News
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by NCR Staff

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It's a crazy world out there. Just a month ago, the Catholic world was reeling with the news that Jean Vanier, the beloved founder of L'Arche International had sexually abused six adult women. NCR columnist Jamie Manson reminded us that the patriarchal system of the church gave Vanier power and control. And columnist Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese wrote about what happens when saints fall. Letters to the editor are edited for length and clarity. Join the conversation by following the rules listed below.

In the article by Jamie Manson, "No, Jean Vanier is not 'like all of us'," the author proposes a common denominator among the abuse cases in the church: "the patriarchal belief that a special class of spiritual men are entitled to use women, children and other vulnerable men for their sexual gratification."



I agree with this in part, but the author also writes: "When this patriarchal system is combined with the theological notion of gender complementarity, which states that God calls men to lead and women to submit, it creates the perfect breeding ground for kinds of abuse we see in the Vanier case."

This is an incorrect understanding of gender complementarity. Complementarity, in general, is about service in love to one another for a greater good. There is no good leader who is not a self-giving servant. Jesus as the head and leader of all is the servant of all. Complementarity between a man and a woman in marriage is also about service in love to one another.

I would suggest a different common denominator: the rejection of church teaching on human sexuality. It is all about chastity, period. Our sexuality is a gift from God that is meant to be used in marriage between a man and a woman to express love, strengthen union and to be open to material and sacramental life.

This gift is also something that can be given back to God as a sacrifice that brings spiritual life to ourselves and others, through perpetual continence or continence for a chosen period of time. A continuous assent to this truth, through faith and by God's grace, (and perhaps good therapy), keeps us far from sexual sin and would

have made a difference in every single abuse case in the church.

SUSAN SCHUDT

Macomb, Michigan

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The article by Jamie Manson also provides an essential overview of the potential (if not inherent) evils found in the structures, traditions and piety of the Roman Catholic Church.

I worked at L'Arche for six years and studied for the priesthood. While espousing potentially transforming ideals, the reality and practice of both falls prey to power structures and patriarchal hierarchies where there will always be victims and the vulnerable. We were led to assume or believe that the vulnerable were solely the core members (those with developmental disabilities who live in L'Arche homes) but these recent revelations demonstrate that they are just as likely to be the live-in assistants, those seeking spiritual direction or counseling, those looking for a surrogate family, etc. I have seen or witnessed this in spades here in the Ottawa community and elsewhere. We even tried to start a union which was akin to an abomination in the eyes of L'Arche leadership and traditionalists.

But it is interesting and almost predictable how justice takes a back seat and becomes a threat to what people assume is "special, unique, or superior" (all adjectives often used to describe Vanier and L'Arche).

CHRIS FITZGERALD

Ottawa, Ontario

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I just want to thank Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese for once again putting an issue in perspective. I guess we can only trust that good will ultimately overcome evil, even when that seems impossible.

PHIL JOHNSON

Romeoville, Illinois

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Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's columns are occasionally annoying, but whose are not? His column in which he sits in sanctimonious judgment of Jean Vanier carries me beyond annoyance, something I regret so early in Lent.

Reese says that he cannot forgive Vanier for his sexual manipulation of six adult women, placing his name between that of Theodore McCarrick and Harvey Weinstein in his short list of those he cannot find it in his heart to forgive.

I find it hard to forgive Reese for placing Vanier between two modern monsters who did enormous damage in their careers. Vanier is a sinner who has shocked and saddened his many friends and followers. Yet he did more for humanity in his long life than most of the names Reese finds himself able to forgive.

I wonder if Reese has ever spent any time at a L'Arche house, and any hours with the mentally challenged yet emotionally humbling people who live in L'Arche facilities. I wonder if Reese has taken a moment of reflection to compare his own contribution to love of neighbor with that of Vanier. I wonder if his Jesuit formation has left any sense of Christian forgiveness in his commentator heart. I wonder if a provocative column means more to him than his Ignatian mindfulness.

JOSEPH COYLE

Paris, France

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