

The Politics of Gentleness:

Random Thoughts For A Conversation with Jean Vanier

1. The Gentleness of Jean Vanier

"Love doesn't mean doing extraordinary or heroic things. It means knowing how to do ordinary things with tenderness."¹ Tenderness and gentleness characterize the life and work of Jean Vanier as well as L'Arche movement. Vanier observes that "community is made of the gentle concern that people show each other every day. It is made up of the small gestures, of services and sacrifices which say 'I love you' and I am happy to be with you.' It is letting the other go in front of you, not trying to prove that you are in the right in a discussion; it is taking the small burdens from the other." (pp. 25-26) Gentle, the world of L'Arche is gentle, and I want to use this occasion to explore the politics of gentleness, that is, why gentleness is constitutive of any politics that would be just.²

Gentleness is usually the last thing most of us would associate with the rough and tumble world of politics. Politics, we assume, is about conflict and/or getting your interests satisfied. Gentleness is a characteristic of personal relationships having little to do with questions of power or rule. That is, of course, exactly the dichotomy I want to challenge by calling attention to the role of gentleness in L'Arche.

Which puts me in my usual stance, that is, drawing on Vanier and the work of L'Arche to

¹Jean Vanier, Community and Growth (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1979), p. 220. Page references to Community and Growth will appear in the text.

² "This occasion" was a two day "Conversation with Jean Vanier and Stanley Hauerwas" at the University of Aberdeen in September, 2006. I am extremely grateful for Professor John Swinton for making this conversation happen.

develop a critique of current assumptions about ethics and politics. So I am "using" Vanier and his friends yet one more time, but thanks to Hans Reinders I am not going to apologize for writing "about" the intellectually disabled.³ Rather I am going to make the most from being drawn into the world of L'Arche and try as best I can to say why I think that world has so much to teach us about how we should live to enhance the moral and political character of our lives.

To focus on gentleness does create a rhetorical problem. My style is polemical and many, I suspect, would not characterize my work as gentle or tender. Accordingly I worry that my attempt to argue for the significance of gentleness for Vanier and L'Arche may betray what he and L'Arche are about. My only defense is that God has given us different tasks. My task has been to put Vanier's wisdom into conversation with philosophical and political positions I fear are antithetical if not outright threats to those we call intellectually disabled. That has meant, however, that my writing style is aggressive and confrontational.

However I do not want the way I argue to belie the significance of gentleness. Which means I hope I will prove to be an adequate listener because learning to listen is basic to the gentle character of life in L'Arche. But I am an academic and academics are notorious bad listeners. We always think we know what someone is going to say before they say anything and we have a response to what we thought they would say in spite of what they may have actually said. To learn to listen well it turns out may require learning to be a gentle person.

That is particularly true if Vanier is right that to learn to listen can be quite painful. For example Vanier observes,

³Hans Reinders, "The Virtue of Writing Appropriately or Is Stanley Hauerwas Right in Thinking He Should Not Write Anymore on the Mentally Handicapped?" in God, Truth and Witness: Engaging Stanley Hauerwas, edited by Gregory Jones, Reinhard Hutter, and Rosalee Velloso Ewell. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005), pp. 53-70.

Communities which start by serving the poor must gradually discover the gifts that those poor people bring. The communities start in generosity; they must grow to listen. In the end, the most important thing is not to do things for people who are poor and in distress, but to help them to have confidence in themselves...Some communities grow by listening to their members' needs for formation and well-being. This growth is usually material: the communities go for the best and most comfortable buildings, where everyone has their own room. These communities will die fairly quickly. Other communities will grow by listening to the cry of the poor. Most of the time, this leads them to become poorer themselves, so that they can be closer to the poor people. (pp. 97-98.)

"Most of the time this leads them to become poorer themselves." What might that mean if I am to listen to Vanier? I do not want to become poorer. I want to remain the academic who can pretend to defend those with mental disability by being more articulate than those I am criticizing. In short I do not want to learn to be gentle. I want to be a warrior on behalf of Vanier doing battle against the politics that threaten to destroy his gentle communities. Vanier, of course, is no less a warrior, but where I see an enemy to be defeated he sees a wound that needs healing.⁴

⁴The gentle character of Vanier's work I suspect tempt some to miss his quite critical and biting comments. For example he observes in Community and Growth that "Marxist philosophers take the struggle against injustice and class warfare as their starting point, rather than an attitude of trust and wonder. That is why there are no Marxist communities, but only groupings of militants. If people come together just to fight, there is no love for or trust in the other; there is no thanksgiving. A community must always remain a community of children--but children who are intellectually conscious and have a vision." (p. 69) Vanier can be quite critical, moreover, of Christian communities. For example he notes that at one time religious orders may have been too closed in on

According to Vanier we all carry a deep wound, that is, the wound of our loneliness. That is why we find it hard to be alone trying to heal our aloneness by joining a community. But to belong to belong cannot help but lead to disappointment. What we must realize is that "this wound is inherent in the human condition and that what we have to do is walk with it instead of fleeing from it. We cannot accept it until we discover that we are loved by God just as we are, and that the Holy Spirit, in a mysterious way, is living at the centre of the wound." (p. 94)

This is the radical insight I take to be at the heart of Vanier and L'Arche making possible the gentleness that heals. The stories Vanier tells of the handicapped are often stories of loneliness not easily overcome. For example he tells the story of Daniel whose disabilities were so severe his parents did not want him which meant after being put in one institution after another he ended up in a psychiatric hospital. Vanier observes even at L'Arche he would now and again flip out of reality "hiding his anguish and himself behind hallucinations. He had constructed thick walls around his heart that prevented him from being who he was. He felt guilty for existing, because nobody wanted him as he was."⁵ Vanier observes that the heart of a child is so easily hurt and the hurt becomes a wound around which we build walls of protection. Walls so constructed can only be breached by gentleness.

2. The Politics of Gentleness

But what does this have to do with politics. I think it helps illumine why, as Hans Reinders

themselves and rightly recognized they must be more open to society, but they often threw off their traditions in a way that resulted in the loss of identity. p. 75.

⁵Jean Vanier, Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus Through the Gospel of John (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), p. 145.

has argued, liberal political theory has found it difficult to provide moral standing for people with mental disabilities. According to Reinders, at the heart of liberal political arrangements is the assumption that "individuals are free to live their own lives as they prefer, provided that they allow other people equal freedom to do the same, and provided that they accept and receive a fair share in the burden and benefits of the social cooperation."⁶ But people with mental disabilities from a liberal perspective are judged to lack

to a greater or lesser extent the powers of reasons and free will. Since these are powers that bring substance to the core values of the liberal view of public morality, mentally disabled people never acquire full moral standing in this view. This is because its moral community is constituted by "persons" and these, in turn, are constituted by the powers of reason and free will. This conception of the person is particularly problematic with respect to the inclusion of severely mentally disabled citizens, since on the liberal view only persons in the sense of rational moral agents can be recipients of equal concern and respect.⁷

I fear it may sound over dramatic, but what Reinders describes is what I take to be the wound that animates liberal political theory and practice--a wound, moreover, that is well protected by walls not easily breached because they seem so reasonable. It is to Martha Nussbaum's great credit that she has acknowledged that liberal political theory, as exemplified in the work of John Rawls, has

⁶Hans Reinders, The Future of the Disabled in Liberal Society: An Ethical Analysis (Notre Dame: Univeristy of Notre Dame Press, 2000), p. 14.

⁷Reinders, pp. 15-16.

difficulty in recognizing the status of the mentally disabled. In her book, Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership, Nussbaum observes, as Reinders argued, that the parties assumed to have the status necessary to negotiate the conditions of a just society "are human beings possessed of no serious mental or physical impairments."⁸

Nussbaum takes as her task to remedy the failure of liberal political theory and practice to include the disabled without abandoning the fundamental insights of liberalism. She does so in the name of three mentally disabled people: Sessa, the daughter of philosopher Eva Kittay and her husband Jeffrey, who will never walk, talk, or read because of her cerebral palsy and mental retardation; Nussbaum's nephew Arthur who is without any social skills (Asperger's syndrome) and unable to learn in school but is mechanically adept; and Jamie Berube, who was born with Down syndrome, and is the son of Michael Berube and Janet Lyon who are literary critics.⁹ That Nussbaum names real people I take to be an indication that this is not just a theoretical exercise for her.

According to Nussbaum at the heart of liberal political theory is the attempt to secure social cooperation on the basis of mutual advantage for the contracting parties. A "strong rationalism" informs the liberal project in the hope that an account of political life can be justified that avoids as much as possible appeals to intuitions and prejudices.¹⁰ Therefore liberalism seeks to provide an

⁸Martha Nussbaum, Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 17.

⁹Nussbaum, pp. 96-98. For my discussion of Jamie Berube, see my chapter, "Timeful Friends: Living with the Handicapped," in Critical Reflections on Stanelly Hauerwas' Theology of Disability: disabling Society, Enabling Theology, edited by John Swinton. (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 2004), pp. 11-25 and Michael Berube's response, "Making Yourself Useful," pp. 31-43.

¹⁰Nussbaum, p. 53.

account of justice that does not depend on the presumption of altruism, but rather assumes an admittedly fictive bargaining process that establishes fundamental principles of mutual advantage.

Nussbaum does not call into question these fundamental presuppositions of the liberal political project. Yet she acknowledges that to so understand the character of justice has resulted in people of disability being omitted from consideration. This is at least partly the result of conflating the question "By whom are society's basic principles designed?" with the question "For whom are society's basic principles designed?"¹¹ Nussbaum thinks because these questions are conflated liberal political theory ends with a counter-intuitive result because those with mental disability are excluded. Such a result is counter-intuitive because, at least in our time,

the issue of justice for people with disabilities is prominent on the agenda of every decent society, the omission of all of them from participation in the situation of basic political choice looks problematic, given the evident capacity of many if not all of them for choice; and their omission from the group of persons for whom society's most basic principles are chosen is more problematic still.¹²

It would seem all Rawls, or other like minded liberal theorist, needs to do to respond to

¹¹Nussbaum, p. 16.

¹²Nussbaum, p. 18. Nussbaum's appeal to "the agenda of every decent society" looks very much like an appeal to an intuition. She defends her "intuitions" by arguing that her account is no more or no less dependent on intuitions than Rawls's account of "justice as fairness." She argues that like Rawls her account will depend on how the background of "considered judgments" are open to revision. (pp.173-176) I am sympathetic to Nussbaum's defense of her intuitions, but I remain unconvinced that her account is consistent with the "strong rationalism" at the heart of Rawls's theory of justice.

Nussbaum's concern for the disabled is to let the parties that participate in the original bargaining game know that some of them may have disabilities for which provision will need to be made. But Rawls is unable to accept this suggestion, Nussbaum argues, because if he did so he "would lose a simple and straightforward way of measuring who is the least well-off in society, a determination that he needs to make for purposes of thinking about material distribution and redistribution, and which he makes with reference to income and wealth alone."¹³ It is also the case that Rawls, like the social contract tradition in general, simply does not take into consideration impairments that are relatively rare.

Nussbaum argues, therefore, that rather than focusing on income and wealth as Rawls does a capabilities approach is necessary if the mentally handicapped are not to be unfairly excluded. According to Nussbaum to focus on capabilities means that we are fundamentally bodily beings whose rationality is but one aspect of our animality. Therefore our "bodily need, including our need for care, is a feature of our rationality and our sociability."¹⁴ To focus on capabilities means the variation of needs can be respected making possible discriminations such as why children need more protein than adults or, more generally, that it is often the case that some need more care than others and why that care must be individualized.¹⁵ Nussbaum thinks, moreover, such care is rightly understood to be a matter of justice.

One cannot help but be sympathetic with Nussbaum's attempt to help us better appreciate the needs of the disabled. However as Alan Ryan points out it is not clear that the concept of capabilities advances the concept of justice. For the very notion of capabilities depends on close

¹³Nussbaum, pp. 113-114.

¹⁴Nussbaum, p. 160.

analysis of practices that allow correlations to be made between needs of a particular person and what will satisfy those needs. But that kind of concreteness is not available as long as Nussbaum is determined to maintain the Rawls's liberal framework.¹⁶

Ryan quite rightly observes that it is not as if Nussbaum is not persuasive about the needs and capacities of the disabled, but it is not clear why our, by which I assume he means those of us who are not disabled, relation to the disabled is a matter of injustice. What, Ryan asks,

would be lost by saying that the duties are stringent, inescapable, and urgent, but not duties of justice? Nussbaum shows--over and over--that no theory that explains justice as a contract for mutual advantage will show that these duties toward the disabled are a matter of justice. There may be little mutual advantage for the person who helps Arthur. Do we need a different theory of justice or should we say that many duties are grounded directly in the needs of beings to who duties are owed, but are not a matter of justice? What difference does it make which we say?¹⁷

Nussbaum might well say in response it makes all the difference what we say because if we do not understand what is done in the care of Sessa, Arthur, and Jamie we may abandon them to a world that cannot be trusted to care for them. They are lucky because they had parents that cared, but what happens if you do not have parents that care? Yet the problem with Nussbaum's attempt to

¹⁵Nussbaum, p. 170.

¹⁶Alan Ryan, "Cosmopolitans," New York Review of Books, LIII, 11 (June 22, 2006), pp. 48-49.

¹⁷Ryan, p. 49.

provide a theory to insure that Sesha, Arthur, and Jamie be cared for is that it is just that--a theory. It is a theory, moreover, in which the wound of loneliness is made a necessity in order that we might be protected from one another.

In contrast Reinders argues that there is no point to try to argue with someone who is a skeptical spectator that they should care about the disabled. Rather it is crucial for a liberal society that people exist who are willing to be engaged in the practice of caring for the disabled. According to Reinders no public policy or theory can resolve the problem of what appears to be the burden of the lives of the disabled unless "it can tap resources that motivate citizens to value the commitment that it requires."¹⁸ For whatever significance can be found in sharing one's life with another person, a significance that will usually come as a surprise, cannot be found outside the activity itself.

Which finally brings me back to the gentleness that characterizes the work of L'Arche. In an early essay, "L'Arche: Its History and Vision," Vanier provides an account of how he became Jean Vanier. He first met people with mental handicaps in 1963. Father Thomas Phillippe, a Dominican priest, was a chaplain for a home of 30 men in a small village called Trosly-Breuil.¹⁹ Vanier was teaching philosophy at St. Michaels College at the University of Toronto, but through Father Thomas he met and begin to live with Philippe and Raphael in a Trosly. Vanier reports,

¹⁸Reinders, p. 207.

¹⁹In his commentary on the gospel of John, Vanier compares the effect Pere Thomas Philippe had on him with Jesus calling of the disciples. He notes tht on leaving the navy in 1950 he went to the community funded by him and "his presence changed my life--or rather orientated my life in a new way. By his very presence, Pere thomas seemed to communicate a presence of God that filled me with inner pece and silence and drew new life from with me. I knew very quickly that I was called to become his disciple, or spiritual son." Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), p. 41.

We began living together, buying food, cooking, cleaning, working in the garden, etc. I knew really nothing about the needs of handicapped people. All I wanted to do was to create community with them. Of course, I did have a tendency to tell them what to do; I organized and planned the day without asking what their opinion or desire. I suppose this was necessary in some ways for we did not know each other and they came from a very structured situation. But I had a lot to learn about listening to the needs of handicapped people; I had a lot to discover about their capacity to grow.²⁰

In short Vanier had to be taught how to be gentle. For it is not easy to learn to be gentle with the mentally disabled for, as was indicated above, they also suffer from the wound of loneliness. Which means they too can ask for too much which means gentleness requires the slow and patient work necessary to create trust. Crucial for the development of trust is that assistants discover the darkness, brokenness, and selfishness shaped by their loneliness. According to Vanier through the struggle required for us to discover we are like the mentally handicapped—wounded—we discover how much "we need Jesus, and his Paraclete. For without them we cannot enter into this life of compassion and communion with our weaker brothers and sisters."²¹

In case anyone wonders if Vanier recognized the political implications of what he was learning he tells us that through his contact with men and women with intellectual disabilities,

²⁰Jean Vanier, "L'Arche: Its History and Vision," in The Church and Disabled Persons, edited by Griff Hogan. (Springfield: Templegate, 1983), p. 52. The story of L'Arche and Vanier has now been told by Kathryn Spink in her, The Miracle, The Message, The Story: Jean Vanier and L'Arche (New Jersey: Hidden Spring, 2006).

²¹Vanier, "L'Arche: Its History and Vision," p. 59.

I discovered then how divided and fragmented our societies are. On the one hand are those who are healthy and well integrated into society; on the other are those who are excluded, on its margins. As in Aristotle's day, there are still masters and slaves. I realized that peace could not prevail while no attempt was made to span the gulf separating different cultures, different religions, and even different individuals.²²

Jean Vanier wrote his dissertation on Aristotle. He knows well that Aristotle thought the test of any good polity was revealed by its ability to sustain friendship between people of virtue. Aristotle, however, would not have thought it possible for a friendship to exist between those that are mentally handicapped and those that are not. Yet Vanier believes that friendship is what L'Arche is about. That he does so is not only a challenge to Aristotle's understanding of friendship but to the presupposition of liberal political theory and practice which tries to envision a politics in which friendship is an after-thought.

That is why I am bold to suggest that the gentle character of the practices that constitute the work of L'Arche are not peculiar to that work, but rather necessary for any polity that would be good. For gentleness is a virtue that depends on, as Hans Reinders observes, that we learn to see

the other person is 'given' to us in the sense that, prior to rules and principles of social morality, the presence of the other in our lives constitutes our responsibility. Moral responsibility arises neither from contractual relationships nor from the cooperative

²²Jean Vanier, Made for Happiness: Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle, translated by Kathryn Spink. (London: DLT, 2001), p. xiii.

exchange between independent individuals. Instead it arises from the nature of the moral self that discovers itself within a network of social relationships...The benefits bestowed by love and friendship are consequential rather than conditional, which explains why human life that is constituted by these relationships is appropriately experienced as a gift. A society that accepts responsibility for dependent others such as the mentally disabled will do so because there are sufficient people who accept something like this account as true.²³

These are not small matters. Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell in their book, Cultural Location of Disability, advocate a cultural model of disability in the hope that "to theorize a political act of renaming that designates disability as a site of resistance and a source of cultural agency previously suppressed--at least to the extent that groups can successfully rewrite their own definition in view of a damaging material and linguistic heritage."²⁴ Such resistance is necessary because they argue the very designation of disability in modernity represented a scourge and a promise: "its very presence signaled a debauched present of cultural degeneration that was tending to regress toward a prior state of primitivism, while at the same time it seemed to promise that its absence would mark the completion of modernity as a cultural project."²⁵ But I confess I am not convinced that a cultural studies model of disability will provide the resistance they so desire.

Rather I think Vanier has given us through the witness of L'Arche the kind of gift we need to

²³Reinders, p. 17.

²⁴Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell, Cultural Locations of Disability (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 10.

²⁵Snyder and Mitchell, p. 31.

help us overwhelm the wound of loneliness that grips our lives in the name of freedom. Such a gift Vanier rightly thinks to be political. For without examples like L'Arche we will assume there is no alternative to the politics of distrust that derives from the wound of our loneliness.²⁶ For I fear many of us, like Daniel, feel guilty for existing and as a result seek to protect ourselves with walls thickened by our refusal to acknowledge our vulnerability. Vanier exemplifies a way to be with one another, to overcome our walls of protection, we could not "think up." We do well, therefore, to attend to the lessons of L'Arche on how to be, even in the most difficult relationships, gentle.

3. God and gentleness

To try to suggest the political significance of gentleness seems quite enough a task for any one paper, but I cannot conclude without exploring what may be an even greater challenge. Put simply I wonder if the kind of gentleness constitutive of L'Arche is possible without God. Vanier's written work is suffused with his unmistakable Catholic convictions and piety. Indeed in many of the quotations from his work already cited he makes clear that without Jesus and the Holy Spirit the work of L'Arche would be impossible.

Yet in Made for Happiness Vanier observes that many people today have no religious faith

²⁶In his book on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Tradition in the ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre: Relativism, Thomism, and Philosophy (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Book, 2004), Christopher Lutz calls attention to an extremely interesting example MacIntyre gives in his essay, "Can Medicine Dispense with a Theological Perspective on Human Nature?" that illumines the political significance of the virtue of gentleness. MacIntyre quotes a German physician, Dr. F Holzel, who said about the euthanasia program in 1940, "The new measures are so convincing that I had hoped to be able to discard all personal considerations. But it is one thing to approve state measures with conviction, and another to carry them out yourself down to the last consequences...If this leads you to put the children's home in other hands, it would mean a painful loss for me. However, I prefer to see clearly and to recognize that I am too gentle for this work...Heil Hitler!" Lutz comments that such a comment reveals that though real virtues can appear as vices they none less function as virtues. p. 103.

yet it remains important for us to be able to communicate with them at a rational level in order to reflect upon things human. He rightly says that many of Aristotle's insights are valid for any ethics. For according to Vanier being human does not consist in obeying laws, but rather to be human "means becoming as perfectly accomplished as possible. If we do not become fully accomplished, something is lost to the whole of humanity. For Aristotle this accomplishment derives from the exercise of the most perfect activity: that of seeking the truth in all things, shunning lies and illusions, acting in accordance with justice, transcending oneself to act for the good of others in society."²⁷

I have no reason to question Vanier's use of Aristotle as a way to sustain a conversation with those that do not share his Christian convictions. With Charles Pinches I have explored some of the same resources that Aristotle provides for helping Christians understand what it means to be Christian.²⁸ With Vanier I believe we were created for happiness which turns out, as Aquinas suggests, to be nothing less than to be befriended by God. But to be befriended by God is surely to require a transformation of self not unlike learning to be gentled into being by being befriended by a person as unlike me as the mentally disabled. Accordingly Aristotle can help us make connections with those that do not share our faith, but it remains the case that what we believe as Christians may finally "explode" Aristotle's categories.

Which means, I think, that if gentleness is a virtue constitutive of politics then Christians cannot help but be in tension with the liberal political arrangements. For one of the reasons

²⁷Vanier, Made for Happiness, p. xiv.

²⁸Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 3-51.

Nussbaum finds a Rawlsian account attractive in spite of the exclusion of the disabled is that such an account

is articulated in terms of free-standing ethical ideas only, without reliance on metaphysical and epistemological doctrines (such as those of the soul, or revelation, or the denial of either of these) that would divide citizens along lines of religion or comprehensive ethical doctrine. It is therefore hoped that this conception can be the object of an overlapping consensus among citizens who otherwise have different comprehensive views.²⁹

Which makes it all the more important that L'Arche not hide its lamp under a bushel basket. If L'Arche loses its theological voice I think it will not only be a loss for L'Arche, but for any politics, and in particular those determined by liberal political arrangements, in which L'Arche exists. All I am asking is for Vanier to be willing to wash the feet of those who do not share his faith. In his commentary on the Gospel of John Vanier reflects on the problem of power by commenting on Jesus's washing of the feet of his disciples (John 13: 1-17). He notes that all societies are built on the model of a pyramid with they powerful, the rich, and the intelligent at the top. Yet Jesus takes the place of the slave by washing his disciples feet. Vanier confesses that he is deeply moved when someone with disabilities wahes his feet. That someone with disabilities should wash the feet of Vanier is why the politics of the gospel is, as Vanier puts it, of a "world upside

²⁹Nussbaum, p. 163.

down."³⁰

Vanier observes that it is tempting for those that would wash the feet of the disabled to assume the model of the pyramid of power in the name of the service they perform. For example he suggests after the conversion of Constantine in 313 church and state became intertwined with the result that many bishops and abbots acted as if they were princes and lords. The dominant habits of the society became the habits of the church corrupting the church. Yet Francis of Assisi came refusing to attack the institution of the church, which included many good people, but choose the other way by his commitment to the poor.³¹

Reflecting on Francis's Admonitions to the heads of his fraternities, Vanier notes,

Followers of Jesus will continually be caught up in the paradox. Shepherds, teachers and leaders are necessary. They have power, but how should they exercise that power in the spirit of the gospels? How should they give a clear message about the truth of Jesus' message? How should they speak out against the powers of wealth? How should they be servant-leaders who humbly give their lives?³²

Vanier answers: "When the poor and weak are present, they prevent us from falling into the trap of power--even the power to do good--of thinking that it is we who are the good ones, who must save the Savior and his church."³³ Which means the politics of gentleness cannot be a triumphalistic

³⁰Vanier, Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus Through the Gospel of John, p. 228.

³¹Vanier, Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John, pp. 236-237.

³²Vanier, Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John, pp. 237-238.

³³Vanier, Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John, p. 238.

politics, but that is why it is all the more important that the theological voice of L'Arche not be silenced. It is not for us as Christians to regret the loss of Christendom, but it means it is all the more important that the care, the gentle care exemplified by Jesus in washing his disciples feet, that gentleness exemplified in L'Arche, be unapologetically a witness to the One who would save us through the cross. Otherwise how would the world know, the world as described by Rawls and Nussbaum, that our loneliness has been overwhelmed.