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CORE 101 – Culture and the Good Life

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L'Arche Night Reflection

I would like to start this reflection by saying that this trip paired with reading *Living Gently in a Violent World* brought a little bit of hamartiological clarity to my own life, in both and personal sense and a theological sense. First, I was challenged with the thought of how sinful I am once again. I am so sinful, and to think that I could ever have harsh thoughts about people who struggle with mental illness, makes me hate my flesh to a greater extent than I did before. I am quite frankly ashamed to admit that the thought that I am a “better” human being than these people, let alone anyone, has cross my mind. I struggle with elevating myself above others internally, and it is often reflected in my actions sometimes. My heart, despite my ongoing sanctification, possesses the great sinfulness of sin and I cannot repent on my own strength. I also grow slightly impatient when interacting with people who struggle with mental handicaps. I volunteered at the College Church ministry “Stars” a few weeks ago, and was privileged to be able to hang out with a young man named Peter, who had several physical and mental impairments. Throughout the night, I solely focused on trying to keep him comfortable, content and entertained. I did not really know how to do that, and the only way I could communicate with him was to ask him yes or no questions, to which he would either say nothing, or do a slight nod for no. By the end of the night, I was an emotional wreck. I did not show it thanks to the poker face I’ve attained throughout the years on the baseball diamond, but my patience was on its last straw. On top of that, I felt really bad, because I didn’t know if I had helped Peter leave

feeling refreshed and ready to come back the next month. I say all of this to illustrate how I fall short when it comes to thinking about, interacting with, and loving these people. I often lose sight of that, and this field trip reminded me of my great sinfulness. The upside to this is that though I may seem like I am beating myself up in this reflection, I am not. Jesus said (I don't recall the exact reference and I am writing this on an airplane and do not have the ability to look it up) that "He who is forgiven much loves much." If I have more godly sorrow for my sin, the grace Christ in my life will be all the more sweeter and I will aim to serve and please Him more. Therefore, I am thankful I experienced this community night.

Theologically speaking, our in-class discussion regarding mentally-handicapped people was very clarifying for me. I had never really thought about whether or not this handicap in the lives of these people was a product of the fall; however, I found it very beneficial and edifying for me to discuss this subject. I do not know about my classmates, but the discussion on *Living Gently in a Violent World* helped me to affirm that the mental illness that these people have is actually not an illness, but rather a characteristic. This characteristic enables them to contribute to the kingdom of God in different ways than we generally conceive or care to think about. These people enable, in my case, to learn to love the 'least of these' and also to treat them with dignity and honor, as they do the same for everyone else. These people are often the sweetest people I can find in any given room full of people. There is no "us" or "them," there is just the kingdom, and if they believe in Jesus, they are a part of it (I do not have any insight on soteriology for mentally handicapped people). Thus, I was so glad that I was affirmed in my beliefs about these people. I do not know if they are 100% correct, but for now, I hold these things to be true.