

# Ecclesiology: the church, and christianity critical thinking example

[Religion](#), [God](#)



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## **ECCLESIOLOGY**

Ecclesiology refers to the study of the church. Through ecclesiology, people are able to understand the purpose of God for the church in the modern world.

Ecclesiology is the doctrine of the church: The study of its origin, nature, ordinances, constitution, and activities (Bragg, Para 1). A clear understanding of Ecclesiology is very important for every believer because it forms a basis for his faith. In addition, it serves as a guide in the daily life of the believer.

### **Vanier's thought in light of our self -understanding as God's people**

In 1950, at the age of twenty-two, Vanier chose to leave the Navy to respond to a gentle call of Jesus to leave and follow him (Vanier, 1994). He realized that time had come for him to change when he noticed he preferred spending more of his evenings walking the ship's flight deck and praying his breviary than going to town with his fellow officers. In this act, we see Vanier giving Christianity a priority. The act serves as an encouragement to other people.

In 1963, around Christmas, Vanier visited Pe`re Thomas Philippe in Trosly-Breuil. Pe`re Thomas had just begun to serve as chaplain at le Val fleuri (The valley of the flowers), this is a small institution for developmentally disabled men. Vanier was very impressed by Fr. Thomas's friends. He had sensed their spiritual openness together with their place in God's heart. All of them had suffered a lot and thirsted so deeply for friendship. Their cry of pain and

their thirst for love touched him greatly (Vanier, 1995).

Vanier's view on the people of God is from his subject of Jesus, the Gift of Love. The spirituality of Jean Vanier, particularly his emphasis on living with the poor is an evident elaboration of the way people of God should extend Jesus' love to one another (Berry, 2008).

In the time of Isaiah, God revealed what behavior pleased him. God was pleased with helping the hungry, poor and the weak in the society. Neither the sacrifice of animals nor fasting pleased him; instead, God was pleased with people's good actions of helping others who are needy in the society (Vanier, 2001)

## **The church**

Cardinal realized that there is a lot to praise in God's people. He says that, "People of God represent the historical nature of the church, described the peace and harmony of God as that also goes beyond the frontiers of sacramental circumstances of life" (Russell Shaw, 2002, Para 6). According to Gene Taylor, the church is a subject of prophecy in the Old Testament, it is important to understand the origin of the church as a whole since it is part of the ecclesiology (Taylor, 1998).

## **Function of the church**

The church is important in that it helps people find Christ so that he may walk together with him in life with the power of truth. The church ceases to become God's dwelling place in the contemporary world, to become a representative of holiness. This is the only reason there should be a struggle in the church, and not for precedence. What is important is the spiritual

growth of people (Russell Shaw, 2002). Of great significance is the church's insistence for respect for all people and her stern warning again, who will be respected, in such an instance, God is the one to be respected (Vatican II, 2008).

### **Vanier's view on:**

#### Human person

Vanier views human beings as sacred, regardless of their culture, race, or religion. Whatever their capacities, weaknesses, or strengths may be, they remain sacred. He argues that these do not have any impact on their sacredness, people may have different personalities and characters, but their spiritual life should remain the same. In addition, he states that in human beings there is a constant tension between order and disorder, togetherness and loneliness, evolving and revolving, security and insecurity. The universe is always evolving. The older gives way to a new order and this in turn crumbles when the next order appears. It is no different in our lives the way we move from birth to death.

Secondly, he states that the human world and individual lives are in the process of evolving. The main question here is how to maintain the old and prepare a new way. This question does not imply that one is refusing the past but rather involves letting the past come into the present and letting this process guide us in our everyday life especially in our plans to focus on living a holy life and the way forward to get eternal life.

Thirdly, human maturity comes through working together through dialogue and a sense of belonging. To conclude his view on human beings he states

that we need to be encouraged to make choices, and to become responsible for our own lives and those of others. We need encouragement for us to become mature and move out of the cocoon of self-centeredness. Self-centeredness is often our defense mechanism, which is oppressive to others and even us.

He continues to say that in order to make these choices, we have to reflect, look for truth and meaning. People should conduct themselves to the good of oneself and others (Vanier, 1998). An individual's conduct affects other people around him. Therefore, the decisions made by an individual ought to be well informed and should reflect concern for other people.

## **Community**

Vanier views the community as a necessity that arises from continual search for meaning, order and an antidote to loneliness.

However, some families, tribes, and groups are in a beautiful order, where the imposed order seems to be a successful solution to the chaos of people's lives, and where each person feels safe due to their connection to others.

However, such a mentality can also be dangerous because in such a community individuals can be stifled, prevented from evolving and doing something new.

Here is the paradox; as human beings, we find ourselves between competing drives to belong and be part of something bigger than what we are in our current state. There is also the driving force that pushes us to rise up, walk as individuals, and reject all the comfortable and other accepted luxuries. It is important to live with others because it is in a group that we can discover

what is common amongst our goals and us. We discover a personal relationship with God individually. We must always find a way to balance these two opposing impulses within us (Vanier, 1998).

With this in mind, Vanier meant that we as individuals should live a self-driven life even though we are in a larger community. This mainly involves making decisions on individual issues. Decisions on individual issues ought to be made based on personal convictions, and not based on what others are doing. An individual should understand what is right or wrong and should be able to make decisions based on this understanding.

## **Brokenness**

Vanier explains brokenness by using understanding of the weakness of a child. He elaborates what happens when a child feels unloved and unwanted. Lonely children do not feel commonality with adults. They have totally lost trust in them and in themselves; they are confused and feel misunderstood. The lonely child is not able to connect with others. There exists a lonely within each of us; hidden inside the walls we created in order to survive and avoid brokenness (Vanier, 1998). The loneliness illustrates the brokenness within us.

Vanier also talks about brokenness when he explains that living in the ark with other people helped them learn acceptance of limitations and brokenness in order for them to have freedom of celebrating their difference and appreciate themselves the way they are. This is because in the ark there existed people with different disabilities and everyone had their own perception of life (Vanier, 2010).

## **Relating human person, community, and brokenness to communion**

Human beings always strive to move towards communion while avoiding brokenness in our communities. Communion is mutual trust and belonging, it implies the security and insecurity of trust that individuals always have; it is the struggle against all the powers of fear and self-centeredness in us, as well as the resilient human need to control someone else. To some extent, we often go out of control in our own lives when we are open to other people. Communion makes us vulnerable to what is present in a community (Vanier, 1998).

## **Comparison of Vanier's thought and Vatican II on human person**

Vatican II states that the freedom of human persons originates from the principle of human dignity, a dignity born out of endowment with reason and free will and therefore bearing personal responsibility to seek the truth; this is specifically religious truth (Vatican II, 1998). This is in contrast to Vanier who views human person as sacred.

## **Comparison of Vanier's thought and Gaillardetz on community**

According to Gaillardetz, major thoughts of Christianity that have developed consciousness currently were inherited from the Israelites during the ancient time. He states that more conflicts, tensions, and disagreements that are happening today have already happened in the Israelite nation. Ancient Judaism started as a small religious organization that had been inspired by

many visions of God, the special communal life that God called and destined them to live (Gaillardetz, 2008). The start of modern Christian ecclesiology began during this time and has since evolved to the modern thoughts of Vanier in the modern world.

People always seek to co-exist in a communal setting where the culture of togetherness is evident. Gaillardetz's thoughts are different from that of Vanier on community. According to Vanier, individuals always want to be in a community. The people's effort matters. Vanier believes in communal existence.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Vanier's contribution to ecclesiology is of great significance. This is because he personally joined Christianity and practiced Christian virtues as a role model to others. His idea of helping the disabled in the society is also very crucial. In this regard, communal life is very important in individual's life. A community gives one a sense of belonging and enables a believer to live according to God's intentions for his people. In churches, people of God always encourage each other to live peacefully with one another. People should treat one another with God's love. They ought to practice the Christian virtues in their day-to-day life and live according to the word of God, as He desires them to live.

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