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*“Transformation” in L’Arche:  
A Mimetic Account*

Those with disabilities are among the lowest and most marginalized in most societies, are the least ‘wanted’, the least desired, people. Increasingly, fetuses are aborted if disability is detected. If God chooses ‘things that are not’ then these are signs of ‘not being’, communities of the sorts of people whose abortion is widely encouraged. To desire them for their own sake, to have them as the focus of respect, love and friendship in a covenant community, to honour their names and tell their stories, is a radical challenge to the church as well as to the rest of society.

DAVID FORD<sup>1</sup>

In *Our Life Together*, Jean Vanier’s recently published “memoir in letters” which consists of a large collection of circular letters which he wrote during the founding and subsequent expansion of L’Arche, we see in an interestingly sequential way how his desire “do good” to the poor was both changed and empowered by his growing sense that the poor were “doing good” to him. “Little did I know,” he writes, “that I was on the road to an amazing discovery, a gold mine of truth, where the weak and the strong, the rich and the poor would be brought together and find peace, where those who were rejected could heal and transform those who had rejected them.”<sup>2</sup> Now an international network of communities with and for people with mental disabilities, with homes in over 30 countries, L’Arche is not unaware of its smallness and fragility in the midst of the world and its suffering. But considering that the L’Arche movement, founded “in the spirit of the Gospel and on the Beatitudes that Jesus preached,”<sup>3</sup> is very much a contemporary instance of the principle “the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Luke 20:17), its particular experience and message of hope may not be extraneous to the challenges we face.

Unlike, for example, Gil Bailie’s sense of Christian conversion his book *Violence Unveiled*,<sup>4</sup> Jean Vanier’s notion of transformation does not essentially involve a recognition of our complicity in the structures of “sacred violence,” or at least not in so many words. There is indeed darkness and violence within us, according to Vanier, and recognizing these (as well as our more common) “shadow areas” is a very important step on the road to healing and wholeness. But these shadow areas are in a sense only

symptoms of our “brokenness;” though real and significant enough they are ultimately reflections of the protective barriers we have formed around our wounded hearts. Transformation, for Vanier, is more essentially a matter of recognizing and integrating our weakness and vulnerability – the feelings of emptiness, guilt, and anguish that in his view provoke the fears and compulsions that lead us to exclude others. As we gradually learn to accept ourselves as we are, with our gifts and our limitations, we become able to accept others as they are; and so the transformation of individual hearts is intimately linked with the weakening of barriers between people. In Vanier’s vision of the good society, weak and vulnerable people have an integral role to play in helping us to recognize and accept our weakness and vulnerability, and in this way to become more fully and more profoundly human.

Although there are significant differences between Vanier’s sense of conversion and that of mimetic theory, his overall account interestingly admits of a Girardian reading. What we deny, exclude, or cast out in the normal process of growing up, according to Vanier, is the pain of “broken communion” – times in each and every person’s life when we felt rejected, not loved by our parents. The anguish stemming from our first experiences of love and rejection quickly changes into a feeling of guilt or shame (“if I am not loved then I am unlovable, I am bad”) which is unbearable and potentially incapacitating. So we block these feelings off, and proceed to compensate for them through various forms of self-assertion, and by doing things that will attract the admiration of others. If such is the normal and healthy response to the pain of broken communion, these merely suppressed and hidden feelings can manifest themselves throughout our lives in difficulties in relationship (notably in the inability to find a proper distance in relationship), in the fear of authority, the fear of those who are different, in various compulsions to success, and sometimes in a perverse attachment to our own sense of victimization. For Vanier, the journey to wholeness is (inter alia) about discovering and accepting this place of pain and vulnerability, and gradually owning it as a part of our humanity. In a certain sense, it is about coming to see our inner wounds and poverty as having been “unjustly” excluded.

In this paper, I would like to consider Jean Vanier’s notion of transformation more fully from the perspective of mimetic theory. If the theory allows us to see the basic

structure of Vanier's account, then it may, to some extent, illuminate and confirm the special relationship of reciprocity that is at the heart of L'Arche.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Vanier's testimony to the transformative effects of relationships with people with disabilities may suggest possible connections between the work of L'Arche and what I understand is the ongoing discussion within COV&R on the topic of "positive" mimesis.<sup>6</sup>

In the first section I will contextualize and explain the "scapegoat" structure of Vanier's account in more detail. My primary source will be his most autobiographical book *Our Journey Home*, a work published about the same time as *Becoming Human*, a Canadian national bestseller based on his 1998 Massey Lectures.<sup>7</sup> Although I find little in Vanier's writings to suggest that he is particularly acquainted with mimetic theory, it seems relevant to mention that he has for at least the last ten years been attempting to articulate what he has learned in L'Arche in distinctively humanistic or "anthropological" terms.<sup>8</sup>

In section 2 I will invoke Rebecca Adams's very helpful notion of loving or "creative" mimesis<sup>9</sup> as a bridge between these two forms of representation. Although Adams's paradigm of positive mimetic desire seems to me basically adequate to task of identifying and at least partly explaining the transformation of people with disabilities in the context of L'Arche, who often arrive with very wounded and broken self-images, I will suggest that it only begins to explain what on Vanier's account may be positively received from them. In filling in this picture on the basis of Vanier's conversion narrative we will have to be open to the possibility of a form of reciprocity which is *asymmetrical* and yet in important respects *complimentary*.

In the third and final section I will briefly comment on the ethics of Adams's proposal, with a view to drawing out a lesson for politics. While it is important to say at the outset that Vanier's "model of conversion" has no immediate political implications, as I think he has always maintained, he does in fact attach political importance to the human possibilities contained in L'Arche, or rather in community properly understood.<sup>10</sup> With this dimension in mind, I will suggest in closing at least one way in which L'Arche may have something to offer the politics of "catastrophe and conversion."

[1] "SCAPEGOAT" PATTERN

As Kathrin Spink observes in her excellent biographical history of Jean Vanier and L'Arche, Vanier's writings are "very much a result of his life and commitment. As he grew and his understanding of what he was living deepened, so his books reflected that evolution."<sup>11</sup>

Born in 1928 into a prominent French Canadian family, Vanier enrolled in the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth during the Second World War and trained as a naval officer. He left the Navy in 1950 to live at Eau Vive ("Living Waters"), a Christian international centre located outside of Paris. Here he studied philosophy and theology, and eventually completed a doctoral thesis on the ethics of Aristotle through the Institut Catholique in Paris. Then in 1964, at the age of 36, inspired and encouraged by his mentor Father Thomas Phillipe, he invited two men with developmental disabilities to share a house with him in the village of Trosly-Breuil, in the north of France, and so founded L'Arche.<sup>12</sup> Although Vanier's circular letters bear witness to his extraordinary energy and vision as he traveled the continents over the following decades announcing L'Arche and supporting new communities, he tends to characterize this third period of his life as a time when he grew emotionally and developed his capacity for relationship. In any case, Vanier's conception of human *wholeness* as consisting of a balance between competence, co-operation and "communion" may be seen as reflecting these different comprehensive commitments.

Assuming that what typically enables individuals to find their place in modern society is a measure of competence in some field as well as the ability to get along with others, it would seem that many people have difficulties in their personal relationships. In Vanier's experience,<sup>13</sup> the source of these difficulties is often our fear of and ambivalence towards love. Genuine love (or communion) implies vulnerability, according to Vanier, and therefore the lowering of the protective barriers we have formed around our hearts. This means we can be easily hurt. Although we each have a deep thirst for communion, a longing to be close to another in a permanent way, we naturally shy away from its possible implications; and this basic ambivalence can produce more or less pathological effects the more we deviate from what Vanier considers to be the true source and fundamental calling of our lives. Before entering in to Vanier's account of how

relationships with people with disabilities can help to unlock these inner barriers, I will just briefly recapitulate the sense of anthropology that underlies his substantive ethics.

We have seen how, for Vanier, our psyches are in a certain sense founded on the exclusion of the pain and disorder of broken communion, which is to say on the rupture of this intimate exchange between a young child and particularly its mother, in which there is trust and a kind of “to-and-fro of love.”<sup>14</sup> It is from their crucial first experiences of love that children learn that they are lovable. Anguish arises from the eventual rupture of this communion, and children implicitly draw the conclusion that they are unlovable, that they are bad. This mistake (though Vanier does not use the word) is in a definite sense at the foundation of their social being, for they respond to it by erecting barriers, and later by seeking the approval and admiration of others. This is, roughly speaking, the genesis of what the theologian David Ford calls the “protective packages” of individuals and groups.<sup>15</sup>

Read on Girardian lines as a myth of origin, Vanier’s account of individual human development contains not only the exclusion of our primal guilt and anguish, and the mystification of this “violence” through the erection of a psychological wall. There is also the cultural system that is founded on this original exclusion, the “false ‘I’” or ego, along with the (ritual) repetition of the actions and behaviours that give meaning and order to life. On this picture, prohibitions get a certain representation in Vanier’s sense that “external” walls between individuals mirror and reflect the walls around their wounded hearts – walls which are of course designed to keep the primal disorder at bay.

Without making too much of this schema, Vanier’s philosophy of human growth really does move towards the identification and rehabilitation of the “victim,” which is to say the feelings of guilt and anguish that he claims are deeply buried in our unconscious. As he writes, “Inner healing and peace come gradually as we penetrate these shadow areas without being completely overwhelmed by them....”<sup>16</sup> As we gradually open up our “protective packages” we can let go of the fears and compulsions that govern us in unconscious ways, and so find ourselves free to embrace universal values of truth, love and justice. Needless to say this conversion from the “way of competition” to the “way of the heart” can involve anguish.<sup>17</sup> Granting that there is a temptation in human life to “want to be other than [we] are, to want to be someone else, even to want to be God,”

Vanier sees the truthful acceptance of our humanity as the key to growth in love and service to others.

If this process of “becoming ourselves” is largely internal, it can be set in motion through an encounter with one who is weak. While much of this remains a mystery,<sup>18</sup> I think it is possible to represent at least important aspects of it using the resources of mimetic theory.

## [2] TRANSFORMATION

In taking up L’Arche’s experience of mutually transforming relationships<sup>19</sup> from the standpoint of mimetic theory, we mustn’t omit to mention Vanier’s own formative relationships with good and stable models, notably his father, General Georges Vanier, a war hero and diplomat who in 1959 was appointed as Canada’s first French Canadian Governor General (and who has since been nominated for beatification); and Père Thomas Philippe, the French Dominican priest who was Jean’s teacher and spiritual director when he left the Navy. Considering Jean Vanier’s achievement and the apparently associated fact that these models never became for him fascinating rivals, we might see these relationships as excellent examples of what James Alison calls “pacific mimesis:” a term which seems to cover both external mediation as well as the non-rivalistic desire that issues from God-centredness.<sup>20</sup>

If it was Jean’s relationship with Father Thomas that gave him, by his own account, “the deepest inner freedom,”<sup>21</sup> it was his relationship with people with disabilities that led him back to the “earth” of his body, and to the “home” of his heart. This “journey home” has, he claims, brought him a greater openness to and acceptance of others as they are; and he has been in an excellent position to witness similar transformations in others. It is roughly on account of this twofold dynamic, primarily inward but also carrying real implications for how we live with and relate to those around us, that Vanier has come to see the role of people with disabilities as “a kind of cement” for our competitive and often fragmented societies. “They have a special part to play,” he writes, “in the healing of hearts and in destroying the barriers which separate people from one another and prevent them from living happily and humanly.”<sup>22</sup> It is the first of these terms that I would like to consider here.

In her paper “Loving Mimesis and Girard’s ‘Scapegoat of the Text’: A Creative Reassessment of Mimetic Desire,” Rebecca Adams provides a very careful analysis of René Girard’s concept of mimesis with a view to uncovering what she identifies as the theory’s “scapegoat” of positive or creative desire. Thus substantiating the general criticism that mimetic theory does not provide an adequate account of positive desire, Adams locates the source of the problem in the theory’s assumed dualism between subject and object, which generates the appearance of inevitable rivalry when subjects of imitation are conceived of as necessarily seeking to appropriate the same objects. Rethinking this presupposition, Adams considers the case of a so-called proto-subject who imitates a mediator’s desire for his or her *subjectivity*,<sup>23</sup> and concludes that this possibility (Model 2d in the text) captures “a singular set of conditions under which mimetic desire is nonviolent, even primordially *creative*.” This simple but seemingly far reaching move both rehabilitates the theory’s “scapegoat” of constructive desire and relegates, she believes, the whole issue of rivalry and the scapegoat mechanism to a second order reality.

As Adams writes in her prefatory remarks of 2006, her published paper “attempts to show how mimetic theory can be made compatible with already existing theologies of creation and worldviews which stress creativity as fundamental, so that those threads can now be developed and explored....”<sup>24</sup> In this spirit of exploration, I would like to submit that her normative conception of “appropriate desire” (which she sees as a model of *genuine love*) is substantially in line with what Vanier describes as the vision of L’Arche: that is “to help people with handicaps to own their worth and beauty, to help them to have confidence in themselves, with their particular gifts, to grow and do beautiful things, to change the negative images they have of themselves into positive ones.”<sup>25</sup> Although Vanier may have very specific ideas about how this desire is to be communicated to those with intellectual and sometimes severe physical disabilities (he has much to say, for example, about non-verbal attitudes and on the importance of touch) I don’t think he would dispute Adams’s contention that affirming the subjectivity of others – particularly of the weak and downtrodden – is what God desires.

Taking this point of basic unity for granted, I wish to observe that Adams’s paper does not say very much about what the mediator of appropriate desire stands to *receive*

for his or her loving and empowering intentions. Given her purpose of showing that mimesis does not necessarily lead to rivalry and violence, it seems enough for her to point out that the object of desire in Model 2d – the subjectivity of the proto-subject – is by definition not something that can be appropriated by the mediator. Yet Adams goes on to observe that “the mediator and proto-subject both get or acquire something through this act of acquisitive mimesis—that is greater subjectivity, desire, and relationship than either had before.” On Adams’s account, therefore, there a certain not-necessarily-conflictual ‘agency’ benefit to affirming the subjectivity of another; but between this rather formal stipulation and its potential to create what she calls “an escalating circle of desire” she seems to steer away from the issue of what the relationship between a (strong) mediator and (weak) proto-subject might reciprocally involve.

At the risk of overgeneralizing the very particular experiences on which Vanier draws, I can detect in his writings at least three kinds of encounters that can supplement our awareness and understanding of this.

The first is that in which the person with disabilities responds to genuine love by opening up in *trust*. This trust is a kind of *self-giving* which in itself has the ability to touch and awaken the heart, if also sometimes the fear and hardness of people. From an initial position of being closed up, depressed, or defensive, the weak person gives of himself in a way which calls forth the tenderness and compassion of the stronger. From this basic experience, repeated time and again in L’Arche in a variety of cultural contexts, Vanier has developed a whole philosophy about how such a meeting of hearts can lead people to become mature human beings – that is, both responsible and loving.

Secondly, there is the important *example* of those who, in spite of their disabilities (if sometimes also on account of them), have made the long passage from self-hatred to self-acceptance. Unlike so-called normal people, in other words, they have nothing to prove, no agendas to advance, no where else to be; in their poverty and littleness they are free to be themselves, and for that reason can be incredibly open to the presence of others. The Dutch priest and writer Henri Nouwen – by all accounts a very anguished man – is not the only one who has seemed to see in the face of his disabled friend something of the face of God.<sup>26</sup>

And thirdly there are relationships that tend to provoke anguish. On retiring as director of L'Arche Trosly in 1980, Vanier spent a sabbatical year in the foyer of La Forrestière, a house specifically designed for people with severe disabilities. Here he lived not only gentle moments of communion with his friend Eric, but also the anguished howling of one Lucien, which seemed to awaken his own anguish and inner violence. "I would have liked to have killed Lucien," Vanier writes, "to have hurled him out of the window. I would have liked to have run away, but I could not because I had responsibilities in the house. I was filled with shame and guilt and confusion."<sup>27</sup>

Of course Jean Vanier did not harm Lucien. But in situations like these we can appreciate the importance of rules and structures for the safety and well-being of all, the people with disabilities as well as their assistants, who are thus rendering themselves vulnerable. With that said, Vanier's point is that experience of his own anguish and capacity to hurt a weaker person was extremely humbling – a moment of conversion in fact.<sup>28</sup> It became impossible to feel himself superior to the person he was supposed to be helping. Although Vanier tends to see in such painful and indeed humiliating experiences valuable opportunities for growth in self-knowledge, they also present themselves as occasions in which we can learn to be compassionate towards the reality of our own fragility and limitations. I believe this sort of journey in truthful self-acceptance may be relevantly contrasted with what Charles Taylor has recently characterized as the common human tendency of shoring up self-integrity through the identification of some contrast case "who must be evil as we are virtuous."<sup>29</sup>

### [3] CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, I have attempted to follow Rebecca Adams's treatment of Girard in reading Vanier's account as a myth of origin "in the general sense of a paradigm that seeks to offer universal anthropological and theological claims."<sup>30</sup> The reading suggested certain analogies, but also the difficulty of knowing what to make of a vision of human growth which centres around the demystification and rehabilitation of its "scapegoat," which is to say, the inner world of anguish which Vanier claims is inextricably bound up with our thirst for love and communion. Each of the cases just considered may be related to this sense of human development, whether on account of calling something out from behind

the “wall” (i.e. compassion or anguish), or else by directly mediating the unconditional love of God. What is at issue in transformation, at any rate, is the truthful acknowledgement and gradual integration of our weakness and vulnerability. Considering that Vanier associates this kind of inner work with the possibility of a “new kind solidarity” based on reaching out together to the weak and the poor,<sup>31</sup> his account should perhaps not lightly be dismissed as mythical.

In any case, beyond the technical issue of attempting to render mimetic theory self-referentially consistent, Adams’s conception of loving mimesis is partly motivated by the concern that Girard’s apparent antidote to the problem of violence, the imitation of Christ in the sense of kenosis or self-emptying, is problematic from the point of view of historically victimized people. “Those with relatively less power,” Adams argues, “do not exactly need to give up their desire for agency and subjectivity. Instead they need to give up their *lack of will* to appropriate subjectivity, desire, and agency as those made in the Image of God.”<sup>32</sup> And so the need to offer a positive and constructive account of how people can potentially acquire this will to appropriate subjectivity.

Considering that Jean Vanier very much stands for a love that empowers, I have no reason to think that he would object to Adams’s ethical posture. But, in fairness to Vanier’s life and work, it is important to emphasize that the concern for victims as such plays only a relatively minor role in his overall account. The message of L’Arche is really about the *value* of the person with disabilities, and about how we can be positively enriched by including them in our lives. And yet it must be said that truly to recognize this value seems to require a certain openness of heart.

This suggests a significant difference between Adams and Vanier’s respective accounts. Beyond their common desire to affirm and rehabilitate those who have been unjustly excluded, Vanier’s understanding of communion contains the important element of *mutual* vulnerability and openness, which is essential if we are going to receive the life that weak and marginal people have to offer. Without really knowing the background of Adams’s paper, I would venture to say that her Model 2d is a model of what Vanier calls *generosity*, or doing good to others from a position of superiority, not of genuine communion. Without getting in to this here, Vanier in fact conceives of the imitation of Christ in terms of going down the ladder of human promotion in order to be with people

where they are, in just such heart to heart relationships of communion. Nor does this willingness to make oneself vulnerable to the weakest among us imply that people should forsake their place in society where they exercise “authority with force and justice, kindness and firmness.”<sup>33</sup>

Indeed the importance of vulnerability in Vanier’s account of human growth suggests the need to protect and promote situations in modern society where people from different backgrounds and with different abilities and disabilities ability *can* become vulnerable to one another. In Vanier’s view, modern individuals have generally lost the understanding of the importance of “belonging” as a *place of mediation*, a place “where we can find structure and discipline, where we can search for truth together, where we can find healing for our hearts...where we learn not to be locked up in our own needs and desires but welcome others as they are, to accept that they have different gifts and capacities, that they are important and have value. The place of mediation,” Vanier continues, “helps us to discover that we are a part of something much bigger, that together we can do something beautiful.”<sup>34</sup>

As we are now bordering on the issue of social and political arrangements, it may be fitting to end with Vanier’s conception of the *political* dimension of community, which is certainly not the conversion of individuals. Taking for granted the liberal freedom of exit, the political significance of community is just that it shows that certain important human goods are still possible in our world. As Vanier characteristically asks in *Community and Growth* (1979): “Isn’t it politically important today to give witness that different kinds of people can live together – that the dividing walls of hostility are not inevitable? Isn’t it important to show that people coming from different cultures and religious traditions can respect and love each other; that war and oppression are not inevitable? Isn’t it important, in a world where people with a handicap are being eliminated before or shortly after birth, that there be communities that manifest their beauty and value?”<sup>35</sup> And we can find more to this effect in Vanier’s sense of the importance of “dailiness” and of “living on a human scale.”

If I may quickly apply this line of thinking to the theme of catastrophe and conversion, the economist Jeffrey Sachs has observed in his recent book *Common Wealth* that “[the] paradox of a unified global economy and divided global society poses the

single greatest threat to the planet because it makes impossible the cooperation needed to address the remaining challenges.”<sup>36</sup> I think L’Arche communities have something specific to offer this challenge to the extent that they are able to fulfill their Charter’s aim of being “signs of hope” in our divided world, that is signs that love and unity are still possible.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 359.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Vanier, *Our Life Together: A Memoir in Letters* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2007), 12.

<sup>3</sup> See the International Charter of L’Arche Communities at [www.larche.org](http://www.larche.org).

<sup>4</sup> Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1994/2004).

<sup>5</sup> This seems to me consistent with Vanier’s wish that L’Arche remain open to theology and to the human sciences. See Jean Vanier, *An Ark for the Poor: The Story of L’Arche* (Toronto: Novalis; New York: Crossroad; London: Geoffrey Chapman-Cassell, 1995), 112.

<sup>6</sup> David Cayley, *On Violence and Religion* [a two-part series on COV&R 2006 at St. Paul University, Ottawa], CBC Radio One (“Ideas” Series), Oct. 2 and 7, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Jean Vanier, *Our Journey Home: Rediscovering a Common Humanity Beyond Our Differences* [hereafter OJH], trans. Maggie Parham (Toronto: Novalis 1997); *Becoming Human* (Toronto: Anansi, 1998/2003).

<sup>8</sup> OJH, xv. At the time of writing I have not been able to integrate the anthropology of Vanier’s substantially revised reedition of *Man and Woman God Made Them* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca J. Adams “Loving Mimesis and Girard’s ‘Scapegoat of the Text’: a Creative Reassessment of Mimetic Desire. In *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking*, ed. Willard M. Swartley (Telford, PA: Pandora, 2000), 277-307.

<sup>10</sup> Vanier’s reflections of the political dimension of community may be found in what many consider to be his most substantial book, *Community and Growth* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist, 1979/1996), 307-12.

<sup>11</sup> Kathryn Spink, *The Miracle, The Message, The Story: Jean Vanier and l’Arche*. (Toronto: Novalis, 2006), 213.

<sup>12</sup> Vanier named L’Arche (“The Ark”) after the biblical story of Noah’s ark (Gen 6-9), which saved humanity from the flood. “The community of l’Arche wants to provide a refuge for people with mental handicaps, who can so quickly be drowned in the waters of our competitive society” (OJH, ix).

<sup>13</sup> Since retiring as director in 1980 Jean Vanier has spent considerable time “accompanying” assistants in L’Arche, listening to their stories and helping them to find a meaning to what they are living. “If I haven’t read many books on psychology,” he writes, “I have learned from listening to others. My understanding of human beings, their call to grow so that they become fully themselves and overcome their fears, has developed through this listening” (OJH, xiv).

<sup>14</sup> Vanier attributes his understanding of communion to Father Thomas Philippe, a teacher whose thought was rooted in the philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas “but who at the same time had a great appreciation for the human sciences” (OJH, 33ff.)

<sup>15</sup> David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*, chap. 10.

<sup>16</sup> OJH, 209.

<sup>17</sup> OJH, 249-50.

<sup>18</sup> For a collection of theological reflections, see Frances M. Young, ed. *Encounter with Mystery: Reflections on L’Arche and Living with Disability* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> In this paper I focus on Vanier’s account of the transformative effects of friendships between “core members” (the people with disabilities) and their assistants, to the exclusion of his general remarks on living intentional community with those who are different. Certainly many people in L’Arche testify to transformations of self issuing from intense involvement with other assistants in community.

<sup>20</sup> James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong* (New York: Herder-Crossroad, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Jean Vanier, *Images of Love, Words of Hope* (Hantsport, NS: Lancelot, 1991), 58

<sup>22</sup> OJH, xi.

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- <sup>23</sup> Understood in the sense of one's "sense of selfhood, as well as the point of view from which one perceives, desires, and acts in the world" (Adams, 302 n.1).
- <sup>24</sup> Adams's preface as well as her published paper can be found on the COV&R 2006 web page at [www.ustpaul.uottawa.ca/covr2006/Document/RebeccaGirard.pdf](http://www.ustpaul.uottawa.ca/covr2006/Document/RebeccaGirard.pdf).
- <sup>25</sup> OJH, 108-9.
- <sup>26</sup> Nouwen spent the last ten years of his life as pastor of L'Arche Daybreak near Toronto. See Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Adam: God's Beloved* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997).
- <sup>27</sup> OJH, 76.
- <sup>28</sup> OJH, 158.
- <sup>29</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge and London: Harvard-Belknap, 2007), 709.
- <sup>30</sup> Adams, 278.
- <sup>31</sup> OJH, 248.
- <sup>32</sup> Adams, 288.
- <sup>33</sup> Jean Vanier, *The Scandal of Service: Jesus Washes Our Feet* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1996), 83.
- <sup>34</sup> Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (Toronto: Anansi, 1998/2003), 66-7.
- <sup>35</sup> Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, 311.
- <sup>36</sup> Jeffrey D. Sachs, *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 7.
- <sup>37</sup> See again the International Charter of L'Arche Communities at [www.larche.org](http://www.larche.org).