and cognitive ability is what makes us human."¹⁵ Hauerwas vehemently disagrees with this assumption. What makes us human is not our physical ability, economic worth, or even our cognitive awareness. Rather, Hauerwas contends that "to be a man is to be able to perceive and respond to other men with recognition of care."¹⁶ Unfortunately, this definition of personhood from "The Retarded and the Criteria for the Human" is still problematic because there are many people with intellectual disabilities who are unable to perceive and respond to being cared for, and it could be argued that the same is true of infants or people in a vegetative state. Though Jean Vanier would contend that

¹⁵ Hauerwas, "The Retarded and the Criteria for the Human," in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 158.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 162

even the most disabled core members at L'Arche are indeed capable of responding to care, the problem is that most people outside of L'Arche would likely not be able to perceive such a subtle response, something Vanier has learned to do over many years. Thus, the observer would be in danger of negating the core member's personhood solely because of his inability to perceive it. Perhaps this is why Hauerwas's definition of humanity has, over three decades, become more Christo-centric, with the Incarnation more determinative of humanity's uniqueness than a set of anthropological attributes. Yet, Hauerwas's notion that being human relies on the ability to perceive and respond to others hints at his understanding of community and more importantly, to what *kind* of community we belong.

The basis for humanity, as Hauerwas sees it in "The Retarded and the Criteria for the Human," is not found in questionable observational data but should be based on what *kind* of people we are and what kind of care we give. Hauerwas is less concerned with individual intelligence (though he is, ironically, a highly intelligent university professor) than he is with social awareness and how we relate to one another. He notes that the reason we need to think at all is only because we live in relation to one another, saying, "our society's high value of rationality tends to makes us forget that our ability to think cannot be separated from our nature as social beings."¹⁷ Thus, "to emphasize our rational ability separated from its social-moral context is to intellectualize arbitrarily the power of cognition and language."¹⁸ What matters is not how smart we are but how much we care for one another. Here Hauerwas turns the question of humanity and the criteria for personhood on its head, as he is prone to do. Hauerwas believes that in the effort to determine the conditions for humanity, we have already lost the essence of

¹⁷ Hauerwas, "The Retarded and the Criteria for the Human," in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 161.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

what it means to be human. “The important moral question is not whether the retarded meet or should meet ‘criteria of the human’ we have established, but whether we do not become inhuman by being concerned with such judgments rather than providing the retarded with respect and care.”¹⁹ Hauerwas drives his point home by suggesting that, “to try to substitute ‘impersonal criteria’ for what should be the moral agony of such decisions [whether to operate on a retarded child] is already to sacrifice more of our humanity than we can stand.”²⁰ Instead of viewing humanity as the ability to adhere to social norms, Hauerwas wants us be the kind of people who see life, and those who have it regardless of their IQ, as a gift from God, made unique in Jesus.

The ability to recognize the mentally handicapped as a gift from God is essential for Hauerwas’s views on the treatment of the mentally handicapped. However, Hauerwas wants to move past the language of “treatment” and into the realm of “welcome.” Instead of thinking about what we need to *do* to care for the mentally handicapped, Hauerwas wants us to focus on what kind of people we need to *be* to welcome the mentally handicapped into our lives, “regardless of the happy or unhappy consequences they may bring.”²¹ If only we were able to view the mentally handicapped as a gift from God, and therefore a good and necessary part of our society, we would then be able to let go of the superficial distinctions of “normal” and “different.” Letting go of these labels would also discourage the attempt to try to make the mentally handicapped “normal.” This, Hauerwas believes, is our tragic flaw.

As Hauerwas rightly points out in “Having and Learning to Care for Retarded Children,” the assumption of what is “normal,” “ignores entirely that we have no clear idea of what it means

¹⁹ Hauerwas, “The Retarded and the Criteria for the Human,” in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 161.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

²¹ Hauerwas, “Having and Learning to Care for Retarded Children,” in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 147.

to be ‘normal.’ Thus in the name of ‘normalcy’ we stand the risk of making the retarded conform to convention because they lack the power to resist.”²² Of course, Fletcher tried to propose a clear idea of what it means to be “normal” but his findings do not fit within Hauerwas’s theology of personhood as a gift from God, made unique in the Incarnation. Back in “The Retarded and the Criteria for the Human,” Hauerwas connects the concept of personhood and the criteria of the human to our concept of normality. He claims that, “to raise the question of the criteria of the human is not first an empirical question, but a conceptual-moral claim about how the nature of man should be understood. We wrongly assume that what our eyes perceive as ‘normal’ is what we should morally understand men to be qua human.”²³ Because the mentally handicapped are unable to participate in the socio-economic construct of our Western liberal capitalistic society, they are given the label “retarded” and thus ostracized for being “different.” “To describe someone as retarded,” Hauerwas writes, “is not a technical decision based on neutral scientific data and analysis: the criteria that determine retardation have less to do with the ‘weakness’ of the retarded than with the complexity of the demands of our society as well as our tolerance of deviation.”²⁴ Here Hauerwas is very much in line with the aforementioned social model of disability. However, Hauerwas’s low view of our society as a whole means he sees the proper place of the mentally handicapped not in that society but in the church since the church is (at least in theory) a place where diversity is celebrated, not one where people are forced to be “normal.”

²² Hauerwas, “Having and Learning to Care for Retarded Children,” in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 155.

²³ Hauerwas, “The Retarded and the Criteria for the Human,” in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 159.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Hauerwas discusses the danger of advocating “normality” for the mentally handicapped in his 1977 essay from *Suffering Presence* titled, “Community and Diversity: The Tyranny of Normality.”²⁵ This essay has much to say about the need for diversity in community, and therefore will be used again in the next section on ecclesiology. Regarding anthropology, Hauerwas cautions us against being too enthusiastic about the “principle of normalization.” The “principle of normalization” to which Hauerwas is referring was advocated by Wolf Wolfensberger in North America in the 1970s and ‘80s.²⁶ For Wolfensberger, “normalization” was meant to enhance the lives of people with intellectual disabilities by providing them access to the same environment as everyone else. “Normalization,” was, however, also misused and misunderstood to mean that mentally handicapped people should be treated *as if they were* normal. This misinterpretation ultimately meant the eradication of the differences between mentally handicapped and “normal” people, and with it their contribution to society as unique individuals with unique gifts. Much like the misappropriation of the concept of “personhood,” Hauerwas’s point in “Community and Diversity: The Tyranny of Normality” is that,

It is of course true that the retarded deserve to do what they are able—to dress themselves, to spend their own money, to decide to spend their money foolishly or wisely, to date, to fall in love, and so on. But the demand to be normal can be tyrannical unless we understand that the normal condition of our being together is that we are all different. If we are to be a good community we must be one that has convictions substantive enough not to fear our differences and, indeed, to see that we would not be whole without the other being different than us.²⁷

²⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, “Community and Diversity: The Tyranny of Normality,” in *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections On Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 211.

²⁶ Wolf Wolfensberger, *The Principle of Normalization in Human Services* (Toronto: National Institute on Mental Retardation, 1972).

²⁷ Hauerwas, “Community and Diversity: The Tyranny of Normality,” in *Suffering Presence*, 214.

If we are able to relinquish the desire to make the mentally handicapped “normal,” and instead view them as gifts, we can then begin to welcome them into our families, communities, and church. The question of what *kind* of people we need to be to welcome the mentally handicapped is the true task of the church (see next chapter) but it is also a question we must all ask of ourselves. Hauerwas writes,

The appropriate moral context for raising the question of the ‘essentially’ human should not be an attempt to determine if some men are or are not human, but rather what we must be if we are to preserve and enhance what humanity we have. In other words the question of the criteria of the human should not be raised about others but only about ourselves.²⁸

Hauerwas’s idea of welcoming the mentally handicapped as gifts intersects with his understanding of all children as gifts and his subsequent views on abortion.²⁹ As he is famous for doing, Hauerwas exposes yet another societal assumption about the having of children when he calls into question the ideas of “wanting” and then “choosing to have” children and the effects these have on a child, mentally handicapped or not. With modern forms of contraception, it is easier than ever to control the ability to conceive children and many people opt for this control. Hauerwas believes this occurs because, “we are people who feel it is important that we have control of our lives, that we not be subject to fate, and one of the ways that we have such control is by choosing to have or not to have children.”³⁰ The desire for control of our lives leads to the desire for the “right conditions” to bring a child into the world and to be “responsible parents” as well. While the sentiment behind these desires is good—i.e. wanting the best possible lives for our children—it can have a dire effect on both children and parents. “For the strong assumption that

²⁸ Hauerwas, “The Retarded and the Criteria for the Human,” in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 157.

²⁹ The following two paragraphs have been adapted from an essay I wrote titled, *Stanley Hauerwas and the Mentally Handicapped*, Sewanee Advanced Degrees Program, 2013.

³⁰ Hauerwas, “Having and Learning to Care for Retarded Children,” in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 149.

we choose our children has made us claim unwarranted responsibility for their well-being,” Hauerwas says, and can bring self-inflicted blame about anything from bad grades to baldness.³¹ Furthermore, Hauerwas contends that the “wanting” of children sets the children up for failure because no one wants a child that is not perfect, and when that child inevitably shows she is not perfect, she has not lived up to her parents’ want. “[Children] must be physically and psychologically perfect in order for us to justify all the energy, all the sacrifices that have gone to our choice to have and raise children. After all, who wants to go to all the trouble that children represent for an inferior product.”³²

Again, this is where Hauerwas contrasts the prevailing social norms (“wanting” and “choosing to have” children) with his view of the Christian norm. “Why do Christians have children?” Hauerwas asks. Because it is their duty to go forth and multiply with the assurance that God is good. “For our having children draws on our deepest convictions that God is the Lord of this world, that in spite of all the evidence of misery in this world, it is a world and existence that we can affirm as good as long as we have the assurance that he is its creator and redeemer.”³³ Why else would anyone have children? With so much pain and suffering in the world, not to mention the sacrifices required to raise children, it seems irresponsible if not downright idiotic to have children at all. But, if children are welcomed as gifts and not seen as burdens or future consumers, they can then be honored as members of the Body of Christ, servants in the Kingdom of God, and heirs of the eternal kingdom. The ability to view children this way comes from Christians’ willingness to give up control of their lives by recognizing that

³¹ Hauerwas, “Having and Learning to Care for Retarded Children,” in *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 149.

³² *Ibid.*, 150.

³³ *Ibid.*, 151.

God is in control, that they are in God's hands, and that no one is perfect but all are children of God. This is the standard by which Hauerwas believes Christians must judge the quality of their lives and society as a whole:

The Christian cares little for existing; his aim is to learn to live. Nor must he care for others as if their care were but a means to the existence of an even-higher quality of the human species. The Christian's care for the weak embodies no grand humanistic vision, but only the idea that regardless of its accomplishments, no society that fails to care for [the] retarded will be worthy or humane.³⁴

Though this does not take into account non-Christian understandings of child-rearing, this is the necessary framework for Christians to welcome all children into the world but *especially* for welcoming mentally handicapped children. Welcoming children who are mentally handicapped into our lives does not change the fact that they are disabled. What it does do, however, is prevent or even alleviate much of their suffering, but not in the ways we might assume.

Hauerwas takes up the topic of suffering in many of his essays on medical ethics and the mentally handicapped, but especially in his 1984 essay, "Suffering the Retarded: Should We Prevent Retardation?"³⁵ In this essay, Hauerwas explores the various types of suffering, considers our reactions to personal suffering and the suffering of others, and questions the idea that the mentally handicapped suffer in the ways we think they do. The essay begins with a description of a short movie produced by the American Association of Retarded Citizens in which two parents with a newborn retarded child encourage pre-natal testing by saying, "Don't let this happen to you."³⁶ That a film suggesting pre-natal testing in order to prevent the births of children with disabilities would be produced by a group of advocates for the mentally

³⁴ Hauerwas, "The Christian, Society, and the Weak: A Meditation on the Care of the Retarded," in *Vision and Virtue*, 193.

³⁵ Hauerwas, "Suffering the Retarded: Should We Prevent Retardation?" in *Suffering Presence*, 159-81.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

handicapped struck Hauerwas as odd and counterintuitive, and led him to consider our understanding of whether and how the mentally handicapped suffer. Hauerwas is concerned with suffering because he believes our fear of suffering comes from the fear of not being in control of our own lives. While this fear (which is related to our overall fear of death) is by no means new to humanity, Hauerwas suggests that not being in control of our own lives is a certain type of suffering that is especially difficult to tolerate in our liberal individualistic culture in which identity and autonomy are intimately linked. We make decisions based on preventing or alleviating unnecessary suffering—a qualification which varies due to circumstances and perspective—and are unable to make sense of suffering which is both unnecessary (meaning we cannot make sense of it) and unchangeable (such as being mentally handicapped). This ultimately leads us into dangerous territory where the need to eliminate the perceived suffering of the mentally handicapped results in *their* elimination, and hence the unsettling film.

What lies at the heart of caring for the mentally handicapped is the suffering of both “normal” and “retarded” people. Hauerwas argues that people who are not mentally handicapped see people with such disabilities and cannot imagine how terrible life would be if they were like that, unable to live autonomously, not in control of their own lives. That we *think* the mentally handicapped suffer is true, but Hauerwas points out that we do not *know* if they suffer like we think they do. “The problem,” says John Swinton, “is that the modern imagination presumes that the criteria that underpin liberal democratic societies have provided for us an accurate description of that which is essential for authentic human living. To lose such valuable social goods (autonomy, freedom, independence, choice, etc.) would be worse than death.”³⁷ By

³⁷ Swinton, “Stanley Hauerwas on Disability,” in Brock and Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 517.

imposing our perception of suffering onto the mentally handicapped, we inadvertently (or sometimes intentionally) *create* the suffering they actually do experience, that is, rejection and exclusion from society.

This is the type of suffering that most core members at L'Arche have experienced and, as Jean Vanier has learned, from which they can find healing with patience, tenderness, and compassion (more on this below). Still, Hauerwas wants us to consider how the definition of suffering that society offers does not, in fact, expose our own failure of imagination when it comes to caring for people with intellectual disabilities. "We thus persist in our assumption that the retarded suffer from being retarded not because we are unsympathetic with them but because we are not sure how to be sympathetic with them. ... Exactly because we are unsure they have the capacity to suffer as we suffer, we seek to avoid their presence in order to avoid the limits of our own sympathy."³⁸ The problem is a lack of imagination on our part. We are unable to imagine that the life of someone who is not able to reason and control their own lives in the way we (think) we can could be enjoyable or fulfilling. More importantly, however, we lack the imagination to respond to them in a way that is neither patronizing nor destructive, fearing that because we cannot cure their suffering, there is no hope for them to be fully human. Here Hauerwas concludes by encouraging his readers again to stop trying "to do for" but instead to "be with" the mentally handicapped. "Only as we learn to be and do with the retarded, do we learn that their retardation, our projection of their suffering, need not create an unbridgeable gap between them and us. We learn that they are not incapable of fellow-feeling with us and, just as

³⁸ Hauerwas, "Suffering the Retarded: Should We Prevent Retardation?" in *Suffering Presence*, 174.

important, that we are not incapable of fellow-feeling with them.”³⁹ Here Hauerwas is very much in line with Jean Vanier’s understanding of what it means to be human, to which we now turn.

Jean Vanier

For Jean Vanier, the question of anthropology is not, “What is a human?” but “How do we become *more* human?” “Becoming human” is not just the title of his book which delves specifically into the topic of anthropology; it is what he believes is the goal of human life for each and every person. He asks, “Is not the life undertaking of us all...to become human? It can be a long and sometimes painful process. It involves a growth to freedom, an opening up of our hearts to others, no longer hiding behind masks or behind the walls of fear and prejudice. It means discovering our common humanity.”⁴⁰ Though he saves explicit language about Jesus and God for other books, Vanier’s anthropology is distinctly Incarnational in the way he connects Jesus’ identification with the poor and weak to the common human experience of poverty and weakness. Through encountering Jesus in the poor and weak at L’Arche, Vanier came to believe that all humans are essentially the same and all humans are sacred. *Becoming Human*, he says, “springs essentially from my experience of humanness and directly from my life of faith. I find that we cannot grow spiritually if we ignore our humanness, just as we cannot become fully human if we ignore spirituality; so this book is more about anthropology.”⁴¹ This is the essence of Vanier’s understanding of humanity—it is intimately related to divinity and thus, Jesus.

Becoming Human goes on to elaborate how encountering in others our common experiences of

³⁹ Hauerwas, “Suffering the Retarded: Should We Prevent Retardation?” in *Suffering Presence*, 176.

⁴⁰ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 1 (ellipsis in original).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

loneliness and belonging, exclusion and inclusion, and freedom and forgiveness, can lead us to become more mature and more human. Again, the book does not set out to answer the question, “What is a human being?” in classic terms. This may leave one wanting in the search for Vanier’s specific anthropology of people with intellectual disabilities, but that is Vanier’s point. Becoming human is a process *every* person can take part in at their own level, regardless of their ability or disability. It is with this basis that this section will present Vanier’s anthropology as Incarnational and transformational, as we are all equal, sacred, and part of a process of becoming human.

In order to understand Vanier’s vision of becoming human, we must begin with how his understanding of the nature of humanity has been influenced by his experience of living with people with intellectual disabilities at L’Arche. As described above, Vanier began L’Arche by trusting his intuition that the Holy Spirit was calling him into relationship with Raphaël and Philippe. He began living with them as a way to “do good” to them, to provide them with a loving home. He quickly found, however, that living with people with intellectual disabilities, with those who are weak, would require him to confront his own weakness. Over the years, Vanier found this to be true for the assistants who came to live at L’Arche as well. They would come with the notion of wanting to “do good” for people with disabilities. Vanier describes this as the “first call” assistants have. “The first call is frequently to follow Jesus or to prepare ourselves to do wonderful and noble things for the Kingdom.”⁴² Eventually, the momentum of this first call that carries assistants to L’Arche gives out, and when they are faced with their own weaknesses, they must respond to the second, more difficult call. “The second call comes later, when we accept that we cannot do big or heroic things for Jesus; it is a time of renunciation,

⁴² Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 139.

humiliation and humility.”⁴³ Hans Reinders describes this second call as a “call to leave behind false pretenses about the superiority of helping and giving, and to open up to the experience of receiving, primarily from those who we never expected had something to give.”⁴⁴ Responding to this call means that assistants begin to see themselves as truly equal to the core members who, though they are weak and in need of care, are no different than the assistants who are simply better and more experienced at hiding their weaknesses and needs. Hearing and accepting this second call relies on a process of *encountering* “the other,” particularly in the sacraments, which we will explore in the next chapter.

After witnessing this process time and time again, and going through it himself, Vanier came to believe that all humans are the same and that all humans are sacred. We are all the same because we all have experienced various levels of loneliness, need, weakness, and fear. We may not all be the same when it comes to being in touch with those feelings of weakness, but Vanier believes that those experiences are essential to human identity and relationships. These needs makes us group together and require us to form relationships with others, build communities, and trust in one another. Weakness and poverty are blessed, as Jesus proclaims in the Beatitudes, because they bring us together and show us that we are dependent on each other, not only to survive, but also to become fully human. Vanier says, “We do not discover who we are, we do not reach true humanness, in a solitary state; we discover it through mutual dependency, in weakness, in learning through belonging.”⁴⁵ We are all the same in Vanier’s eyes because we all

⁴³ Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 139.

⁴⁴ Reinders, “Jean Vanier’s Theological Realism,” in Brock and Swinton, eds., *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, 479.

⁴⁵ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 41.

have experienced the pain of weakness and poverty and because of that, the need for community and communion.

It is in that place of need that Jesus' proclamation of good news to the poor truly is good news. In *The Heart of L'Arche*, Vanier grounds his understanding of how weakness is indeed sacred in the person of Jesus. "By identifying himself with the poor and weak, Jesus reminds us that he identifies himself with the poor and the weak in each of us."⁴⁶ This is the mystery of Jesus—as found in the Beatitudes, banquet parable, and "abiding" in the Fourth Gospel from above—that is essential for Vanier's understanding of humanity. Just as Hauerwas begins with Jesus, so too does Vanier see how Jesus' suffering on the cross and his life of weakness, compassion, and presence provides us with the true picture of humanness. This, combined with Vanier's Catholic faith, enables him to say that, "all humans are sacred, whatever their culture, race, or religion, whatever their capacities or incapacities, and whatever their weaknesses or strengths may be."⁴⁷ Jesus' benediction to the poor and his own life of weakness were and still are revolutionary because they go against society's definition of personhood. "Jesus overturns the established order: he urges people not simply to do good to the poor but to discover God hidden in the poor, to discover that the poor have the power to heal and free people."⁴⁸

In this way, Vanier is very similar to Hauerwas in how he views contemporary society. Though Hauerwas uses certain key terms like "modern liberal capitalistic individualism" that are not catch-phrases for Vanier, they both agree that the cultural norms of individual power and competition have a detrimental affect on how we understand our identities as human beings.

⁴⁶ Vanier, *The Heart of L'Arche*, 43.

⁴⁷ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 14.

⁴⁸ Vanier, *The Heart of L'Arche*, 21.

“Our Western societies,” says Vanier, “have placed power, rights, and needs of the individual above those of the group. We have developed societies based on the principle of competition; people must work hard in order to succeed.”⁴⁹ Before beginning life at L’Arche, Vanier had been a cog in the societal machine, striving to do his best in order to be promoted in the Navy, or published in the academy, both being hierarchical systems based on achievement. Vanier, of course, recognizes that competition can encourage a healthy atmosphere in which individuals are able to push themselves to greater heights, using their skills and talents well and learning that they can produce quality work. The problem with competition as a societal norm arises when our identity becomes based on what we can produce or consume. Such a hierarchy of performance-based identity naturally leaves those who are weak at the bottom. Taken to an extreme, the question then becomes, as Vanier puts it, “If someone cannot live according to the values of knowledge and power, the values of the greater society, we ask ourselves, can that person be fully human?”⁵⁰ Vanier’s answer to this question is “Yes” because his understanding of being fully human depends on knowing one’s self and having power over one’s desires, things he has seen people do regardless of their intellectual abilities. Vanier believes the goal of society should not be to exclude those who are weak because they cannot engage in the system. Rather, it should be a place of inclusion and mutual respect:

Those who are weak have a great difficulty finding their place in our society. The image of the ideal human as powerful and capable disenfranchises the old, the sick, the less-abled. For me, society must, by definition, be inclusive of the needs and gifts of all its members; how can we lay claim to making an open and friendly society where human

⁴⁹ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 50.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

rights are respected and fostered when, by the values we teach and foster, we systematically exclude segments of our population?⁵¹

In this way, Vanier and Hauerwas are *very* similar in their understanding of the destructive power of societal norms that are not based on the sanctity of human life and on justice for the poor and weak. Hauerwas takes this and uses the mentally handicapped to expose the dangers of such a system, which taken to its logical conclusion, is antithetical to the church and its role in bringing about the Kingdom of God. While Vanier believes the mentally handicapped do indeed expose the societal structures for what they are, he does not attempt to produce general theories about why this is so. Instead, he witnesses to this truth by telling stories about individuals who have stepped out of that system and into the process of becoming human:

To witness is to tell our story. In L'Arche, we love to tell our stories and how people with disabilities have transformed us, stories that reveal their love and simplicity and that speak of their courage, pain, and closeness to God. It is hard to be interesting if we speak in general terms about those with disabilities; people are not always terribly interested. It is the story of a specific person that touches the listener.⁵²

To be sure, Hauerwas's work is very interesting and he does include some stories about people with disabilities. However, it is clear that Vanier's methodology of story-telling is influenced by his personal relationships with people with disabilities who have taught him how to become human. For Vanier, this all comes down to the heart: "We tend to reduce being human to acquiring knowledge, power and social status. We have disregarded the heart, seeing it only as a symbol of weakness, the centre of sentimentality and emotion, instead of as a powerhouse of love that can reorient us from our self-centeredness, revealing to us and to others the basic

⁵¹ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 45.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 90.

beauty of humanity, empowering us to grow.”⁵³ People with intellectual disabilities are so important for Vanier’s understanding of humanity because they are examples of “people of the heart.”⁵⁴

At L’Arche, Vanier found that people with intellectual disabilities are “people who are not very capable on the intellectual or practical level but who are very gifted in relationships. ... With them I began to discover that human maturity comes as we begin to bring our heads and our hearts together.”⁵⁵ The heart, for Vanier, “is the basis of all relationships and is what is deepest inside each one of us. ... The heart is the place of our ‘oneness’ with others.”⁵⁶ The heart can be hard or soft, closed or open, and therefore the way of the heart implies a choice. Choosing to be open means the difference between seeing people as machines who simply do things for you (such as waitresses, bus drivers, cashiers, etc.) to seeing others as people who also have hearts and therefore deserve to be treated with love and respect. Vanier says he “discovered the ‘way of the heart’ in L’Arche, as a way of putting people first, of entering into personal relationships,” but also acknowledges that, like for all us, it was hard for him to let go of his previous life of climbing the ladder.⁵⁷ Père Thomas was Vanier’s greatest example of living the “way of the heart” as it was his openness to and compassion for the men at Val Fleuri that inspired Vanier to begin L’Arche. Once Vanier began to learn about the connection between the head and heart, he saw that the “way of the heart” was lived both internally, through being in

⁵³ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 78.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

touch with the motivations and desires of the heart, and externally, by physically caring for and living with people with disabilities.

To live the “way of the heart” internally is to recognize our own poverty and loneliness, see that we are not alone in that loneliness, and seek to understand the delicate balance between belonging and freedom. Vanier believes that deep in our hearts we have all experienced loneliness. That loneliness then drives us to seek out people who can comfort and support us. Grouping together is a natural anthropological movement but it has the tendency to cut us off from others who are not in our group and subsequently encourage exclusive attitudes and habits. Vanier sees this as the “paradox of humanity.” “As humans, we crave belonging, we need the connectedness to others that brings security, but this connectedness can prevent the natural movement and evolution that we need in our lives. It can also get in the way of creativity and stifle the natural loneliness that pushes us to discover something new, that pushes us closer to God.”⁵⁸ We are pushed closer to God when we listen to our hearts crying out in loneliness for something deeper than societal norms. Vanier sees this longing as indicative of our common humanity, saying in *Encountering ‘the Other’*,

In the heart of every human being there is a quest for truth, a quest for justice, a quest for peace, a quest for love, a quest for mercy. In the heart of each one of us we have this longing for something over and above our immediate reality. This longing for peace is very deep in the hearts of each one of us. We love truth. We want truth. We want justice. It is something that unites all human beings and can bring us together. This access to God, this possibility of being in relationship to God, links us all together.⁵⁹

Here Vanier is more explicit about the truth of reality as our relationship with God than he is in *Becoming Human*. In *Becoming Human*, Vanier is intentionally vague about the heart’s

⁵⁸ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 18.

⁵⁹ Jean Vanier, *Encountering ‘the Other’* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 43.

longing for God, opting instead for language of truth and reality. Still, one can hear the gospel behind Vanier's more inclusive language which illustrates that his understanding of reality is, in fact, based on the Incarnation of Jesus. For example, in *Becoming Human* Vanier mirrors the language of the gospel found in his other books saying, "The discovery of our common humanity liberates us from self-centered compulsions and inner hurts; it is the discovery that ultimately finds its fulfillment in forgiveness and in loving those who are our enemies. It is the process of truly becoming human."⁶⁰ Becoming human, for Vanier, is not exclusive to Christianity nor does it require explicitly Christian language. Hauerwas, on the hand, with his Incarnational anthropology, wonders if this is correct, especially given that L'Arche itself was founded in Vanier's Catholic tradition. How can people who do not believe in Jesus become fully human if the essence of a full humanity is Jesus? Or, how can L'Arche work if its members are not Christian? The next section on ecclesiology will attempt to tease out Vanier's and Hauerwas's convictions regarding the primacy of the Christian faith when it comes to caring for and being with the mentally handicapped. For now, Vanier believes that the way to be fully human is to begin to heal from the inner hurts caused by loneliness and rejection and thus attain a level of inner peace and maturity which gives way to a freedom of living. This type of freedom enables individuals to obey Jesus' command to love our enemies as ourselves and it is shown through external action.

Living the "way of the heart" means not only becoming aware of and healing from internal loneliness, prejudices, and fears that separate us from each other. It also involves learning to show tenderness to those who are also hurt and to forgive those who hurt us.

⁶⁰ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 5.

Tenderness as an external expression of the “way of the heart” is very important for Vanier because tenderness comes from a place of humility and care, not power and domination.

“Tenderness is the language of the body speaking of respect; thus, the body honors whatever it touches; it honors reality. It does not act as if reality itself must be changed or possessed; reality belongs to humanity and to God.”⁶¹ Tenderness is expressed through the body which is

something that we all share, whatever our intellectual abilities. Tenderness is vital at L’Arche because it is most often expressed non-verbally, through assistants’ and core members’ bodies.

“In tenderness, we know how and when to touch someone to help them to *be* and to be well.”⁶²

For the many core members at L’Arche who struggle to communicate verbally, and especially for those who cannot speak at all, a touch of tenderness from an assistant or another core member can mean the difference between being consumed by loneliness and isolation and feeling comforted and supported in a loving community. In the introduction to his memoir of letters, *Our Life Together*, Vanier reflects on how important bodily interaction is for core members. “The first element in our relationships at L’Arche centres on the body—eating meals together, dressing, bathing, touching—just physically caring for people, being attentive to the body, attentive to medical care, revealing to them in a concrete way that they are loved,” and says to them, “you are unique; you are precious; you are my joy.”⁶³

Tenderness means knowing how to be compassionate and being compassionate requires a certain level of maturity. “Compassion is maturity and maturity is acceptance. Maturity is precisely the acceptance of yourself with your own flaws, as well as others with their flaws.

⁶¹ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 98.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Vanier, *Our Life Together*, 13.

Maturity, then, is to discover who we are.”⁶⁴ For Vanier, becoming fully human means to be mature enough to know yourself and show compassion through tenderness to others. The danger with Vanier’s focus on maturity as knowing yourself is that people with intellectual disabilities seem as if they are unable to know themselves precisely because their intellectual disabilities. But Vanier does not believe this is true because he has witnessed so many core members find peace and healing at L’Arche. They may not be able to articulate their growth and maturity verbally, or in a way may we expect or hope for, but through the language of tenderness and compassion core members learn to express their maturity and teach others how to become human.

Finally, the crux of Vanier’s anthropology is the necessity of forgiveness. Because we are all constantly dealing with various internal and external desires and pressures, and because we are all in a process of growth and maturation, we are bound to wound and hurt each other when we are unable to show tenderness and compassion. Unless we are able to forgive, and be forgiven, our maturity and growth will not become fully realized; we will not become fully human. “To forgive,” says Vanier,

is to break down the walls of hostility that separate us, and to bring each other out of the anguish of loneliness, fear, and chaos into communion and oneness. This communion is born from mutual trust and acceptance, and the freedom to be ourselves in our uniqueness and beauty, the freedom to exercise our gifts. We are no longer contained and held back by fear, prejudices, or the need to prove ourselves.⁶⁵

The process of forgiveness takes time and hard work, but Vanier believes that if we each continue to forgive and be forgiven, we can “change our world one heart at a time.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 114.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

Much like their methodologies, Jean Vanier and Stanley Hauerwas begin in the same place with their anthropology but end up saying different, though complementary, things about what it means to be human. They both begin with Jesus as the ultimate revelation of humanness. Hauerwas sees Jesus' Incarnation as the basis for human uniqueness and by connecting Jesus' weakness and suffering to that of people with disabilities, is able to challenge societal norms that promote power and dominance, norms which go against the Christian story of forgiveness and compassion. Vanier also begins with Jesus' weakness and agrees with Hauerwas that the Christian story, as opposed to societal norms, is the true reality by which our humanness should be defined. From here, however, Vanier does not build ethical theories or argue against specific ethical issues. Rather, he tells stories about people, including himself, who have found healing and peace through community and communion. Though Vanier and Hauerwas do different things with their anthropologies, they both agree that people with intellectual disabilities are not without the status of "human" and so deserve love and respect. What's more, they both believe that people with intellectual disabilities can teach us how to become human if we open our hearts and welcome them into our lives. Perhaps one of the most important places we can welcome people with intellectual disabilities is in the church. The next chapter will consider Vanier's and Hauerwas's theologies of the church and the role of mentally handicapped people within it.

Chapter 3: Ecclesiology

Jean Vanier's and Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesiologies are both grounded in the sacramental life of the church. As a faithful Roman Catholic, Vanier looks to the magisterium for his ecclesiological foundation. He frequently cites the documents of Vatican II and is inspired by the Holy See. Though L'Arche was founded in the Catholic tradition, Vanier's experiences in L'Arche homes located in countries where Christianity is not the majority religion have led him to a more open and inclusive ecclesiology. The key to Vanier's inclusive ecclesiology is his understanding of the sacraments as foundational for community and communion. However, tradition and sacraments only go as far as the love that is expressed through them and for Vanier individual conscience is more important than ecclesial dogma or affiliation. He stresses that (as a means of direction from the Holy Spirit) the magisterium is only as good as an individual's own conscience in getting to know Jesus "whether he is named or not."¹ Despite his open ecclesiology, one must not be too quick to paint Vanier as a pluralist or "anonymous Christian" supporter because throughout his work, he continually goes back to Jesus, and his eucharistic presence, as the source of community and communion.² This he terms the "sacrament of encounter" which became the basis of his ecclesiology as experienced in the development of L'Arche. The sacrament of encounter combines the explicit liturgical sacraments with the invisible everyday sacraments of eating with, bathing, or laughing with the "other."

¹ Jean Vanier, *Signs of the Times: Seven Paths of Hope for a Troubled World* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2013), 108.

² "Anonymous Christian" is a term coined by Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner around the time of Vatican II. It refers to the idea that people who have never heard of Jesus would not be condemned if they had lived lives in line with the teachings of Jesus. Thus, they would be saved as "anonymous Christians" having followed a Christian lifestyle though unintentionally.

Like Vanier, Hauerwas's ecclesiology is based on the sanctifying nature of the sacraments, but Hauerwas places much more importance on the visible church as a sacrament itself. Because Hauerwas believes that claiming to be a Christian means being a disciple of Jesus, (i.e., following his teachings, and participating in the life of the church) goes against many of our societal norms, he places tremendous value in the church as a community of believers whose common life is thus a witness to and embodiment of the life and love of Jesus. His high ecclesiology requires that Christians place their allegiance to Jesus and the church above other societal organizations and norms, but it does not make him exclusive in principle. Still, Hauerwas is often charged with being "sectarian" by a number of Christian and non-Christian critics. Hauerwas takes on his most ardent "sectarian" accuser in his 1988 essay "Why the 'Sectarian Temptation' Is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson," arguing that "contrary to Gustafson's characterization, I stand in the catholic tradition that both affirms the universality of the church and confesses God's trinitarian nature."³

Most important for Hauerwas is that Christians act like Christians, meaning they allow the recognition of God's sovereignty to inform their actions so that they may be part of the Kingdom to come. Hauerwas distinguishes between being a disciple of Jesus and trying to imitate Jesus in *The Peaceable Kingdom* saying,

The theme of 'imitation' is subject, however, to much misunderstanding. In particular it carries with it individualist presuppositions that are antithetical to the social nature of the Christian life. For there is no way to learn to 'imitate' God by trying to copy in an external manner the actions of Jesus. No one can become virtuous merely by doing what virtuous people do. We can only be virtuous by doing what virtuous people do in the manner that they do it. Therefore one can only learn how to be virtuous, to be like Jesus,

³ Hauerwas, "Why the 'Sectarian Temptation' Is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 92.

by learning from others how that is done. To be like Jesus requires that I become part of a community that practices virtues, not that I copy his life point by point.⁴

Learning to be virtuous like Jesus by being formed by the community of the church is the essence of Christian discipleship for Hauerwas. But learning from others is not the only form of formation and sanctification to be found in the church. Perhaps the most important aspect of formation are the liturgical sacraments, especially baptism and eucharist. By continually sanctifying its members through the administration of the sacraments, the church itself becomes a sacrament to the world and bears witness to the reality of God's redemptive narrative in Jesus Christ. Earlier in his response to Gustafson, Hauerwas notes that "when I began my work I had no idea I would believe the church to be as important as I now think it is for understanding the nature and truth of Christian convictions. Even less did I think that Christian nonviolence might be crucial for the epistemological status of Christian belief."⁵

If the church is where the truth of Christian convictions is made known, it is crucial for Hauerwas that the church properly understands the nature of the reality it professes—namely that Jesus Christ is present in the poor and weak. As described above, both Hauerwas and Vanier recognize that people with intellectual disabilities, though poor and weak in the eyes of the world, are not only precious to God but can also show us the face of God and teach us how live more fully. Because of this, the mentally handicapped have an important role in the life of the church. For Hauerwas, the mentally handicapped remind the church that it must slow down in order to be able to be a place of peace in which the mentally handicapped can participate fully in

⁴ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 76.

⁵ Hauerwas, "Why the 'Sectarian Temptation' Is a Misrepresentation," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 90. I would add that being with the mentally handicapped is just as important to Hauerwas now as nonviolence was in 1988.

the life of the church. For Vanier, the role of the mentally handicapped in church is to teach the church what community and communion with God look like through eating, praying, and celebrating life together. This chapter will explore Vanier's and Hauerwas's ecclesiologies and how they see the mentally handicapped as a good and necessary part of the body of Christ.

Jean Vanier

Jean Vanier's ecclesiology is based on his experience of the process of growth, maturation, and sanctification found in community and communion. In L'Arche, Vanier found the community he had been longing for from his days in the navy and academia. By living, eating, praying, and working with people with intellectual disabilities, Vanier began to see what true community, based on love not power, could look like. Community is important for Vanier because it is the only way we are able to truly *encounter* one another. Encounter is essential for Vanier's ecclesiology because in encountering the other in humility and tenderness, we can begin to be in *communion* with them. But communion does not come simply from being in community. Vanier notes that often after natural disasters or other crises, people of different races, classes, or cultures can come together to work for a common goal. Vanier once experienced this in Montreal when the power went out during a particularly cold winter and "[people] met each other, got to know each other, shared what they had and responded creatively to the crisis and to individual needs. Ten days later, the power was restored, and everyone went back to watching television."⁶ Community can only go so far as the needs of its members. Thus, community based on a crisis is

⁶ Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 109.

dissolved after the crisis is averted or there is emotional distance from the event, and communion, though it may have been reached, is never sustained.

True community, on the other hand, must be founded on something deeper, a need that is beyond earthly needs. “Praying and living together, eating at the same table and obeying the same rule...are not enough to create true community,”⁷ says Vanier. These form the skeleton of true community, “but skeletons need to be en fleshed with bodies and hearts: we have to love each other as Jesus loves us.”⁸ True community, one that enables us to encounter “the other,” is not possible without the love of Jesus among its members and for Vanier, this love is found first and foremost in the eucharist. Vanier’s ecclesiology is fundamentally sacramental because he has seen how the sacrament of the eucharist is necessary to build true community. “Each [sacrament],” says Vanier, “signifies physically a gift of life and of love. The water of baptism cleanses us and gives us new life; the consecrated bread, broken, given and eaten, and the consecrated wine, offered and consumed, are all signs through which Jesus gives himself to us, so that we may live continually in communion with him, in a heart-to-heart relationship.”⁹ Vanier’s view of the eucharist is fundamental to his ecclesiology because of his recognition that, when separated from Jesus’ weakness and relationship to the poor, it can become a means of exclusion and not of encounter:

The danger is that the Eucharist becomes simply a rite which gives an identity, guarantees a certain morality and favors people of a particular social class, at the risk of engendering different sorts of exclusion. That would be to forget one of Jesus’ most striking teachings, which could apply equally to the Eucharist: when you offer a meal, don’t invite your

⁷ Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 94

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Jean Vanier, *The Scandal of Service: Jesus Washes Our Feet*, L’Arche Collection (Toronto: Novalis, 1998), 85.

parents and friends, your kinfolk or your neighbors, but invite the people who are poor and maimed, blind and lame (Lk 14:12-14). Then you will live 'a beatitude.'¹⁰

Vanier's eucharistic ecclesiology intersects here with the three components of his methodology mentioned above: Jesus' abiding presence, the Beatitudes, and the banquet parable. What is important about this connection is that it grounds the eucharist in the weakness and poverty of Jesus and in doing so, steers clear of exclusive dogma and theology regarding admittance to God's table. This was indeed crucial in the development of L'Arche.

It may seem quite obvious that a Roman Catholic would have a high view of the eucharist and value its place in community, but Vanier's understanding of the eucharist goes beyond his Catholic identity. For Vanier, the eucharist functions as both the Catholic liturgical celebration of the Lord's Supper by which the real presence of Jesus is found in the bread and wine *and* as a way to preserve the Catholic spirituality of L'Arche as it began to include members who were not Catholic. It is important here to restate the earlier observation that Vanier's theology is retrospective. The dual purpose of the eucharist was not the means by which L'Arche was able to welcome non-Catholic members. Rather, Vanier came to understand the eucharist in this way as he reflected on the movement of the Holy Spirit among the various ecumenical and eventually inter-religious L'Arche communities. This will be important later when Hauerwas questions the functionality of non-Christian L'Arche communities. However, Vanier's experience and interpretation of the eucharist is the only proof necessary to sustain his conviction that Jesus can be known in and through a sacrament of encounter, whether he is named or not.

When Vanier began L'Arche, he naturally grounded its spirituality in his own Catholic faith. Philippe, Raphaël, and he attended Mass each day, prayed together in the home, and found

¹⁰ Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 111.

a deeper relationship with Jesus by living in community and communion together. However, it was not long until non-Catholic core members and assistants arrived at L'Arche, requiring Vanier think about ecumenism. Reflecting on this in *Our Life Together*, Vanier writes,

L'Arche was founded in the Catholic tradition, and the Church has been the womb in which L'Arche was conceived and from which it was born. ... Little by little we discovered that to live the gift of ecumenism did not mean simply inviting Anglicans and Protestants to our Catholic Masses and celebrations but instead giving them more space to live, celebrate and nourish their own traditions—the Catholic faith at L'Arche has become one tradition amongst others. And so it was when we moved to non-Christian countries.¹¹

As the years went by and L'Arche began to spread to countries where Christianity, either Catholic or Protestant, was not the dominant religion, Vanier had to reconcile a vision of community that was founded on eucharistic communion with Jesus, with the faith of non-Christian core members and assistants. How can members of a L'Arche community encounter one another in true communion if they do not explicitly believe in the source of that communion, Jesus? They can because, “the sacrament of the altar, the Eucharist, is *fulfilled* in the ‘sacrament of the poor’—which means an encounter with Jesus in the poor.”¹² Because Jesus is present in the poor (in this context meaning people with intellectual disabilities) through his own weakness, partaking in the eucharist and being in relationship with the poor are *both* means of encountering Jesus. Vanier calls this the “‘sacrament of encounter’ [which] makes Jesus present. This encounter can only be possible between people who discover themselves as equals, capable of mutual trust and of receiving the gift of the other.”¹³ This is the crucial link for Vanier’s sacramental ecclesiology in relation to people with mental disabilities and it allows him to

¹¹ Vanier, *Our Life Together*, 491.

¹² Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 50-51. Italics added.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 28.

continue to proclaim Jesus as the source of community and communion while welcoming those who do not believe in him explicitly.

The way the sacrament of the poor meets Jesus in a liturgical but not necessarily explicitly Christian setting at L'Arche is in their practice of washing one another's feet in the same way Jesus washed his disciples' feet during the Last Supper. In *The Scandal of Service: Jesus Washes our Feet*, Vanier reflects on the importance of foot washing as a religiously-neutral yet powerful experience of encounter that has become a staple of L'Arche's spiritual life, especially at ecumenical and inter-religious retreats for L'Arche or Faith and Light. "At these retreats, the Eucharist and the eucharistic communion cannot be the visible sign of our unity. All of us can, however, wash each other's feet."¹⁴ To be sure, L'Arche's paraliturgy of foot washing is modeled exactly after Jesus' washing the disciples' feet and Vanier sees it as complementary to the eucharist saying, "You cannot understand the one without the other. One necessarily leads to the other and one without the other would be a distortion of what Jesus envisioned."¹⁵ Though there are some Christian denominations who *do* exclude non-Christians from performing this third ordinance (such those descended from the Schwarzenau Brethren of Germany¹⁶), Vanier sees it as open to all and thus it has become a very important gesture at L'Arche, an "act of humility [that] expresses in a very concrete way our love and respect for others."¹⁷

As L'Arche grew, Vanier was able to welcome different religious traditions but he still believed that Jesus was the ultimate source of community and encountering the other in

¹⁴ Vanier, *The Scandal of Service*, 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁶ On the Schwarzenau Brethren tradition of the Love Feast and the place of foot washing within it, see Jeff Bach, *Publications of the Pennsylvania German Society*, vol. 36, *Voices of the Turtledoves: The Sacred World of Ephrata* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 76-7.

¹⁷ Vanier, *The Scandal of Service*, 85.

community. “Jesus is there for everyone;” he says, “each person is called to get to know him, whether he is named or not.”¹⁸ Getting to know Jesus is done by encountering the weakness and poverty in others as well as in the self and finding the joy of communion there. This is the basis for Vanier’s anthropology, as mentioned above, but it also grounds his understanding of how God works in each of our hearts, regardless of our religious traditions. Vanier is not a pluralist, but he does think that other religions, at their best, are essentially about this kind of encounter. “The truth of religion and morality shows itself when they liberate us and give us a deep respect and compassion for others.”¹⁹ Furthermore, Vanier espouses a certain hint of natural theology when it comes to the reason why, regardless of religion, we all have the capacity for compassion. “We are all subject to a higher, more profound law, one that we do not make but which is given to us, hidden in the heart of every human being, to reveal that life is all about growth and that it is possible for each one of us to evolve out of darkness and chaos into light and into a new order of love.”²⁰ Vanier makes this general statement because he believes our conscience is the voice of this higher law inside us and thus what makes us all subject to the same higher law.

Vanier identifies conscience with the source of divine law and it becomes, for him, the means by which we are able to be present to and encounter each other in community. Conscience as morally directive is distinct from yearnings and desires which often come from places of fear and loneliness. But, conscience is neither a monolithic nor fully-formed entity handed down from on high; it must be nurtured and educated if it is to direct us toward the love of God and neighbor. “For Christians, it is clearly the Gospel which is the basis of an educated conscience:

¹⁸ Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 108.

¹⁹ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

the love of God and our neighbor. But only conscience can discern what is just in a specific context, and what God is asking of us so that we can truly love people who are different from us. Conscience is like the voice of God which shows the way of love in the here and now.”²¹ For non-Christians, Vanier relies on the *experience* of the universal higher law to educate conscience. “There are unchanging principles, such as the call to be people of love and not of hate, which govern our lives. We need to integrate our experiences into these principles and let these principles be enlightened by our experience.”²² An educated conscience which orients us towards justice, combined with the eucharistic communion found in the sacrament of encounter is how Vanier is able to incorporate multiple religious traditions in the Catholic foundations of L’Arche. But conscience, particularly felt as intuition, is also a necessary safeguard against religious adherence without love, and Vanier does not hesitate to speak out against this danger in the Roman Catholic Church.

Though the eucharist is foundational for his ecclesiology as the source of communion, Vanier is aware that it can also become a tool for exclusion and isolation if we are not intentional about maintaining its true nature as a sacrament of encounter. “Today, the breaking of the bread has become so ritualized that we have forgotten this communion of hearts and mutual support. We need to re-find the joyful expression of Eucharistic communion which leads to a communion of hearts, and to create communities whose heart is universal, inclusive, and neither exclusive nor excluding.”²³ In order to rediscover this joyful expression, Vanier wants us to look back to the primitive church as described in Acts 2. After the Ascension of Jesus Christ, his followers

²¹ Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 78.

²² Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 16.

²³ Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 107.

gathered together and formed a community with new values based on the teachings of Jesus. As more people joined the community, especially after Peter's preaching at Pentecost, this band of followers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). In these ways they remembered what Jesus had instructed them to do, adhered to the teaching of his closest disciples, and entered into communion with each other by sharing meals and prayers. This common life stood out against their social backdrop and made people notice. Vanier is inspired by two signs of their common life that also struck the people who observed these first communities: "their joy and the quality of love between them, however great their differences, and their non-proselytizing love and care for the poor of their districts and towns. These two things, because everyone could see them, were 'signs.'"²⁴ From the primitive church on, the sacraments, especially the eucharist, have been signs of the communion possible when a community is open to encountering others who, though different from them, are brothers and sisters in Christ. Without that openness and love, however, these signs can become distractions that point to nothing. This brings us to Vanier's faithful, yet critical, relationship with the Catholic Church, its priests, and its magisterium.

As the epigraph in *Signs of the Times*, Vanier includes this quote from the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*: "The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men have about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other."²⁵ The point of religious adherence and norms, especially found in the sacraments of the eucharist and encounter, is to

²⁴ Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 96.

²⁵ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*. "Introductory Statement: The Situation of Men in the Modern World," 4:1.

educate our conscience as we seek to interpret how the Spirit is leading us toward deeper relationship with God and with each other. That the Church keeps this point front and center is most important for Vanier. “Priests and catechists insist on the religious norms: go to Mass, pray morning and night, participate in the sacraments. They sometimes forget that these norms are intended precisely to help us develop personal conscience and to live as Jesus lived, allowing ourselves to be drawn towards the good and the true. This is not emphasized enough.”²⁶ Vanier’s experience of the power of the sacraments at L’Arche makes him question if “our faith [has] truly reached into our bodies and hearts, or is the Church in danger of closing itself off by over-identifying with its rituals?”²⁷ Over-identifying with these rituals is often a symptom of the fear Christians have of allowing the rituals to change their hearts and lead them into the mystery of Jesus and the mystery of the poor. Instead of being open and welcoming to people on the fringes of society, Christians often turn inward, letting denominational identity, theological constructions, or liturgical preferences get in the way of encountering “the other.” “When religion closes people up in their own particular group,” Vanier says, “it puts belonging to the group, and its success and growth, above love and vulnerability towards others; it no longer nourishes and opens the heart.”²⁸

Vanier is acutely aware of the damage that can be caused when members of the church, especially the clergy, over-identify with ritual or power, and close their hearts to the poor. Over the course of history, the church has often valued upholding its image over admitting and repenting of its shortcomings. “Too often,” says Vanier, “organizations and established

²⁶ Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 48-9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 120-1.

²⁸ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 63.

institutions fail to question themselves: they cling to self-preservation without counting the human cost. Personal consciences and human lives are sacrificed on the altars of ideology and power.”²⁹ Because of this, Vanier believes that “one of the great problems of our Church is its concern for its reputation and fear of humiliation.”³⁰ This problem is by no means exclusive to any one denomination but, as a member of the Catholic Church, Vanier is deeply saddened by one of the most horrendous examples of this—the ongoing pedophilia scandals. Vanier is particularly troubled by these scandals because of the decades he has spent showing tenderness to and being trustworthy with the most vulnerable members of society. The fact that priests could misuse their places of authority in this way is a great humiliation for Vanier. Vanier believes part of the reason these abuses occurred is due to the “tyranny of normalization.” This term was most likely first coined by Hauerwas in his essay “Community and Diversity: The Tyranny of Normality” (1977) but Vanier does not mention his name when he uses it in *Signs of the Times* (2013). This might be because Vanier is using it to refer to “how the norms of success and concern for public standing, what I call the ‘tyranny of normalization’, can lead people who carry responsibility to live in contradiction: they went to keep up appearances while knowing the gravity of the wrongdoing which has been committed.”³¹ This is different from Hauerwas’s use of the term, which for him stands for the dissolving of differences among groups of people in a push for suffocating equality over the richness of diversity.

The tyranny of normalization Vanier describes can have tragic effects on people, not only in the case of sexual abuse, but also in more subtle ways. While these are tragic events and

²⁹ Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 87.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 37-8.

justice needs to be served, Vanier also recognizes the opportunity the Catholic (and the catholic/universal) Church has to use this humiliation to humble itself before God and the world, and to re-form its leaders:

The humiliation that the Church is experiencing today could also become an opportunity for it to recognize the vulnerability, wounds and fragility of some of its ministers, and so an opportunity to reconsider how it prepares them to live their vocation. It is fortunate that these facts of the Church's life have been revealed. Now we can face and accept this wrong which has been hidden for too long. The first step is to reveal the truth and re-establish justice. But we are all called to take a further step: to recognize our own fragility and accept our own humiliation, so that we can bear witness to a new presence of God in a humiliated and humble Church, of which we are all part.³²

Vanier hopes the Church will not try to fool the world saying, "The Church is stronger than ever!" but instead recognize reality, in humiliation and humility, and try to heal from it. Only then can it, along with its rites and rituals, be a sign of love and agent of change.

Rather than having false confidence in ideologies and power, Vanier wants Christians to have confidence in themselves as beloved children of God who are capable of sharing Jesus' love with others in community and communion. "Christians express their confidence in God. But they are often fearful of affirming confidence in themselves and their personal conscience. True self-confidence is a sign of respect for the child of God that we are, called to do beautiful things for Him."³³ A mature conscience, founded in humility and most importantly in prayer, will keep Christians from focusing their confidence on power and prestige rather than on humility and love. Here Vanier's ecclesiology mirrors his methodology and anthropology in the way that the church is different than the world. While Hauerwas takes this and runs (away?) with it, Vanier maintains his Christian identity alongside his inclusivity and ecumenical openness. "The way of

³² Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 115.

³³ *Ibid.*, 79.

the Church,” Vanier says, “is a way of humility, oriented towards service to those who are excluded and socially insignificant.”³⁴ The church is different from the world exactly because of the kind of communion that is realized in the sacrament of encounter.

This leads us to the presence of the mentally handicapped in the life of the institutional church. The question many church people want answered is, “How (or why) should we include people with mental handicaps in the life of the church?” Being arguably the most experienced and committed advocate and friend of people with intellectual disabilities, Vanier’s relative silence on this question is striking. The wisdom of his books touches the core of what it means to be human, but seldom does he speak about practical applications for the church at large. To some, this might be a frustration, for what good is all this if there is no advice for regular churches to implement strategies or programs to better incorporate the mentally handicapped? Perhaps, however, Vanier’s silence can lead us to ask the deeper question, the one he has spent his life attempting to learn the answer. The question should not be, “What is the role of the mentally handicapped in church?” or “How can we fix the problem of the lack of participation of people with intellectual disabilities in the church?” For Vanier there is no “problem” of what to do with the mentally handicapped in church, in work, or in life. *The problem is with the question itself.* The real problem is with those of us who are not able to see people with intellectual disabilities as fully human, to encounter them as such, and to be in relationship with them. Here Vanier is similar to Hauerwas in how he redirects the question to get at the deeper, less obvious, problem. The reason we wonder about the place of the mentally handicapped in church is because we have proven to be the kind of people who are unable to welcome them, to make a

³⁴ Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 138.

place for them as beloved and precious members of the body of Christ. L'Arche is not the answer to the church's "problem" with the mentally handicapped, nor is it an escapist, sectarian community. Rather, it is a sign of what community can look like if we turn our questioning hearts and minds inward, open our hearts to the other, and welcome the poor and weak.

If Vanier does offer some form of practical advice about the place of the mentally handicapped in church, it is that we should not see ourselves as serving, including, or evangelizing them, but as their friends. In this way, both the abled and disabled are equal members of the body of Christ, with different but important roles. Engaging in the sacrament of encounter means that we become friends:

To eat at the same table is to become friends. ... Communities of faith, of God's reign, bring together into oneness those who by culture and by education are far apart. This is the body of Christ. This is the church. The poor are evangelized. They discover they are loved. But even more, the poor evangelize. They possess a healing power that awakens and transforms the hearts of the rich.³⁵

Vanier places the poor in the center of the church by following Paul's first letter to the Corinthians [which] compares the body of the Church with the physical body. "[Paul] says that those parts of the body which are the least presentable and the weakest are indispensable and should be honoured (cf 1 Cor 2). What an incredible vision! Those who are the weakest are indispensable to the Church and should be honoured."³⁶ This is what Vanier has to say to the institutional church—that the least presentable members should be treated with the greatest respect. It is also his hope for the future of the church. "The renewal of the Church and the new evangelization are carried through encounters with people who are broken by suffering and

³⁵ Jean Vanier, "A Rebel for Peace," in John Dear, ed., *Apostle of Peace: Essays in Honor of Daniel Berrigan* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 133.

³⁶ Vanier, *Encountering 'the Other,'* 22.

isolation.”³⁷ When the church recognizes that it does not need to “do things for” people with intellectual disabilities but needs to “be with” them in friendship and communion, then Vanier believes the church will have something to say to the whole world.

It is important to note, however, that people with identifiable, diagnosable disabilities are not the only people who are suffering and in need of honor and respect—we *all* suffer and need love. Thus, L’Arche as a movement has something to say to the church and to the whole world. Vanier says, “any real movement with real signification has to have universal meaning, to address our common humanity. It’s the sharing of a world vision. We weren’t just sharing life with Christians, we were sharing life with people who were suffering; and if you’re talking generally about people who are suffering, then you’re talking about people everywhere.”³⁸ In the end, Vanier’s ecclesiology, founded on the sacrament of encounter, is a vision of what the world, not just the church, could be if everyone shared this vision and encountered one another in love and respect. To a certain extent, this is also true of Hauerwas’s ecclesiology, in that he too has a grand vision for what the world could be if the values of the Kingdom of God were lived out. However, where Vanier is willing to substitute the sacrament of encounter for the sacrament of eucharist, I will argue that Hauerwas, though recognizing the mystery and power of interacting with the mentally handicapped, understands the church as fundamentally *sacramental*, and thereby emphasizes the visible and embodied nature of Jesus through the sacraments. Let us now consider the relationship between Hauerwas’s overall theological project, his sacramental ecclesiology, and the mentally handicapped.

³⁷ Vanier, *Signs of the Times*, 124.

³⁸ Vanier, *Our Life Together*, 7.

Stanley Hauerwas

Stanley Hauerwas is known to most people as an “ethicist.” His prolific writing has covered numerous topics and he has challenged many of our society’s ethical standards. While Hauerwas accepts the title of ethicist, he understands himself to be a theologian and his writing to be theology proper. This is because Hauerwas believes that theological convictions have to be lived out in order to be demonstrated as true, and living out theology means dealing with ethics. “I have accepted the current academic designation of ‘ethics’ only because as a theologian I am convinced that the intelligibility and truthfulness of Christian convictions reside in their practical force.”³⁹ Hauerwas is also skeptical of the idea that he is doing something “new” with his writings, preferring instead to be faithful to the Christian tradition. “The theologian’s task is faithfulness, not the creation of the new. . . . I certainly have not tried to be ‘creative’ and/or do something ‘new’ as if that were worth doing in and of itself. Rather, I began my work wanting to do no more than recapture the significance of the virtues for understanding the Christian life and in the process perhaps even help us live more faithfully.”⁴⁰ Hauerwas as a theologian writes about how the implications of living a Christian ethic (i.e. *being* a Christian) require Christians to live lives that witness to the truth of the claim “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Though others may disagree with Hauerwas’s claim to being a faithful theologian, that claim is essential in understanding his ecclesiology.

As mentioned above, Hauerwas believes the Christian narrative stands in contrast to the story of the world (particularly Western individualistic liberalism) and illuminating this truth is a

³⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 1.

⁴⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays On Church, World, and Living in Between* (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1988), 1.

large part of his methodology and anthropology. The Christian narrative, however, would not be known to the world, and thus distinct from it, without being *embodied* in the life of the church. The church is essential to Hauerwas's entire theological project because the church "is the place where the story of God is enacted, told, and heard."⁴¹ The church must live out its claim that Jesus Christ is Lord in tangible, visible, and audible ways. These ways are so radically different from the ways of the world that they are necessarily recognizable as witnesses to the truth of Jesus Christ. If they are not embodied by the church, that claim, and the redemptive narrative it assumes, will cease to have an impact on the world. Does that mean that if the church did not exist, God would not exist? In a sense, yes, because for Hauerwas (who shows his Barthian influence here), the fact the God made a covenant with Israel which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, means that God's presence in the world is ontologically tied to human relationship and embodiment. Just as his anthropology is based on Jesus' Incarnation, his ecclesiology is based on the church's embodiment of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit. The church embodies and articulates the distinction between the ways of the peaceable Kingdom and the ways of the world and therefore the church is a particular embodiment God's grace. Speaking about the new thing God did at Pentecost in creating the church, Hauerwas says,

there is no way, if we are to be faithful to God's gift at Pentecost, that the church can avoid calling attention to itself. To be sure, like Israel, the church has a story to tell in which God is the main character. But the church cannot tell that story without becoming part of the tale. The church as witness to God's work for us in Israel and Jesus of Nazareth means that here the teller and the tale are one. . . . That story, the story of the world, cannot be told rightly unless it includes the story of the church as God's creation to heal our separateness.⁴²

⁴¹ Hauerwas, "The Gesture of a Truthful Story," in *Christian Existence Today*, 101.

⁴² Hauerwas, "The Church as God's New Language," (1986) in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 149-50.

God's story and God's people are intimately connected and since Pentecost God has chosen to use the church to help in God's work of reconciling the world to God's self and healing our separateness. Hauerwas argues that the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost endowed the church with the ability to embody Jesus' presence on earth, through that same Holy Spirit. For this reason, I believe Hauerwas views the church as a *sacrament*—"an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace."⁴³ The knowledge of God as revealed in Jesus Christ is the inward grace that is made known and visible to the world, by the presence of the Holy Spirit, in the outward and visible sacrament of the church. The presence of the Holy Spirit means that the church has an ontological character that sets it apart from the world. The church is therefore not only a *witness* to the life of Jesus, it is also an *embodiment* of his presence in the world.

This embodiment is the first step in identifying Hauerwas's ecclesiology as sacramental. Hauerwas claims that "the church does not *have* a social ethic, but *is* a social ethic."⁴⁴ This claim is key for understanding my claim that Hauerwas's ecclesiology is sacramental. Living with Jesus Christ as Lord is not an individualistic undertaking but instead requires engaging with and being formed by the community that embodies Jesus' life as the sign of the Kingdom of God and a new creation itself. "We call this new creation *church*," Hauerwas says. "It is constituted by word and sacrament, as the story we tell, the story we embody, must not only be told but enacted. In telling we are challenged to be a people capable of hearing God's good news such that we can be a witness to others."⁴⁵ Of course, embodying Jesus in the sacrament of the church does not

⁴³ *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Hymnal Corp., 1979), 857.

⁴⁴ Hauerwas, "The Gesture of a Truthful Story," in *Christian Existence Today*, 102.

⁴⁵ Hauerwas, "God's New Language," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 149.

come easily. Simply because the church is the church does not mean it cannot betray its relationship with God if it acts in ways that forget the reality that Jesus Christ is Lord. One example of such transgression is the pedophilia scandal that Vanier acknowledges. The reason the church is a sacrament is not because its priests and members are *themselves* ontologically better than non-Christians. Hauerwas believes that the world has also been redeemed by Jesus' work on the cross, and so the distinction between the church and the world, says John B. Thomson in *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, "is a noetic rather than ontological one. The church therefore does not withdraw in its quest for distinctiveness but 'tries to develop the resources to stand within the world witnessing to the peaceable Kingdom and thus rightly understanding the world.'"⁴⁶ Hauerwas says, "the church does not possess Christ; his presence is not confined to the church. Rather it is in the church that we learn to recognize Christ's presence outside the church."⁴⁷ The church is a sacrament is because its members participate in the sacraments of the church and through this ongoing process of sanctification, the church and its members become the embodiment of what it means to live as a follower of Jesus, seeing Christ's presence in others and embodying for them a sign of the peaceable Kingdom.

The second step in identifying Hauerwas's ecclesiology as sacramental has to do with how this happens, namely, participation in the sacraments themselves. The church is sacramental because of the presence of the Holy Spirit. That presence is embodied most visibly, tangibly, and audibly in the sacramental life of the church. Hauerwas believes that performing these rituals, especially baptism and eucharist, not only shapes the lives of the worshipers, but also serves as a

⁴⁶ John B. Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas: A Christian Theology of Liberation*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2003), 24. Internal quote from Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 102.

⁴⁷ Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 97.

sign or “gesture” to the world of what it means to claim Jesus Christ as Lord. This is why the church *is* a social ethic for Hauerwas. Its sacramental life is a sacrament to the world, transforming both its members and its neighbors by the presence of the Holy Spirit. However, his claim that the church is a social ethic has been critiqued by those who say that these “gestures” do not engage with the world enough. As Hauerwas puts it, “the claim that the church is, rather than has, a social ethic cannot help but appear to many as a dangerous withdrawal of the church back into self-righteous pietism which ignores the social agony of the world. At best, such a Christian social ethic is but a gesture; at worst, it is a failure of Christians to face responsibly the complexity of the social problems confronting us in these troubled times.”⁴⁸ Hauerwas responds to the criticism that his view of the Christian social ethic is but a “gesture” by conceding the point but then affirming the need of such gestures because they “embody as well as sustain the valuable and significant”⁴⁹:

In this way, the church is but God’s gesture on behalf of the world to create a space and time in which we might have a foretaste of the Kingdom. It is through gestures that we learn the nature of the story that is the very content and constitution of that Kingdom. The way we learn a story, after all, is not just by hearing it. Important and significant stories must be acted out. We must be taught the gestures that help position our bodies and our souls to be able to hear rightly and then retell the story.⁵⁰

Here we see more of the other half of Hauerwas’s sacramental theology. The gestures that the church must perform in order to embody the foretaste of the Kingdom are realized first and foremost in the work of its people—the liturgical sacraments. Trying to be faithful to Jesus comes from the sanctification and formation found in liturgy. “Liturgy is social action. Through liturgy

⁴⁸ Hauerwas, “The Gesture of a Truthful Story,” in *Christian Existence Today*, 106.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

we are shaped to live rightly the story of God.”⁵¹ These liturgical sacraments, specifically eucharist and baptism, are for Hauerwas essential to the church because they shape us and orient us toward God’s story:

[In] Baptism and Eucharist, we are made part of a common history that requires continuous celebration to be rightly remembered. It is through Baptism and Eucharist that our lives are engrafted onto the life of the one that makes our unity possible. Through this telling and enactment we, like Israel, become a people who live by distinctively remembering the history of God’s redemption of the world.⁵²

By partaking in the sacraments, Christians are sanctified and formed. Being initiated into (baptism) and sustained by (eucharist) the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, brings Christians together as a community in order to embody God’s salvific story. “[The sacraments] are, in effect, essential reminders for the constitution of God’s people in world. Without them, we are constantly tempted to turn God into an ideology to supply our wants and needs rather than have our needs and wants transformed by God’s capturing of our attention through the mundane life of Jesus of Nazareth.”⁵³ Through the sacraments of baptism, eucharist, and the sacrament of the church itself, Christians are able to embody the love of God, as shown in Jesus Christ, and made present through the Holy Spirit to each other and to the world. By participating in the sacramental and liturgical life of the church, Christians discipline their individual desires and place God’s will over their own. Hauerwas argues that participation in the sacraments is necessary for Christians because they teach Christians how to make the appropriate gestures that point toward God’s reality, the reality that Jesus Christ is Lord.

⁵¹ Hauerwas, “The Gesture of a Truthful Story,” in *Christian Existence Today*, 107.

⁵² Hauerwas, “God’s New Language,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 149.

⁵³ Hauerwas, “The Gesture of a Truthful Story,” in *Christian Existence Today*, 107.

But what exactly does it mean to live out the belief that “Jesus Christ is Lord”? In the church, Christians find community and communion, but that is not the goal of the church. The church is not simply a place where Christians gather together for moral, financial, or even spiritual support. Community is not the *telos* of the church, Jesus is. In *Resident Aliens*, Hauerwas and Will Willimon describe Christian community or “life in the colony, [as] not primarily about togetherness. It is about the way of Jesus Christ with those whom he calls to himself. It is about disciplining our wants and needs in congruence with a true story, which gives us the resources to lead truthful lives. In living out the story together, togetherness happens, but only as a by-product of the main project of trying to be faithful to Jesus.”⁵⁴ This is the essence of Hauerwas’s theological project which he believes is the same project of the church.

The fact that Hauerwas sees the church as the embodiment of God’s story and calls the sacraments “essential reminders” might lead one to believe that he would develop these one-liners a bit more. That is not the case, however, as relative to his other common motifs, Hauerwas seldom mentions the sacraments explicitly. In fact, one of the conclusions Thomson reaches regarding his ecclesiology is that,

Hauerwas could therefore strengthen his project by explicating the sacramental character of the church’s politics and practices, albeit recognizing that the characteristic of a sacrament is its mystery. . . . [This] would reiterate the importance of the gathered ecclesial community attending to the way its practices, its reading of the Scriptures, its worship, its welcome of the stranger, the story of its saints and martyrs are forming it into a community of witness to the ways of God. Furthermore, [this] would underline the way these practices mediate the lively presence of God.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 78.

⁵⁵ Thomson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*, 214.

Why then am I arguing that Hauerwas's ecclesiology is fundamentally sacramental? It seems to me that identifying his ecclesiology as sacramental ties together the threads he has sewn and helps explain his vision of the church as both the embodiment of the truth of Jesus and a means of sanctification of its members.

The project of the church is to embody the transformative and redemptive love of the Trinitarian God in the world by being formed by the sacraments and being a sacrament to the world, but similar to Vanier, Hauerwas knows that these rituals and sacraments are not an end in themselves. Rather, they are what enable Christians to become more virtuous, to be a sign to the world, and most importantly, to become more like their Lord, Jesus. For many in the West, the project of the church and the project of secular progressivism are seen as one and the same. Because all people deserve the freedom to live their lives how they want to, and because the church is supposed to love people, the church is assumed to be on the side of progress in society. Hauerwas, however, is not so quick to equate democratic social reforms with the good news of the Gospel. Christians are part of a "story-formed community,"⁵⁶ not a community based on liberal individualism which says, "You have no story except the one you write for yourself." As such, Hauerwas wants Christians to be confident in their role as participants in God's story, even (or especially) if that means going against societal assumptions. Christians must not be afraid to behave a certain way because of their beliefs. Rather, they should allow the sacraments of the church to form their behavior and in doing so become an embodied presence of God's redemptive love in the world. Hauerwas thinks Christians are afraid to label an ethical position as "Christian" or "religious" because:

⁵⁶ Hauerwas, "A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on *Watership Down*," in *A Community of Character*, 9.

(1) Christians are increasingly aware of their obligation to avoid the scandal of the inhumanity and self-righteousness often associated with those who claim special 'religious' obligation; and (2) Christians feel a duty to serve the needy; in a pluralist society, this seems to entail downplaying our differences in order to join in a common effort for human betterment.⁵⁷

Part of Hauerwas's aim in defining the church as a social ethic is to call out Christians for letting go of the distinctive qualities and actions that should define their way-of-being in the world. If Christians were more confident in the source of their convictions, instead of down-playing it, the "gestures" that they do might become a more complete witness to the truth of God's narrative in the world, as revealed in Jesus Christ.

For Hauerwas, one of the most important and identifiable ways that Christians can perform such powerful gestures is by welcoming and loving people who are mentally handicapped. The way to do this is to think as a Christian, or theologically, about how the church should be interacting with the mentally handicapped. "Theologically thinking about the mentally handicapped helps us see, moreover, that claims about the way things are cannot be separated from the way we should live."⁵⁸ By thinking theologically about the mentally handicapped (i.e. letting the reality of God's narrative direct their lives towards a better way of interacting with the mentally handicapped), Christians can act out their faith and show how different the implications of God's story are from the project of modernity. This is another reason why I believe Hauerwas's ecclesiology is sacramental. Hauerwas's notion that the mentally handicapped have the unique ability to show us the "face of God,"⁵⁹ combined with his deep conviction that they have an important role in the life of the church as it embodies Christ's love and stands against the

⁵⁷ Hauerwas, "The Christian, Society, and the Weak," in *Vision and Virtue*, 187.

⁵⁸ Hauerwas, "Timeful Friends," in *Sanctify: Them in the Truth*, 147.

⁵⁹ Hauerwas, "Suffering the Retarded," in *Suffering Presence*, 179.

project of modernity, means that the church has a moral and theological imperative to welcome the mentally handicapped in the life of the church. Michael G. Cartwright connects Hauerwas's identification of the sacraments as gestures with his views on the mentally handicapped in his "Reader's Guide" to *The Hauerwas Reader* saying, "the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, must be understood to be 'essential gestures' through which we learn *the skills* to be Christians, but they are not the only such gestures. Hauerwas argues that the gestures Christians embody that constitute the proper focus of Christian social ethics are precisely the kinds of gestures that can be done with the mentally handicapped."⁶⁰

This is where the rubber meets the road for Hauerwas. Hauerwas believes the church can, at its best, represent a better way to love the mentally handicapped and so inspire those outside the church. "For if the wider society lacks the basis for knowing how to care for the mentally handicapped, it does so because it is devoid of examples to help it spur its imagination."⁶¹ If Christians cannot be the kind of people who welcome and respect the mentally handicapped, then who can, and how will they know how to? The answer to this question may indeed be that anyone can. That is certainly what Jean Vanier has found, though he still grounds such relationships in Jesus through the sacrament of encounter. Hauerwas's goal is not to say that people who are not Christian cannot love and respect people with intellectual disabilities. Rather he is trying to call the church to be better at embodying Christ's love in relationship with the mentally handicapped. Now let us consider how Hauerwas thinks such embodiment, or gestures, should be put into practice.

⁶⁰ Michael G. Cartwright, "A Reader's Guide," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 633.

⁶¹ Hauerwas, "The Church and the Mentally Handicapped: A Continuing Challenge to the Imagination," in *Dispatches from the Front*, 185.

The first step in welcoming the mentally handicapped, and their families, is for the church to let them be themselves. “At the very least,” Hauerwas says, “the church should be the place where parents and mentally handicapped children can be without apologizing, without being stared at, without being silently condemned.”⁶² The unfortunate truth is that, while this type of silent condemnation is always present with people who are not used to engaging with the mentally handicapped, it often occurs among church-goers who are “normal” as well. Perhaps by engaging with the mentally handicapped in such a welcoming and non-judgmental way, the church might also learn how to better engage with all its members, replacing looks of judgment with hands of support. Regardless, the mentally handicapped cannot participate fully in the life of the church if they are judged or excluded for simply being who they are. But who says they should be participating fully? Is it not much easier to have them sit quietly in the back and not disturb the congregation, not be a distraction? On the contrary, the church should not simply pretend to include people with intellectual disabilities. Rather, Hauerwas argues that the church *must* include the mentally handicapped in its public worship, not because it is a “nice thing to do,” but because in doing so, the church is forced to recognize that it is on God’s time, that it is not in control, and that it is not a place where order and decorum trump the inclusion of some of its members. Hauerwas sees this as the gift that the mentally handicapped give to the church:

Through their willingness to be present in church, [the mentally handicapped] provide the church with the time to be the church. We thus learn that we can take the time for someone who does not talk well to read the Scriptures. We can take the time to walk slowly together to the communion table when one of our own does not walk well or not at all. We can take the time to design our places of gathering so that they are open to many who would otherwise not be able to be there. We can take the time to be a people

⁶² Hauerwas, “The Church and the Mentally Handicapped,” in *Dispatches from the Front*, 182. Hauerwas’s use of “children” here is slightly more problematic because, though he refers to parents and that necessarily entails the presence of children, he does not also articulate the need to welcome *adults* with disabilities who are, of course, children of their parents, but may not be accompanied by them.

open to children who always will distract us from the projects that seem so promising for making the world ‘better.’⁶³

This is the essence of what Hauerwas believes the mentally handicapped have to say to the church—that the church needs to be a *place of peace* where it is on God’s time, not its own. Hauerwas takes on the relation of peace, time, and space in his 1986 essay “Taking Time for Peace: The Ethical Significance of the Trivial.”⁶⁴ Here Hauerwas focuses more on the Christian response to the aversion of nuclear war by arguing that peace comes when we take time to enjoy the daily events of our lives, most importantly worshipping God, as doing so allows us to let go of the need to control both time and the world in general. A decade later, in “Timeful Friends: Living with the Handicapped,” Hauerwas combines his take on peace with the mentally handicapped as inspired by his newfound appreciation for Jean Vanier and L’Arche. In this essay Hauerwas notes that the work of *being with* (instead of doing for) the mentally handicapped is “slow work”:

Indeed, to be capable of such work means, as Vanier puts it, we have ‘to be great friends of time.’⁶⁵ We have to become not only friends of time, but friends of those who make such time possible. And to make such time possible is to call upon one who, though outside of time, has entered into our time to be with us and to befriend us. We have to learn how to receive the friendship the mentally handicapped have to offer us.⁶⁶

⁶³ Hauerwas, “The Church and the Mentally Handicapped,” in *Dispatches from the Front*, 185. Here again the language of “children” implies that those for whom we need to make time and space for are not adults but children and places them in a position of inferiority even though they might be welcomed.

⁶⁴ Hauerwas, “Taking Time for Peace: The Ethical Significance of the Trivial,” in *Christian Existence Today*, 253-65.

⁶⁵ Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 80.

⁶⁶ Hauerwas, “Timeful Friends,” in *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 154.

Still another decade later (which illustrates how long Hauerwas has been thinking about the theology and disability) Hauerwas connects peace, place, time and the mentally handicapped in collaboration with Vanier himself.

In *Living Gently in a Violent World*, the book they co-authored, Hauerwas's contributions focus on L'Arche as a sign of the patience necessary to embody peace with the mentally handicapped. "This is what I think L'Arche has to say to the church today: slow down. Just slow down. L'Arche embodies the patience that is absolutely crucial if we are to learn to be faithful people in our world."⁶⁷ This patience will enable the church to be such a place of peace, as L'Arche is, not only for its members who have intellectual disabilities, but for all. Hauerwas concludes by reiterating this point saying, "That's what I think L'Arche has to say to the church. It offers a kind of time, a kind of patience, and kind of placedness that comes from faithfulness and produces a different understanding of catholicity. That is how L'Arche helps the church find the gospel."⁶⁸ What is ironic about this chapter, titled "Finding God in Strange Places: Why L'Arche needs the Church," is that Hauerwas spends much more time saying why the church needs L'Arche than making the opposite point. Even when he makes that point, it is really just another reason the church needs L'Arche:

I think L'Arche needs the wider church exactly to the extent it can become too significant. L'Arche needs the wider church because its members need to leave L'Arche to worship God elsewhere, in another place, with all the time and bother it may require. This is not just for the sake of the people within L'Arche, but for the sake of the church. L'Arche must remain connected with other modes of Christian life that make L'Arche possible. The body of L'Arche must always be integrated into the larger body of Christ through interconnectedness with other communities around the world.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Hauerwas, "Finding God in Strange Places," in Hauerwas and Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World*, 45.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 57-8.

By saying L'Arche needs the church, I think Hauerwas really means that Vanier and L'Arche cannot lose their theological and christocentric grounding because if they do L'Arche will lose its distinctiveness. L'Arche and Vanier may have already "lost" that by including other faiths and gravitating toward the sacrament of encounter as a substitute for the liturgical sacraments in places where Christianity is not practiced. But Hauerwas doesn't really say that in the essay. Instead, he spends most of it saying what L'Arche has to say to the church, which is much more important, because L'Arche is an embodiment, a sign, a gesture, a "modest proposal," and not a solution, of the exact things Hauerwas wants the church to be for the mentally handicapped.⁷⁰ Hauerwas is right that L'Arche needs the church because it is not the church proper—with its traditions, sacraments, and liturgy—and therefore the members need to be included in the worshiping life of regular churches. The danger is that L'Arche might turn in on itself, thus losing the mutually refining relationship it has with the wider church. Because Hauerwas is wary of this possibility, he affirms the Christian grounding of L'Arche, but it is clear that he sees L'Arche as a tremendously important example of the church's embodiment of Jesus in the world. This is especially evident in "Timeful Friends" when Hauerwas says,

[L'Arche's] witness remains crucial for the rest of us who are not part of their community; for without such examples our imaginations lack the resources to know that what we have become used to doing is not done by necessity. Without L'Arche anything I or any other theologian might have to say could not help but be empty. L'Arche literally gives weight, gives body, to the story of the world we Christians know as Gospel.⁷¹

⁷⁰ The term "modest proposal" comes from Jonathan Swift's 1729 satirical essay known as "A Modest Proposal". Hauerwas here is alluding to a sign on his office door which reads, "A modest proposal for peace: let the Christians of the world resolve not to kill one another." Hauerwas, "Finding God in Strange Places," in Hauerwas and Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World*, 55.

⁷¹ Hauerwas, "Timeful Friends," in *Sanctify Them in the Truth*, 155.

Compared to Vanier's vision of the church, Hauerwas's ecclesiology is quite similar and yet decidedly different. Hauerwas is similar to Vanier in that he believes that the church must embody its witness to Jesus Christ by living in a way that is governed by the truth of God's redemptive narrative and its focus on the poor. Hauerwas differs from Vanier in how this looks on a practical level. For Vanier, anyone who is able to be in communion with the other, particularly the poor, through the sacrament of encounter, is able to know Jesus through this encounter whether Jesus is named or not. For Hauerwas, Jesus must be named and claimed by those who participate in the sacraments because their very participation in those sacraments sets them apart as a "colony" for God.⁷² While anyone who is open to the other can engage in Vanier's vision of becoming human and living a fuller life, Hauerwas believes the communal life of the visible church is the only way to show the world a different vision of how to live and why. Yet, these distinct visions of the church come together in the church's connection to the mentally handicapped. Vanier and Hauerwas are essentially saying the same thing when it comes to the mentally handicapped because it takes a certain quality of person (Christian or not) to engage with the mentally handicapped in a way that goes against the way the world treats them. Vanier thinks anyone can do it regardless of his religion, so long as he is open to the other. But, because Vanier himself sees this as an encounter with Jesus, he is very much in line with Hauerwas who thinks the church and only the church (as it is the only group of people who gather in order to live their lives according to the reality of the truth of Jesus Christ), are able to properly welcome and befriend people with intellectual disabilities. In doing so, the church and the mentally

⁷² Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 12.

handicapped stand together, embodying the presence and peace of Jesus Christ in the world and changing it, one heart at a time.

Conclusion

This thesis has been an attempt to compare Jean Vanier and Stanley Hauerwas's views on theology and disability by considering their methodology, anthropology, and ecclesiology. As I hope has been evident so far, understanding the nuances of their views is not only important as an academic exercise, whereby we can grapple with specific issues and questions posed in their writings. Surely this is also an important personal and practical exercise, as their views on people with intellectual disabilities get at the heart of what it means to be both a human being and a people called to embody the presence of Jesus in the world. In each of the chapters above, certain themes stick out to me as particularly important for learning to engage with people with disabilities and become, with them, "people of the heart."¹ Let us now reconsider these themes and some of the practical implications they raise in each of these three areas.

In the first chapter on methodology, I argued that Vanier and Hauerwas have opposing trajectories which can be found in their approach to and the goals of their writings on people with intellectual disabilities. Vanier wrote because he was drawn into the mystery of Jesus through sharing his life with the mentally handicapped. Hauerwas was drawn into the mystery of the mentally handicapped because he wrote about what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus. Though Vanier's insights came mostly from his lived experience, they were also grounded in his Catholic faith and informed specifically by the Beatitudes, the parable of the great banquet, and the abiding presence of Jesus in the Gospel of John. Each of these gave voice to Vanier's growing certainty that the poor and the weak (in this case meaning the mentally handicapped) are

¹ Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 2.

blessed not because they enable the rich and strong to be charitable, but because God identifies with the poor and weak in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Being linked to Jesus precisely because of their weakness and poverty, the mentally handicapped can and do teach the strong how to become fully human.

Vanier agrees with Hauerwas that engaging in real, loving relationships with the mentally handicapped goes against the way that Western, liberal, individualistic society treats them. Hauerwas's entire theological project is to pull back the curtain on such a society and show that its high value placed on the freedom of the individual to create his own story forgets that we do not exist outside of community and the story that that community tells. For Hauerwas, the mentally handicapped provide the perfect example of what happens to people who are unable to participate in that social narrative and he uses them to further his theological agenda. Such use of the mentally handicapped as a category would be irresponsible if it were not for the other half of his project, which is to call the church to become the distinctive community of disciples it should be if it truly believes that "Jesus Christ is Lord." Again, the mentally handicapped play an important role as they should not only be welcomed by such a community, but also be lifted up and celebrated, not *despite* but, rather, *because* of their differences. Though Hauerwas and Vanier may be writing from different points of view, they both agree that the mentally handicapped are, regardless of their disabilities, fully human, vital parts the church and society in general, and people from whom "normal" people have much to learn.

This brings us to the second chapter on anthropology which summarized Hauerwas's and Vanier's thoughts on what it means to be (fully) human. Here, they both start from the same place as they directly identify the person of Jesus as the foundation for and prime example of

what it means to be human. Hauerwas's anthropology is specifically Incarnational because he believes the fact that God became a human (and not a penguin) in Jesus Christ means that our human uniqueness should not be based on cognitive ability or rationality. Rather, being human is intimately linked with the divine through Jesus, and Hauerwas uses this to argue against attempts to define personhood by such arbitrary criteria as IQ or Fletcher's "Profile of Man." Hauerwas also gets at what is behind the question of personhood, arguing that such attempts are only necessary because we have failed to be the *kind* of people who welcome the disabled and now need to draw the line somewhere when it comes to what constitutes life so that we will not be faced with agonizing medical and ethical dilemmas. Hauerwas goes even further to suggest that our society's definition of a happy and productive life creates the suffering that people with intellectual disabilities experience, thereby labeling them as "retarded." By questioning our idea of suffering, without venturing into vain attempts at theodicy, Hauerwas shows the kind of suffering we impose on the mentally handicapped does not come simply because someone has Down syndrome. Rather, it comes from our failure to imagine a way to see that person not as "different" but as a person, whom we should celebrate, learn from, and see God in.

Vanier also begins his anthropology with Jesus' Incarnation by focusing on the connection between Jesus' suffering, weakness, and poverty, in relation to our own. Vanier believes all humans are sacred and all humans are the same because we all experience similar feelings of loneliness, exclusion, fear, and isolation. The mentally handicapped experience these feelings because of their disabilities and because of their exclusion from society, but Vanier thinks that deep down, "normal" people are just as broken and weak—they just do a better job at hiding it. What is important is that we are not alone in those sufferings because other people also

feel the same things *and* because Jesus suffered as one of us, though without sin. Thus, to become fully human is to be in touch with those feelings and to heal from them in community with other people who share those experiences. Vanier found that this type of healing happens in a profound way when one engages with people who are more visibly weak and poor (the mentally handicapped). This growth and maturity comes not simply because their presence makes us confront our own poverty and weakness, but also because we encounter ourselves when we encounter “the other.” In this way, mentally handicapped people can show us “the way of the heart.”² The “way of the heart” comes from connecting our heads and our hearts internally, as we listen to our conscience and help it to mature, get in touch with our own weakness and poverty, and celebrate our strengths and gifts; and externally, as we show tenderness and care to all people, but especially the weak, and show them that we love them through physical contact and presence. Living “the way of the heart” helps us to mature and grow and become fully human as we more fully encounter ourselves and one another in community and communion.

Encountering “the other” is the basis of Vanier’s ecclesiology and is practiced in everyday encounters like feeding someone who cannot feed herself, as well as sacramental encounters like baptism, eucharist, and the washing of another’s feet. L’Arche was founded in Vanier’s Catholic spirituality which is rooted in the liturgical sacraments, especially baptism and eucharist. One of the ways that Vanier experienced communion with Raphaël and Philippe in the first L’Arche foyer was by praying, worshiping, and going to Mass each day. In the eucharist, Christ is made known in the breaking of the bread and those who partake in this meal encounter

² Vanier, *Becoming Human*, 88.

Christ and each other. Once L'Arche grew beyond its Catholic roots, however, Vanier began to relate the eucharistic presence of Christ with the everyday tasks of care as well as the special liturgical act of foot washing. This enabled non-Catholic and non-Christian L'Arche residents to participate fully in the sacrament of encounter, and so become more human together. Because of his experience of encountering Jesus in the poor and weak, Vanier critiques the institutional Church and its priests and members who have misused their power and authority and exploited or abused the vulnerable. He believes the humiliation the Church has experienced can, however, be used to humble the Church and focus it back on the mystery of Jesus and his presence in the weakest parts of the body of Christ, which as St. Paul says, are the most honorable.³

Hauerwas's ecclesiology is also sacramental in that he sees the church as both a body of disciples who are seeking sanctification through the sacraments *and* because he believes the church acts as an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. The church was founded with the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost so that the story of God's redemption of the world in Jesus Christ might be shared throughout the world. What is key for Hauerwas, is that that story must be *embodied* in order to be fully shared. If Christians do not act out their faith, following (but not exactly imitating) Jesus, then the story Christians believe is true will not be made true in the world. In other words, the peaceable Kingdom will not come (on this side of the *parousia*) if it is not embodied. One of the ways Christians embody their faith is by participating in the liturgical sacraments, especially baptism and eucharist. Through these sacraments—which Hauerwas admits are gestures, but still very important gestures—Christians take the time to orient their lives toward the reality of Jesus and in doing so show the world a

³ For more personal reflections on the power of encountering the mystery of Jesus through L'Arche see Frances M. Young, ed., *Encounter with Mystery: Reflections On L'Arche and Living with Disability* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997).

different way to live. Again, one distinctive way Christians can do this is by recognizing Jesus' presence in the mentally handicapped and welcoming them as full members of the body of Christ, even if that means waiting for them to process to the altar or listening to them read slowly in church.

With all of this in mind, we can begin to understand why Vanier and Hauerwas chose to title their co-authored book *Living Gently in a Violent World*. By showing tenderness and compassion to the weak and in doing so learning to love ourselves and God more fully, we can become people of the heart who show the world a different way of being, one that is an embodiment of the love of Jesus and not a struggle to be the best. For both Hauerwas and Vanier, when it comes to embodying Jesus' love with the mentally handicapped, it is all about *being with*, not *doing for*. This comes up again and again in both their writings and it is essential to their understanding of human relationships and what it means to take the time for peace and gentleness. By *being with* people with intellectual disabilities, we are forced to let go of societal norms based on achievement, efficiency, and productivity, and we are able to then recognize God's special presence in the "other" as well as ourselves because we all beloved children of God. *Being with* people with intellectual disabilities allows our hearts to be opened and our consciences to mature, thus enabling us to know, or intuit, what we should really do for them, i.e. show tenderness, give proper medical care, wash their feet, celebrate their birthdays, let them read in church, etc.

This brings us to the paradox of disability, namely that it is a beautiful thing and an ugly thing. Neither Hauerwas nor Vanier would wish a person to be born with a disability, and yet they both believe that God is uniquely present in the lives of the disabled. How can we celebrate

when someone suffers? We can celebrate because all of us—disabled and abled, weak and strong, normal and different—suffer, but God has redeemed our suffering by claiming it as his own and identifying himself with the poor and weak in Jesus Christ. Because of God’s redemptive narrative and the communion and community of people who embody that story, those distinctions of “normal” and “different,” “weak” and “strong” are washed away, and instead we are each important and valuable members of that community, with different gifts and different roles. Getting to know one another, learning the strengths and weakness of ourselves and the “other,” enables us to work together to embody the Kingdom of God on earth and change the world, one heart at a time.

That being said, there are still some areas for further study that would help the church and those who feel drawn to encounter the mentally handicapped to be more equipped and prepared to do so. Both Vanier and Hauerwas focus much attention on the people with intellectual disabilities who have been neglected and excluded specifically from their immediate families. Though their observations about society’s attitude towards the disabled in general are true, the experience of mentally handicapped people who have a loving and stable home life is relatively absent in their writings. One person I know who has a daughter with Down syndrome is Amy Julia Becker, and she has written books and maintains a blog about her life with Penny as well as issues surrounding pre-natal testing.⁴ Her work is giving voice to the experience of families who *do* welcome and love children with disabilities and is enabling her friends and family to understand more fully the journey they share with Penny and the Beckers.

⁴ See Amy Julia Becker, *A Good and Perfect Gift: Faith, Expectations, and a Little Girl Named Penny* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), Amy Julia Becker, *What Every Woman Needs to Know about Prenatal Testing: Insight from a Mom Who Has Been There* (Patheos Press, 2013), and her blog <http://www.christianitytoday.com/amyjuliabecker/>

For more on pre-natal testing and new genetics see John Swinton and Brian Brock, eds., *Theology, Disability, and the New Genetics: Why Science Needs the Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2007).

Another area to consider further is how best to welcome people with disabilities into the worship and common life of the church and other faith-based organizations. While every congregation will have its own needs relating to its own members, one helpful resource is *That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People with Disabilities*.⁵ This resource is very useful for religious leaders who are looking for best practices and specific guidelines for welcoming people with disabilities. From what to say and not to say, how to provide access to buildings, how to provide opportunities to participate in worship and much more, this handbook is a great place to begin. It would be interesting to research how people with disabilities feel about their place in churches who have, and have not, taken concrete steps toward welcoming them into the community and what they think could be done differently or better. Such research would also benefit from the experiences of able-bodied members of those congregations and their reactions to the inclusion of people with disabilities into the life of the community.

Though Hauerwas and Vanier are both Christian theologians who rely on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ to guide their theology of disability, the question remains regarding the theological underpinnings of other religions' views of intellectual disabilities, as well as secular approaches. Amos Yong provides an overview of disability in Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism in *Theology and Down Syndrome*, and reminds us that "since up to 70 percent of all people with disability world-wide live in regions where the Judeo-Christian worldview is only very marginally represented, if at all, it is incumbent on any theology of disability to at least understand the basic ideas associated with disability in the world's religious traditions."⁶ Though

⁵ National Organization on Disability, *That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People with Disabilities* (Washington, DC: National Organization on Disability, 2000).

⁶ Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, 140-50.

providing such a basis is outside the scope of this thesis, it is important to clarify that Hauerwas's and Vanier's perspectives on disability do come from within cultures with an historically Judeo-Christian worldview. Of course, their point is that those cultures are not living by this worldview (and they believe that the reality of Jesus should determine our relationship with the disabled) but disability takes on a different character outside of that worldview altogether and hearing those voices is necessary for understanding the myriad of experiences of disability.

Finally, respecting this myriad of reactions to people with disabilities is important as we close this comparison of the reactions of Hauerwas and Vanier. While Hauerwas and Vanier have the academic, personal, and spiritual experience to be definitive voices in the area of theology and disability, their expertise and wisdom will mean nothing if we ourselves are unable to put it into practice in relationship with people with intellectual disabilities. Writing theology is not the same as doing theology and both Vanier and Hauerwas emphasize the personal aspect of embodying the love of God in all our relationships. This can be hard, however, and we must respect others who have not yet known the joy of friendship with people with intellectual disabilities, as well as ourselves when we forget about those friendships or find them difficult to maintain. Hauerwas and Vanier have spent much of their lives thinking about and being with people with disabilities and they, too, are still learning how to *be with* and not *do for* them.

I would like to close by challenging us to put this into practice in three specific ways: First, let us change our attitudes; we can only welcome someone who is different than us if we are able to think about them and engage with them with an attitude of humility, respect, and openness. Second, let us change our language; let us stop using "retarded" as an insult or label, and start calling individuals with intellectual disabilities by their names, not their conditions. And

third, let us let people like Toma, Taylor, and Kyle change our lives; isn't it true that real friends change our lives? We can change our attitudes and change our language, but if we do not allow our lives to be changed by such friends with disabilities, then we will miss out on the gifts they can share with us and our lives will suffer for it.

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