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**Selected Books by Jean Vanier
and
Books Inspired by Jean Vanier's Work**

Jean Vanier is the author of more than 30 books which have been translated into 29 languages. Following are summaries of a selection of those books, along with a list of others that have been written about Vanier, his work and philosophy, and L'Arche.

Selected Books by Jean Vanier

[The Gospel of John, the Gospel of Relationship](#). Franciscan Media, 2015.

This commentary on the Gospel of John is the fruit of years of reflection, study, prayer and lived community life at L'Arche since its beginnings. Through this commentary on the writings of the beloved disciple, Jean Vanier invites us to discover who Jesus is, and who we are; thus he calls us to growth in our relationships. He reveals the vision of God for our world, a true spirituality which gives meaning to life, to death and to the evolution of humanity.

[Signs: Seven Words of Hope](#). Paulist Press, 2014. (In the UK as [Signs of the Times: Seven Paths of Hope for a Troubled World](#). Darton, Longman & Todd, 2013.)

The Second Vatican Council released its vision of a Church which would put society's weakest and most marginalized members at its heart. At the same time, Jean Vanier founded L'Arche, a new sort of Christian community in which people with intellectual disabilities could be welcomed to a life of freedom and dignity. What has become of the radical hope for a renewed Church and those who should be its central concern? Vanier identifies the seven paths of transformation at the heart of L'Arche philosophy, the same paths that should be heeded by the Church: From humiliation to humility; from normalization to the awakening conscience; from exclusion to encounter; from power to authority; from isolation to community; from strength to vulnerability; from secret to mystery.

[Tears of Silence](#). House of Anansi Press, 2014 (original edition 1974).

This inspiring book of meditations includes a new introduction by Vanier, a foreword by author and education activist Parker Palmer, and new photos by Montreal photographer Jonathan Boulet-Groulx. The tears are those of Vanier's own heart, faced with the pain and humiliation of so many people with intellectual disabilities, abandoned in terrible institutions or on the streets. Through his tears rises a cry of anger at the indifference of the world to this abandonment. Vanier asks where do we find the courage to let ourselves be challenged and transformed so that we might rise up as messengers of peace and unity?

[Mental Health: The Inclusive Church Resource](#). With John Swinton. Darton, Longman & Todd, 2014.

This book aims to educate, to reflect theologically and to provide practical advice and guidance, with first-hand personal experiences of marginalized people, theological reflections by Jean Vanier and John Swinton, and a resource section containing addresses, websites and practical advice on improving a church's inclusivity.

[Befriending the Stranger](#). Paulist Press, 2014 (William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005; Paulist Press, 2010)

Rather than challenging us to “do good” to the stranger, and have compassion for the needy, Vanier encourages us to enter into friendship. Through his friends at L’Arche, Vanier discovered that to love people is not first of all to do things for them but to reveal something to them. It is to reveal that they have a value, that they are beautiful and precious. We can only do this by recognizing the weakness, helplessness and need for forgiveness within ourselves.

[I Meet Jesus: He Tells Me “I Love You”](#). Paulist Press, 2014 (Original edition 1981)

With simply written text and illustrations, this book tells the story of the Love of God through the Bible. One can stop and spend time with just one picture – one that speaks to the heart and gives peace. Vanier invites us to be part of the family of God in a warm, friendly, and prayerful manner.

[Happiness: A Guide for a Good Life, Aristotle for a New Century](#). Arcade Publishing, 2012. (In Canada as [Made for Happiness: Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle](#). House of Anansi Press, 2001, 2005.)

Vanier starts by pointing out that happiness, whatever else people may say, is the greatest concern of our life and that Aristotle is one of the great witnesses to this quest for happiness. As a vital activity, happiness touches on important moral questions: “Is human life merely a matter of being successful, of doing one’s work and performing one’s civic and familial duties well? Is human happiness resting in the awareness that we have lived successfully, have been awarded honor, and are surrounded by our family and friends? Where, in that case, do celebrations and possessions belong?”

[An Ark for the Poor: The Story of L’Arche](#). Novalis, 2012 (Crossroad Publishing Co., 1995)

This book tells the story of the L’Arche community’s first thirty years: its foundation and growth, its joys and sorrows, and chronicles the transformation that occurs when the poorest and the weakest find a haven of love and safety to carry them through the storms of life. Vanier writes, “It is the story, especially of the beauty and fragility of people with mental handicaps. In and through the simple, humble gestures of daily living, it continues to be written, day after day. Our people help us rediscover the importance of these little gestures.”

[The Heart of L’Arche: A Spirituality for Everyday](#). Novalis, 2012 (Geoffrey Chapman, 1995)

With simplicity and conviction, Jean Vanier shows how a life shared with people who have disabilities calls us to selflessness and risk. Living with the two men with disabilities he invited to the first L’Arche community, he discovered his own “disabilities of the heart.” He discovered that love and forgiveness did not come easily for him, and that anger did. The vulnerability that is so much part of their lives reveals our own limits and forces us to ask questions that can lead us to profound liberation.

Becoming Friends. St. Paul Communications, 2010.

This book is the print version of a retreat Jean Vanier gave at the community of Saint Martin in Kenya in 2008. The spirit of the Beatitudes that is alive in this community continues to touch him deeply. It is a community where each member is precious and the weakest members takes the central place, and is one of God’s signs of hope in our world.

[Our Life Together: A Memoir in Letters](#). HarperCollins, 2009.

This book gathers letters from four decades of Vanier's correspondence with L'Arche communities around the world beginning in 1964. In a meditative style, Vanier reflects on world events, his travels, his own journey through his faith and his deep desire for interfaith dialogue and peace. The letters reveal a man of tremendous insight and compassion, a leader whose example can inspire us all to do great things.

[Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness](#). With Stanley Hauerwas. InterVarsity Press, 2008.

How are Christians to live in a violent and wounded world? Rather than contending for privilege by wielding power and authority, we can witness prophetically from a position of weakness. The church has much to learn from an often overlooked community – those with disabilities. For many years, theologian Stanley Hauerwas has reflected on the lives of people with disability, the political significance of community, and how the experience of disability addresses the weaknesses and failures of liberal society. L'Arche provides a unique model of inclusive community that is underpinned by a deep spirituality and theology. Together, Vanier and Hauerwas carefully explore the contours of a countercultural community that embodies a different way of being and witnesses to a new order – one marked by radical forms of gentleness, peacemaking and faithfulness.

[Becoming Human](#). Paulist Press, 2008 (Original edition 1998)

This international best-seller is about the liberation of the human heart. Vanier shares his profoundly human vision for transformation – for creating a common good that radically changes our communities, our relationships, and ourselves. It invites us into freedom from the tentacles of chaos and loneliness, and from those fears that provoke us to exclude and reject others. It is a freedom that opens us up and leads us to the discovery of our common humanity amid difference.

[Community and Growth](#). Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007 (Paulist Press, 1989).

This Vanier classic offers a series of 'starting points for reflection' on the nature and meaning of community. For example, Vanier writes that our communities should be signs of joy and celebration. If we are accepted with our limitations as well as our abilities, our communities gradually become places of liberation, fruitfulness and fecundity. Vanier says that a community grows like a child and this growth is set between two frailties – the weakness of the tiny child and that of the person who is dying." Community therefore is founded on frailty. Wisely, Vanier calls us to be in touch with our vulnerabilities as individuals and as a community.

[Encountering 'the Other'](#). Paulist Press, 2006.

These reflections come from talks that Vanier gave at a June 2004 conference at the University of Ulster, which gathered people from many religious backgrounds and nationalities to encounter difference and to explore and celebrate that difference. A fundamental principle of encountering another in peace is a belief that each person is important. Even if you cannot speak, writes Vanier, even if you cannot walk, even if you've been abandoned, you have a gift to give the other. We must discover how to enter into each other's story so that there is dialogue and mutual trust.

[Seeing Beyond Depression](#). Paulist Press, 2005.

Vanier explores depression as a wounding of the heart that sends individuals into a deep abyss of anguish, apathy, loneliness, and despair. It is an illness we cannot treat ourselves. When we are depressed, we have to rely on the kindness of others, especially those friends who are in a heart-to-heart relationship with us. Vanier is convinced that it is important to put words to the pain of depression and to have faith in the sun that is shining behind the dark clouds.

[Drawn into the Mystery of Jesus through the Gospel of John.](#) Paulist Press, 2004.

Vanier celebrates the gospel of John in this meditative work. It calls all Christians to encounter the fullness of the life lived in close communion with God. Vanier writes: "These insights that I share in this book come from the life of Jesus in me... They also flow from my life with people who are weak and who have taught me to welcome Jesus from the place of poverty in me."

[Finding Peace.](#) House of Anansi Press, 2003; Continuum Publishing Group, 2006.

One of the deepest human desires, Vanier writes, is our need to live in peace. He asks, "We yearn for peace, but what is it exactly? How do we find it, and how can we bring peace to our lives and our communities?" Vanier reflects on world events, identifying the sources of conflict and fear within and among individuals, communities, and nations that thwart us in our quest for peace. Peace is not just the work of governments or armies or diplomats, he argues, but the task of each one of us. We can all become makers of peace.

[Our Journey Home: Rediscovering a Common Humanity Beyond our Difference.](#) Orbis Books, 1997.

Vanier describes the beauty and holiness of life and the need to overcome the various divisions that separate us from one another. Vanier's work is a call to unity founded on the covenant of love to which God is calling all community members. This calling implies welcome and respect for differences. Unity at L'Arche presupposes that the most vulnerable in each community is at the center, paradoxically holding the community together. In this way each community is in solidarity with one another. Vanier's message is clear: The communities of L'Arche want to be in solidarity with the poor of the world, and with all those who take part in the struggle for justice.

[From Brokenness to Community.](#) Paulist Press, 1992.

This book originated as lectures given by Vanier at Harvard Divinity School in 1988. He speaks eloquently of the lessons he has learned from L'Arche, of his own healing and his own need for people, of the power of belonging and how it satisfies the deepest needs in people. He does not romanticize community. For Vanier, community is a place of struggle, conflict and confrontation. Community is a place where the ego dies, a place of surrender. However, it is also a place of celebration, joy, and ultimately of human fulfillment. For Vanier, community is a place where we encounter God: God is present in the poverty and wounds of our hearts. God is not just present in the capacity to heal but rather in the need to be healed.

[Images of Love, Words of Hope.](#) Robert Pope Foundation 1991 (Paulist Press, 1988)

This book is based on a 13-part television series of conversations with Jean Vanier. In an age and time where there is much confusion, discouragement and little direction, Vanier's vision and insights on the human condition are deeply valuable. "The mystery of God," writes Vanier, "is that He does not come into our world of power; He comes into our littleness and weakness." Vanier's message of love and hope is simple: We can walk together along the road of pain, but also the road of joy and peace. Together we find strength and compassion to create of this world a place where there is greater peace."

[The Broken Body.](#) Darton, Longman & Todd, Paulist Press, 1988.

How can we discover the source of wholeness, healing and hope amidst a broken and suffering world? Vanier examines the roots of brokenness within the Jewish and Christian traditions and calls readers to come closer to people who suffer. He offers hope and encouragement, and the assurance that peace and joy can be found but only by first accepting the reality of suffering and the cross in one's own life and in the lives of others.

[Eruption to Hope](#). Paulist Press, 1983 (Griffin House, 1971)

The theme of this book is “sharing”. Vanier believes that our civilization will erupt in ruin unless we share. If we share, then good will and love will give way to an “eruption of hope.” An interiority of hope is the cause and effect of the young person discovering a true personal morality, he writes, a morality of love which surges from the inner being and flows like a source of living water. It is this morality or spirituality which gives real interior liberty and eases all fear.

[Be Not Afraid](#). Paulist Press, 1975.

Vanier brings to life the Beatitudes by saying that we must contemplate Jesus as He lived and above all follow Him because we cannot be called disciples of Jesus Christ if we do not. And to follow Him is to put our hand in His hands, our steps in His steps. It is to take the same road and to stay on it. It is to let fear fall away, putting our confidence in him, because his is the healer, the One who comes to bring us life and liberate us from ourselves.

[In Weakness Strength: The Spiritual Sources of Georges P. Vanier, 19th Governor-General of Canada](#). Griffin House, 1969.

Georges P. Vanier, Jean Vanier’s father, made a strong impression on his son. After his father’s death, Vanier wrote this biography encapsulating his father’s spiritual life. For Georges, love was the “central aspect of human faith and God,” and this idea has also been his son’s overarching theological and philosophical basis.

Books Inspired by Jean Vanier’s Work

- [Adam, God’s Beloved](#). By Henri Nouwen, Orbis Books, 2012
- [The Paradox of Disability: Responses to Jean Vanier and L’Arche Communities from Theology and the Sciences](#). Edited by Hans S. Reinders. Eerdmans Press, 2010
- [Theology, Disability, and Spiritual Transformation: Learning from the Communities of L’Arche](#). By Michael Hryniuk. Cambria Press, 2010
- [Living L’Arche: Stories of Compassion, Love and Disability](#). By Kevin Scott Reimer. Liturgical Press, 2009
- [Walking on a Rolling Deck: Life on the Ark](#). By Kathleen Berken. Liturgical Press, 2008
- [Jean Vanier: Essential Writings](#). Edited by Carolyn Whitney-Brown. Orbis Books, 2008
- [Enough Room for Joy: The Early Days of L’Arche](#). By B. Clarke, SJ. Novalis Publishing, 2006 (Paulist Press, 1974)
- [The Miracle, the Message, the Story: Jean Vanier and L’Arche](#). By Kathryn Spink. Paulist Press, 2006; Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005
- [My Life Together: L’Arche Communities and the Challenge of Unity](#). By Hilary Wilson. Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004
- [L’Arche Communities: New Movements and Communities in the Life of the Church](#). By Helen Reid Thomas. Catholic Truth Society, 2002
- [Encounter with Mystery: Reflections on L’Arche and Living with Disability](#). Edited by Frances M. Young. Darton, Longman & Todd, 1997
- [One Bread, One Body: The ecumenical experience of L’Arche](#). By Thérèse Vanier, Novalis/Gracewing, 1997
- [Nick, Man of the Heart](#). By Thérèse Vanier, Gil & MacMillan, 1993
- [A Blessed Weakness: Spirit of Jean Vanier and L’Arche](#). By Michael Downey. Harper Collins, 1989
- [The Challenge of L’Arche](#). Novalis/Winston, 1981

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