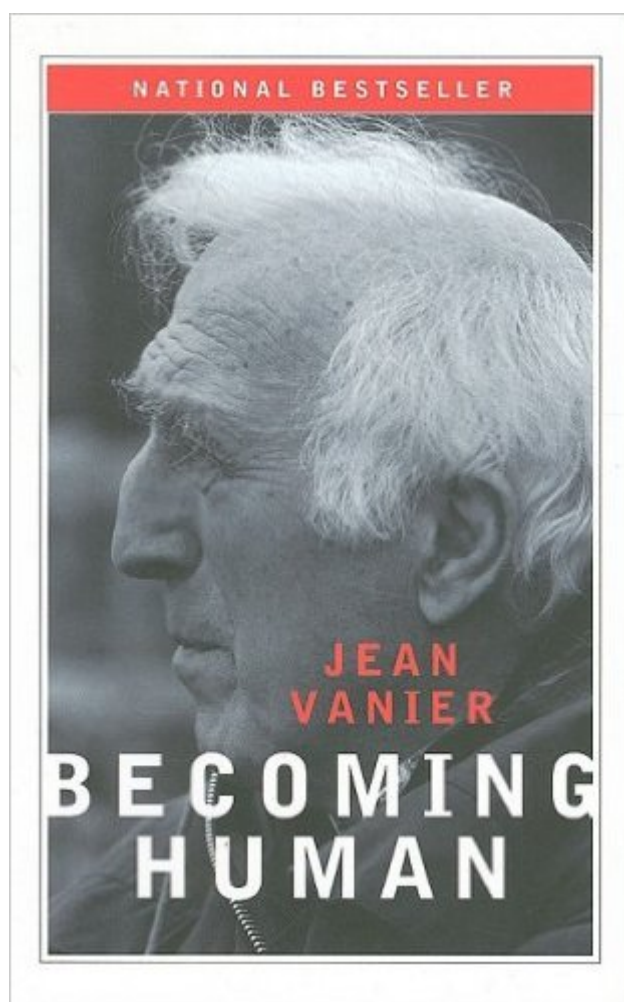


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# Becoming Human



## Synopsis

Acclaimed as a man who inspires the world, (Maclean's) and a nation builder (Globe and Mail), Jean Vanier has made a difference in the lives of countless people. In this provocative book, Vanier shares his profoundly human vision for creating a common good that radically changes our communities, our relationships, and ourselves. He proposes that by opening ourselves to outsiders, those we perceive as weak, different, or inferior, we can achieve true personal and societal freedom. *Becoming Human* is not only a book of extraordinary ideas, but a revolutionary call to action. The 10th anniversary edition includes a new Introduction by the author.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As a young man, Jean Vanier founded the Larch Society. The Larch Society is a network of communities around the world where severely mentally and physically handicapped adults live together with other caring adults in small groups. Through his experiences living with these severely handicapped individuals, Vanier has asked and answered the question, what is the essence of being human. In this eloquently written, thoughtful and thought provoking book, Jean Vanier discussed what he feels truly determines humanity, what makes us more than just talking, intelligent animals. Although Vanier writes from a Christian perspective, this book is for anyone, of any religious or spiritual perspective or belief.

I came across this book after reading a footnote in one of Henri Nouwen's book. It first caught my attention in one of Neowen's passages. I was quite intrigued by Vanier's insight and remarks. Once

reading *Becoming Human* I was again reminded of the sanctity of life. "We are simply human beings, enfolded in weakness and in hope, called together to change our world one heart at a time." (p.163) Vanier's insight into the human heart brings a chilling reminder that we are not a society of the strong and intelligent, that is just part of being human. Understanding our weaknesses and brokenness brings us to a fullness that God originally intended for us.

Originally a series of radio broadcasts on the CBC, this delightful little book is a refresher course in being human. In a deceptively simple, meditative style, Jean Vanier shares the wisdom he has gained from years of helping disabled people at the L'Arche communities he founded. Vanier gently explores human frailty and dignity, our need for individual affirmation and loving community, issues of freedom and forgiveness, and the nature of true maturity. Perhaps all disabled people, in the sense that includes everyone, can gain some insight and inspiration here.

Jean Vanier is my favorite philosopher and spiritual thinker, and although he's a Christian, his teachings have tremendous appeal to people of all religious or non-religious perspectives. What a wonderful, wonderful human being. God bless him! Growing up, I used to eagerly watch Jean Vanier's TV program where he talks about the importance of love and relationship with others, what he calls communion and forming community. And in his sermons he always emphasizes how relationship with a person you care about is more important than material gain. He talks about how materialism satisfies the senses but it leaves an aching emptiness of the soul, which can only be filled by a spiritual relationship with God and an emotional relationship with other people, all based on love. What I love about Vanier's teachings is how he challenges us to open ourselves up to outsiders, especially to those that society sees as weak, different, or inferior, and that by opening up our hearts to them, we can help heal our own inner brokenness as well as theirs. Our world values strength and achievement, but by embracing weakness, we reach a higher inner level of personal compassion and understanding. It's all about learning to accept a person just as he is, rather than shutting oneself off from him simply because he isn't what you expect. It's about unconditional friendship through love, and love through friendship. The people in this world who understand this message and the few who actually live it are truly the blessed of God. David Rehak author of "A Young Girl's Crimes"

I was profoundly moved by this book--it is far more insightful, better written, and more sincere than just about any other "spiritual" discourse. Vanier is not someone to promote himself and his ideas.

Instead, this short book is straight from the heart of a brilliant man. If only more people read this instead of so much self-indulgent new age literature. I cannot recommend this strongly enough.

Vanier mixes timeless truth with a dash of storytelling in this quick read, reaching back into his earliest experiences with the mentally disabled for examples on 'becoming human.' He argues that manifestations of weakness should not be avoided out of ignorance: Now-vigorous people often shun those less fortunate than themselves in the mistaken belief their places will never be reversed. By accepting weakness, however, and by embracing it, such individuals come closer to understanding what it really means to be human. This work is based upon a series of talks Vanier gave through CBC radio, as well as several lectures he conducted at the University of Toronto. The resulting notes and transcripts were brought together in a single manuscript, which Vanier did little to edit. Instead, he merely added small blocks of text to ease the transition from one thought to another. As a consequence, the book is given to redundancy in areas where the lecture notes and CBC transcripts probably overlap. These raw text dumps are so distracting they detract from the book's message; and the material, though offered up in thematic chapters, doesn't have any real sense of order. The author would have done better to rewrite this book based upon his notes, rather than borrowing directly from them. In that way, he could have formed better links between each topic, while at the same time weeding out any glaring repetition.

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