

research. It provides a wonderful application of a Memory Theory that all scholars should become familiar with. I highly recommend this book.

— Deborah Shanks

**VULNERABLE  
COMMUNION:  
A Theology of Disability  
and Hospitality  
by Thomas E. Reynolds  
Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos  
Press, 2008, 256 pages.**

Thomas Reynolds is associate professor of theology at Emmanuel College in Toronto. He and his life-partner, Mary, have two sons, Chris and Evan. Chris has been diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome, a neurological disorder of the brain, and with Asperger's syndrome, a high-functioning disorder on the autism spectrum. His father notes, "Chris is making his way in the world. But the principalities and powers of the world are not set up to make his way easy" (p. 12).

In this book Reynolds shares his experiences, both joyful and painful, as the father of a child with, and a child without, disabilities. He also writes as a theologian who has read widely about, and reflected at length upon, disability and its implications for Christian thought

and practice. This is an extensive analytical work that explores how Christians might think differently about disability and act differently toward people with disabilities. "Nurturing communities of abundant hospitality is the goal" (p. 14).

Chapter 1 offers an overview of the promises and the perils of thinking theologically about disability. It presents a searing analysis of theodicy as a theological enterprise that results in denigrating and trivializing disability, while objectifying and demeaning persons with disabilities. Reynolds confronts as well the "medical model" that underlies dominant social and theological views that regard disability as a personal tragedy. He calls for a rethinking of "the paradigm by which disability is perceived as an anomaly" (p. 30).

Full personhood is neither diminished by disability nor confirmed by ability. Instead, it is a factor of the interdependent relationships we share with one another as creatures loved into being by God in the image of God. There is a wider horizon in which all persons in their uniqueness and vulnerability coexist within the enfolding presence of a gracious God. This horizon is our shared humanity, a fragile and contingent

humanity that God is present to, suffers with, and transforms by embracing in Jesus Christ (pp. 42f).

Chapters 2 and 3 explore the “cult of normalcy”, a cultural system of social control born of a fear-based projection that seeks to enforce social cohesion. Persons of the so-called “normal” group, those without disabilities, are privileged in position and power by a social system that fears and treats persons with disabilities as “other”. The “cult of normalcy” marginalizes persons with disabilities so that they too come to regard themselves as “abnormal”, “outsider”, “deficient” in ability to contribute to the common good. This “cult of normalcy” is devastating to, and dehumanizing of, both persons with and without disabilities. Reynolds’ analysis brings to my mind these words of Canadian singer/songwriter Bruce Cockburn: “the trouble with normal is it always gets worse”.

Chapter 4 offers the vision of an alternative, counter-to-culture community. It asks us to reconsider what it means to be a person as we recognize our basic dependence upon others in relationships of mutual vulnerability and love. Wholeness is relational rather than individual. Communities of mutual vulnerability and love embody

wholeness when comprised of persons, both with and without disabilities, who recognize in one another God’s beloved. Thus persons with disabilities are essential to the wholeness of human community. This may be Reynolds’ most challenging assertion as regards disability’s implications for Christian thought and practice.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 deepen his analysis with an examination of such theological themes as God and creation, humanity and redemption in Jesus Christ, and the reconciling power of God’s kingdom as anticipated in the community called church. In conclusion, wholeness is shown not to be the product of self-sufficiency or independence, as per the “cult of normalcy”, but rather of the genuinely inclusive communion that results from sharing our humanity with one another in light of the grace of God. And “hospitality is the Christ-shaped character of God’s reconciling love, displayed not in power but in vulnerability”(p. 20).

This is neither a quick nor a light read. Reynolds reflects upon his own experience, engages in solid social, political, scriptural and theological analysis, and draws extensively upon the work of Paul Ricoeur, Jurgen Moltmann, Stanley Hauerwas, and Jean Vanier, among others. In so doing, he produces a work of significant scholarly weight

and theological heft. This is no “how-to” manual, with practical suggestions for putting theory into praxis. It is however, I would suggest, a valuable resource for all who teach and study in fields of theology and ethics.

— Ron McConnell

**OUR LIFE TOGETHER:  
A Memoir in Letters**  
by **Jean Vanier** ■■■ **Toronto,**  
**ON: HarperCollins, 2007,**  
**565** ■ **pages.**

Many of us know adults with intellectual disabilities who are active participants in work, social interaction, spiritual and community life. It was a different reality in 1964, when Jean Vanier, son of a Governor-General, formerly in the navy, now teaching ethics at the University of Toronto, visited his friend Père Thomas, chaplain of a small institution for intellectually challenged adults in Trosly, France. These residents had been previously “locked up in psychiatric hospitals or hidden by their families” (p. 5). Soon Vanier identified his true vocation. He left his university post, bought a modest house in Trosly, which he named L’Arche, and received into it two men with intellectual disabilities. This was the small beginning of what is now a

worldwide network of over 130 such houses, in which assistants live with the residents, tending to their needs and building relationships of mutual caring and respect with them, together creating a sense of home and family. All this began with Vanier’s own intuitive sense of what was needed, as did the Faith and Light groups for families of the intellectually challenged.

To learn more about Vanier’s experience with the L’Arche movement, you can now read this book, which contains selected letters dating from 1964 to 2006, the first written for about 40 friends, the later ones for a wider audience. They are not intended as history but, as the subtitle indicates, memoir. Vanier includes introductions to each section, and an introduction and conclusion to the whole book, so that he can highlight the main themes and offer a retrospective view.

For sustained and stimulating philosophical and theological reflection, one must look elsewhere in Vanier’s writings. These are, simply, letters, and, like most letters, contain some details more interesting to their original recipients than to you and me. As in any social justice and advocacy organization working with marginalized people, this letter writing has the purpose of informing supporters, encouraging their