

A Witness to God's Peace: A Jean Vanier Symposium

**“The Greatest Spiritual
Issue of our time”**

A Response

10 March 2017

Proudly supported by



Dr Peter Mudge

Senior Lecturer Religious Education & Spirituality
BBI – The Australian Institute of Theological Education

Conjoint Lecturer, School of Humanities & Social Science,
The University of Newcastle

The Question

“What do you believe is the greatest spiritual issue of today and how should people approach and/or address it?”



Jean Vanier's response

- Throughout the video interview Vanier reflects on “people living with disabilities” :
 - “they have taught me many things”
 - “they are people of the heart rather than the head”
 - “washing the feet of others”
 - “Jesus is the face of mercy”



“There is no greater disability in society, than the inability to see a person as more.”

Robert M. Hensel

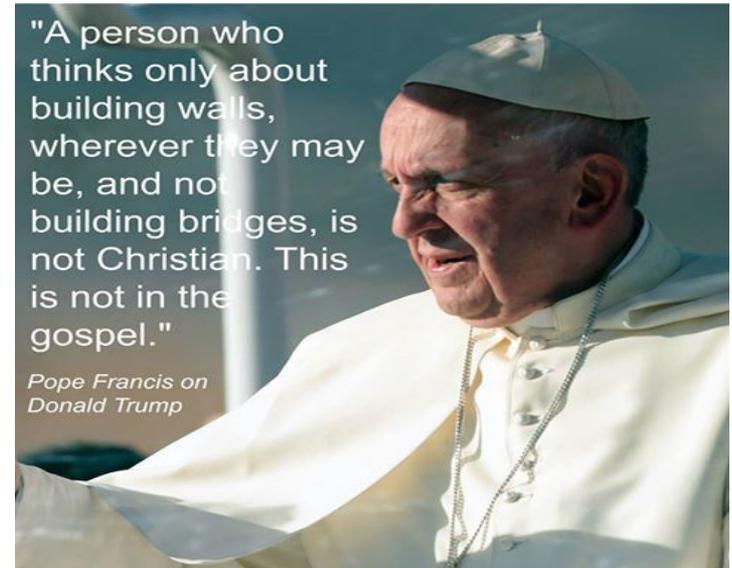
“The greatest spiritual issues of today”

- “Fear and division”
- “Forms of fundamentalism and other anxieties”
- “Closing down rather than opening up”
- Q: How then do we “open up”?



Pope Francis – some similarities

- Move to the frontiers
- Open doors rather than build fortresses
- “The person who builds walls, and not bridges, is not Christian. This is not the gospel”





Being drawn into the Mystery = “littleness”

- “The little ones can listen to God, can hear and see God”
- St Thérèse of Lisieux, the *anawim*, the little ones totally dependent upon God
- Both Vanier & Thérèse are “God’s small paint brush”



St Thérèse of Lisieux – a spirituality of “littleness”

- Holiness means “not striving to *climb up to God* but, rather, *receiving God*, in Jesus, *reaching out to us*”;
- “*Human weakness is fully compatible with holiness*”

(Conn, in Holder, 2010, *Christian spirituality: The classics*, pp. 306-313; quotes pp. 313,



It is possible to remain
little even in the most
responsible position.

St. Thérèse

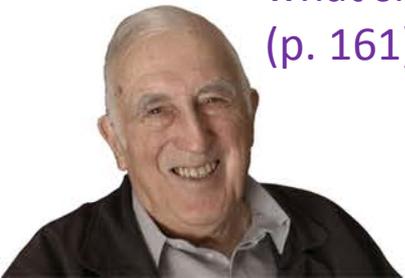
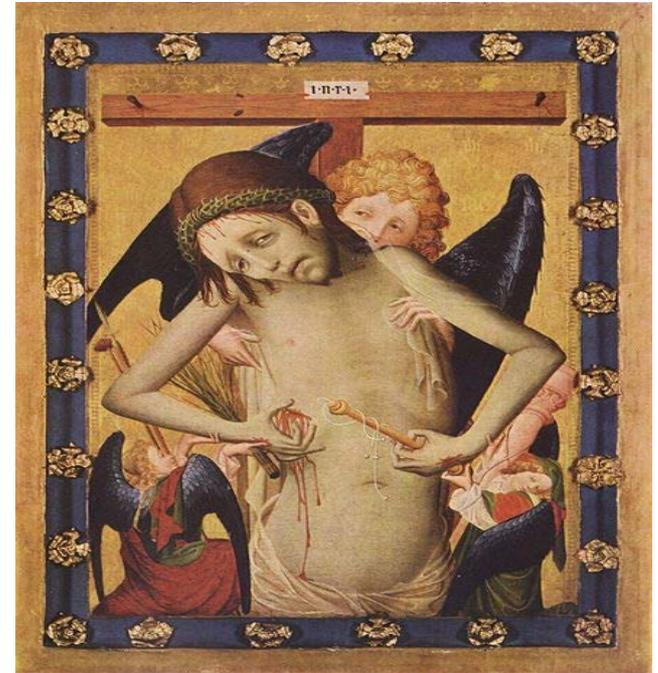
Society of the Little Flower 

www.littleflower.org
facebook.com/saintthereseoflisieux



“The wound is the site of healing”

- ❖ Latin “**vulnus**” = wound (Sinclair, 2003, p. 256)
- ❖ “Our healing is next to the **wound**” (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2011, p. 73)
- ❖ Theologian Sarah Coakley (2002): ‘the **frailty, vulnerability and ‘self-effacement’** of [Jesus in the Gethsemane & Golgotha] narratives is what shows us ‘perfect humanity’ (p. 161).

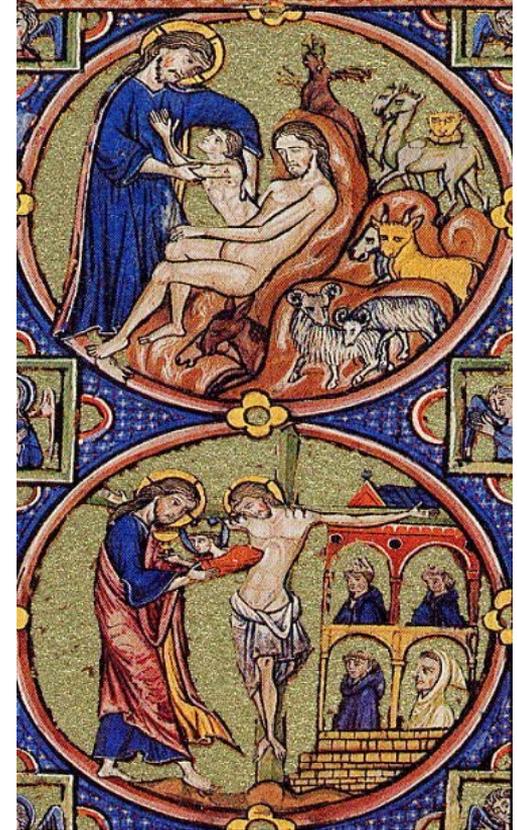


Vulnerability = linked to “wound”

- **Wound** as birth image; source of hope, healing, new life
- **“The sleep of Adam is the death of Christ”**; Eve is drawn out by God from one of the ribs of the sleeping Adam ; the entire creation looks on.
- **God draws out the Church** as crowned female from the side of the dead Christ; the newly formed Church saints or new creation look on; both images c. 1250 CE
- **Cf. Levinas:** “Sensibility...is an opening to others, a nearness, the one-for-the-other, precisely vulnerability to others” (cited in Benaroyo, 2007, p. 7)



Figure 1 – *Bible Moralisée* (c. 1250): and the caption provided by ARAS (ARAS 5Ek.010) ‘The sleep of Adam is the death of Christ’ (excerpt). Upper panel: Eve is drawn from the side of Adam’s. Lower panel: the Church emerges from the side of the crucified and dead Christ



References & Suggested reading

- Benaroyo, L. (2007). The notion of vulnerability in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and its significance for medical ethics and aesthetics. Retrieved on 2/2/14 from: http://www.api.or.at/aebm/download/docs/web_levinas.pdf
- Boler, M. & Zembylas, M. (2010). Discomforting truths: The emotional terrain of understanding difference. In P. P. Trifonas (Ed.), *Pedagogies of difference: Rethinking education for social change* (pp. 110-136). New York & London: Routledge.
- Brown, B. (2012). *Daring Greatly: How the courage to be Vulnerable transforms the way we Live, love, parent and lead*. New York: Gotham Books. Refer especially to Chapter 4, "The Vulnerability Armour", pp. 112-171.
- Cameron, H., Reader, J., Slater, V., with Rowland, C. (2012). *Theological reflection for human flourishing, pastoral practice and public theology*. London: SCM Press.
- Chödrön, P. (2001). *The places that scare you: A guide to fearlessness in difficult times*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Chödrön, P. (2002). *Comfortable with uncertainty: 108 teachings on cultivating fearlessness and compassion*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Chödrön, P. (2013). *Living beautifully with uncertainty and change*. (Ed. J. D. Oliver). Boston & London: Shambhala.
- Coakley, S. (2002). Kenosis and subversion: On the repression of 'vulnerability' in Christian feminist writing. In *Powers and submissions: Spirituality, philosophy and gender*. (pp. 1-39). Oxford: Blackwell.



References & Suggested reading cont.

- Conn, J. W. (2011). "Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897), *Story of a Soul*. In Arthur Holder (ed.). *Christian Spirituality: The Classics*. (pp. 305-316). London & New York: Routledge.
- Eileen, M. R. (1960). Advent in the spirit of the "anawim". *Worship* 35(1), 20-25.
- Morris, W. (2013). Transforming Able-Bodied Normativity: The Wounded Christ and Human Vulnerability. *Irish Theological Quarterly* 78(3), 231-243.
- Okpalaoka, C. L. & Dillard, C. B. (2011). Our healing is next to the wound: Endarkened feminisms, spirituality and wisdom for teaching, learning and research. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 131, 65-74. doi: 10.1002/ace.422
- Sinclair, J. M. (Gen. Consult.). (2003). *The Collins/Times English dictionary & thesaurus, 21st century edition*. Glasgow: HarperCollinsPublishers & Times Books.
- Tracy, D. (1999). Fragments: The Spiritual Situation of Our Times. In John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds.). *God, The Gift and Postmodernism*. (pp. 170-184). Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University.
- Yaconelli, M. (2002). *Messy spirituality: God's annoying love for imperfect people*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



Thank You

