

## Monday Lent Week Three



Religious status or spiritual influence in any power structure is a source of temptation. Most of the dark side of the history of Christianity, since the edict of Milan in AD 313 (when the Empire stopped persecuting of the followers of Jesus), can be attributed to giving in to temptations of power. This was the illusion that Jesus so clearly saw through and refused during his own Lent. I find it hard to believe that Jean Vanier was tempted by this kind of power.

I don't know his inner world, but on the basis of his teaching and personality I would venture to say his self-inflicted wound that led him to wound others was not crude hunger for power but self-deception around his own handicap and hunger for intimacy. Clearly he did have power and misused it with people whom he should have been caring for, not using. But, my guess, is that it was not driven by the desire for power or acclaim. It was closer to what he often spoke about: weakness and handicaps. When these are not acknowledged they become dark forces.

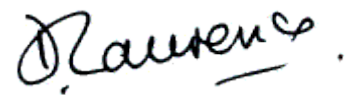
But does this even make a difference? What matters for those he hurt is not his motivation but the consequences they suffered and the attention they now receive. I am not sure; it is uncomfortable for anyone to reflect on and get it right. But trying to understand it helps us to correct the mistakes we make about the important meaning of holiness. All religion proposes

the idea of holiness, the enlightened, liberated state of individuals who have plunged more fully into the processes of human transformation. We may assume this process of sanctification is complete in someone when it is anything but finished. Don't we all have good and bad, self-less and self-sacrificing, enlightened and shadow sides? When it is obvious that our process is not complete, no one calls us 'holy'. If it is more advanced, people can jump to the conclusion we have arrived. And then up goes another pedestal and our human clay is re-used to make a plaster saint.

The only safe approach is to call no one holy (for Catholics not even the 'Holy Father'). Jesus warned us to call no one 'Father' or 'Teacher' or 'Master'. There is only one Father and one Teacher. Only God is holy. Only God is good. His warning to 'judge not' includes over-positive judgements of others as well as the total condemnations we like to make. It is complicated when someone we have learned from and whom we saw as a friend is exposed and we see how they harmed others. The first concern then is caring for those who have been hurt, the human collateral damage. Second, is being careful (for our sake and that of the truth) how we judge the offender. Even if, relatively speaking, we have only a splinter in our own eye, we need to take it out before we can see anything clearly. For example, how far were we, even unconsciously, facilitating a lust for power or the game of self-deception, which became, in a basically good person, an irresistible temptation?

It's hard when heroes, especially our spiritual heroes, are shamed and downgraded. So maybe it's good that there are no heroes anymore. Or only one hero. It's better and safer for all concerned.

Laurence Freeman OSB

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurence". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name.