

Paper One: “Becoming Human” Jean Vanier

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# 1 The Most Significant Themes in the Book

The whole book talked about one topic. A person should be a part of the human community, or else he or she will not be able to live normally. Based on this topic, the author talked about the cause of loneliness, the reason of exclusion and what should the human community do for helping the lonely people to rejoin the human community.

## 1.1 The Cause of Loneliness

There are some children who have physical or mental diseases when they were born. Those children usually have difficulties on being part of communities since they are not able to communicate with others normally. Some of them are because they have physical problems such as they cannot talk or listen. Some of them are because of mental problems such as feeble-mindedness. Then other children may not want to play with them. Even their parents may not like to see them. For a period of time not able to receive love, that child would sink into the loneliness.

In the book, Vanier told us the story of Eric. He was blind and deaf, as well as severely intellectually disabled. A child who cannot see and listen is excluded by the normal human community. He didn't have effective method to communicate with others. It was not easy for Eric to feel others love. Eric's crazy behavior was the result of the loneliness.

Loneliness is one of the worst sentiments for a child. Loneliness can be force of good, but most of time it is a negative emotion. According to Vanier [1],

“there is nothing to compare with the terrible loneliness of a child; fragile and helpless, a lonely child feels fear, anguish, a sense of guilt. And when children are wounded in their hearts, they learn to protect themselves by hiding behind barriers.”

Children were all born with weakness. They could do nothing without the help of their parents. They need love and protection from their parents. As Vanier said, “Children cannot live and grow humanly without that love. For human being, love is as vital as food.” [1] He also said, “Lonely children feel no commonality with adults. They have lost trust in them and in themselves, they are confused and feel misunderstood. Lonely children cannot name the pain. Only self-accusation remains.” [1]

Children in that emotion protect themselves by hiding behind the inner walls of their spiritual world. From their, children got self-fulfillment and safety. In other hand, they are more becoming individuals. If things continue in this way, the lonely child is not able to get connect with others.

This is not just a particular case. Vanier said that there is a lonely child in each of us hidden behind the walls we created in order to survive and that loneliness can destroy part of us [1]. That means all of us are more or less far away from the normal human community. So we have to find a way to rejoin the human community, for being saved from the loneliness. As the loneliness comes from the lack of necessary love, we can get rid of the loneliness by giving and receiving love.

## 1.2 The Reason of Exclusion

The author had also told us the reason why most of us are not very active to help the lonely people. Usually we feel those who are not willing to help the lonely people are not kind enough. The author told us a more important reason. People who are not willing to help those people in loneliness are fear of their life changed.

As we have talked above, we need to give our love to help those people. That's not simply denoting some money or stuff. We need our heart to touch theirs. According to Vanier [1], "What happens when our hearts are touched? We might want to do something to comfort and help him, to alleviate his pain, ..." To give our love to the lonely people means we and them are building sort of relationship. If we do so, our life are likely to be changed.

For example, most of time when we meet a beggar on the street, we may give him or her some money, but usually we won't asked him or her to sit down and listen to his or her story. We are not likely to spend time with them to work on ideas that can help them to be better. Why? Because if we do these, we are touching their heart by ours. We have to build relationship with them. We are likely happy if they are better and grieved if they are worse. These works and emotions changed our life to an unexpected situation. So most of us are afraid of that and just give the beggars some money and leave them as quickly as possible.

### 1.3 Rejoin the Human Community

People are too weak to get rid of the loneliness themselves. To try joining the human community is not enough. We need the help of others. The human community should pay attention on those lonely people and help each other. Each of us should show our love to those lonely people because only love can transform chaos of those lonely people. According to Vanier [1], there are seven aspects of love that seem necessary for the transformation of the heart in those who are profoundly lonely: to reveal, to understand, to communicate, to celebrate, to empower, to be in communion with another, and to forgive.

To do all of those usually not easy. Each of them need us to pay a lot of time and attention. Let's just talk about the first two aspects of them.

People need to be revealed the value and beauty from others. The revelation of value need lots of time because the lonely people was lack of love for such a long time. They have spent quite a long time to survive by believing the fact that they are worthless. So being patient to those lonely people is necessary. Also for revealing their beauty to them, we need to show our trust to them. The beauty of those lonely people's is often hidden behind their shabby outside looking which is from the long time lonely life. We are not even able to see their beauty without the trust.

To understand those lonely people is the second aspect of love. It is very important. In the long time of lonely life, the idea of those lonely people's may be changed away from the normal idea. Those lonely people usually do something strange such as screaming or violence. In this situation, most of

others can't understand those lonely people. People often feel they are mad or should be managed strictly. Actually, to understand is very important to those lonely people. They just choose a irregular way to express themselves. We should think why do they do that and what do they want to tell us.

In the book, Vanier talked about Claudia's story. When she was first in l'Arche, she was an autistic seven-year-old girl. She was blind, fearful of relationships, filled with inner pain and anguish. After twenty years after she first arrived at l'Arche, she had become a twenty-eight-year-old woman and she could do many things in the community. Though she still liked being alone but she was not a lonely people. The love from the community had successfully transformed Claudia's loneliness.

## **2 Vanier's Vision of the Church**

Vanier think "prayer necessitates stepping back from the pains and joys of daily life" [1]. In Vanier's vision, people get together is very important. Stepping back from the pains and joys of daily life is needed because we should not look at things just for our own perspective. To look at things for others is also very important for getting together with others. The church is a place of love and getting together.

In Vanier's vision of the church, believers are living together and trusting and loving each other. They call the Spirit of God to each person. People can enter the prayer freely and easily to open their heart to God. Before God,

everyone in the church are equal.

From the example that the author gave us, the author showed that his vision of the church is helpful to the lonely people. Once those lonely people begin to trust that they were loved by God, they are much easier to love themselves and find their meaning in life.

### **3 Vanier's Vision of the Human Person**

Vanier thought each individual person is equal. Because human being were created by the God, we can't simply determine a person's value by his or her achievement.

In this book, Vanier has talked a lot of examples about the unfortunate children. Children who got physical disease are not easy to get together with the normal community. In other words, it is very difficult for them to earn respect from the normal community. Vanier thinks them are respectable. He said, "all humans are sacred, whatever their culture, race, or religion, whatever their capacities or incapacities, and whatever their weaknesses or strengths may be." [1]

Not only the life for the poor people should be respected, all kinds of human rights should be protected and encouraged. For example, Vanier has said, "human beings need to be encouraged to make choices, and to become responsible for their own lies and for the lives of others." [1]

## 4 What Elements of Vanier's Thought Need to Be Applied the Most to Our Society?

I think the idea of love can transform chaos is very good, especially people need to be revealed the value and beauty from others. In my experience, people, usually children, are not easy to be found the value and beauty. This had caused a lot of tragedies.

In old China, for example, female discrimination is very serious. Each family prefer a boy to a girl when the family has a woman got pregnant. People only saw the value of boys, which is to continue family's traditions. People seldom found girls value and beauty except they can do housework. So girls in an old family has a very low position. In some outlying area, some family which want a boy were usually have lots of babies. If the family was poor, they even killed the girl because they couldn't feed those children.

Not only in the old China, there are still some unsolved social problems which are because people can't get the correct value and beauty of human being. For example, in Congo, people are in the war. Some people were killed because of the argument of the ownership of resources. The value of those killed people were estimated incorrectly without an environment full of love.

## **5 What Were You Most in Need of Hearing from Vanier?**

The one I am most in need is how to rejoin the human community. Because of my character, I'm not quite good at mixing freely with the people and I usually feel fear of communicating with others. So when I realized the meaning of "becoming human" was to solve the problem of individual's loneliness, I focused on the way of joining the human community. I also learned the root of my fear. I'm fear of changing. The book gave me some good answers. It told me to liberate from bondage and be free from the load. That's greatly helpful.

## References

- [1] Vanier, J.(1998) *Becoming human*. House of Anansi Press Ltd.