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FR RONALD ROLHEISER

## Vanier revisited

glowingly. So the news about him shook me deeply. What's to be said about Jean Vanier in person whom I much admired and about whom on numerous occasions I have written light of these revelations concerning Jean Vanier. He was a ike many others, I was deeply distressed to learn of the recent revelations

deeply harmful, not least to the women he victimised. Without knowing the specifics of what happened (and without wanting to know tion can be placed around it. a serious abuse of trust. No cloak of justificathem) enough is known to grasp that this was that what he did was very wrong and

commandment, in a way that merits a harsh judgment, given his public stature and the abuse of a particular kind of sacred trust. However his breaking of his professed celibacy doesn't put into question the legitimacy and fruitfulness of vowed vowed religious. He was a layman, a public celibate admittedly, but his betrayal of his commitment to celibacy may not be identified man being unfaithful to his wife puts into question the legitimacy and fruitcelibacy itself, any more than a married with clerical abuse. He broke the sixth was not a cleric, or indeed a canonically identified with clerical sexual abuse. Second, what he did may not be linked to or . Vanier

Jesus is the only founder who had no flaws. Indeed, the good work being done by L'Arche attests too to the fact that fulness of the vocation of marriage.
Third, Vanier's transgressions do
not negate the good work of L'Arche leave behind such a grace-filled legacy that its founder had some flaws. So be it. grace, of the Holy Spirit. It turns out now countries. done and continues to do in more than 30 that and no one – no one – can deny or question the good work that L'Arche has that and no one fruits you shall know them: Jesus taught and who have worked there. By their many women and men who work there dedication and or cast any negative shadow on the Nobody who is essentially duplicitous can Vanier is and was bigger than his sins. L'Arche is a work of God, of good work of the

the way he is being addressed by saying young man comes up to Jesus and says to him: "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus immediately challenges feel says as much about us as it does about Jean Vanier. In Luke's Gospel (18:18-23), a Finally, the distillusionment and anger we



good work not negate the hese sins do Arche

ally disappoint

What Jean Vanier did to us was unfair. We cannot *not* feel betrayed. Conversely, though, what we did to him was also unfair. We asked

him to be God for us and that's also not a

tair request.

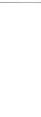
Vanier – we cannot not ultimately be disappointed and disillusioned. Nobody, except God, does God well; all the rest of us eventu-

Vanier

cloak with divinity in an idealisation that's supposed to be reserved for God alone. And whenever we do that – and we did it to Jean

"Don't call me good! Only God is good."
That was our mistake with Jean Vanier, just as

it's our mistake with other persons whom we



gushing with superlatives as he described Vanier as the "holiest, most wonderful, most single-minded, spiritual man" he'd ever met. My critical faculties immediately put me on guard: "No one's that good!" So I deliberately didn't look to Vanier for mentorship. searching for mentors, one of my seminary teachers came back from a Vanier retreat When I was a 21-year-old seminarian

now also sufficiently besotted by him that I too felt dismayed and disillusioned when I read his books and was much influenced by numerous people who counted him as a I learned of his moral lapses. the newspapers when he died. Henri Nouwen). I wrote a preface for one of his last books and a glowing tribute to him for formidable influence in their lives (including him for it. m for it. Though I never met him personally, So I was by

was one on our part too know, a certain falsity in his life on our part, not his. There was, as we now perceived. With Jean Vanier, the illusion was rather than on the part of the one being mind of the one who's doing the perceiving of an illusion, and an illusion is always in the After the initial shock, you soon enough realise it's a positive thing. It's the dispelling isillusionment is a curious phenomenon but there

perfect, even a Jean Vanier. At our core we can accept that, despite this betrayal, Jean Vanier did a lot of good and that L'Arche is no one, except God, is good, at least with a goodness that has no imperfections. Once we accept that, we can accept too that nobody's at our core, when we touch it, we know that shook me deeply, but not to my core because clearly a graced reality. the revelations about Jean Vanier

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